



Catechesis: The Eucharist and the Dialogue with Cultures

By His Eminence Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle

Maayong Buntag! Good Morning! Buenos Dias! Bonjour! Saw-an! Xinchao!

We are indeed blessed to have this day of reflection on the memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas not only a holy scholar but a lover of the Eucharist to him to his prayer and intercession we entrust today's reflection. Every IEC is special it is an extra ordinary event of grace, but for me the 51st IEC is extra special not only because it is being held in the Philippines for the second time and now in this beautiful and historic city of Cebu, but also because it is the 3rd consecutive International Eucharistic Congress where I speak as a catechist.

In Quebec, Canada in 2008 and in Dublin, Ireland 2012, I opened my talk by saying I bring you warm greetings from the Philippines. Now I have to change that, now I say "thank you for bringing the warmth of your people's and country's to the Philippines." Cebu has become a much warmer place because of our Eucharistic fervor this is climate change at its best. The climate of unity of peoples of different nations, tongues and cultures becoming one body in Jesus Christ. What warmth, what joy, what love. And this is the topic of my catechesis this morning, the Eucharist and the dialogue with cultures. My talk will have two parts. In the first part I will reflect on culture and dialogue. And in the 2nd part, I will attempt to bring the Eucharist in the center of such a dialogue.

The first part, the basic text for the preparation of this congress which I know all of you have read. The basic text contains a whole section on mission as dialogue with people's and cultures and that section ends by saying the Eucharist will mean much for most Asian's because it expresses many of the cultural values that they treasure very dearly. I believe that we can affirm the same thing of other cultures not only of Asian cultures, but first let me reflect on the keywords "culture and dialogue". First, culture, there are various ways of defining or describing culture. I found a classical sociological definition that has been modified which goes this way. Culture is the whole complex of forms of feeling, acting, and thinking shared by a society. Which allows members of the group to survive, provides them a sense of identity and belonging, and gives their lives meaning. From that definition, we see how important culture is and how no one could escape culture. In fact culture is almost second nature to us we don't even know that we are thinking, reacting in a particular way it's because of culture. So culture contains ways of feeling, acting and thinking, and these are deeply personal, but also profoundly



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communal, social, in fact according to the definition the survival the identity and the values of a society and its individual member depend to a large extent on their culture. So when you move from one culture to another culture even temporarily you feel a bit strange, you feel a bit confused and sometimes you feel threatened. You know that you are in unfamiliar ground. Now that is the sociological definition, I'm not a sociologist. So to make culture a bit more chewable, more concrete for us in our daily living, let me alert us to ordinary signs or bearers of a people's culture. I will give you some examples, you want to understand your culture, and you want to understand the culture of your family, you want to understand the culture of your parish, look at the following things. First the use and the arrangement of space, if your parish has a big space for parking but no room for pastoral formation. What does that say about the culture of your parish? Look at our gathering here? How do we arranged the space? The venerable Cardinals, Bishops here and then those there I couldn't see anymore and then our beloved deaf there what culture is being lived out here? Peace! Look at your churches, how far is the sanctuary from the first pew? That speaks a lot of our culture. Now aside from space, language. In the English speaking world you say the crack of dawn, in Filipino we say "bukang liwayway". Not crack but opening, and they say in Italian, "Un sole che sorge" what does that reveal about culture? Heroes remembered and honored, in some cultures they remember always their military heroes in some cultures their heroes are the boxing champions and the beauty queens. What does that say about a culture? Peace! The system of awards and punishment, who are awarded in some cultures, if you tell the truth you are recognized, in some cultures if you tell the truth you are punished. What does that say about a culture? Rituals, dancing, movements, food, in one gathering I was asked whether I preferred salted or sweet snack, in other places you have sweet and sour it is not either or it is and. In Asia you have chopsticks Asia, you also have Curry Asia, and you also have banana leaf Asia. You see the culture based on food and also the sense of time. In Quebec and in Dublin, while I was doing my catechesis periodically, somebody would stand in front of me telling me "ten minutes left" "one minute left" "we will turn off the microphone". Here, I don't think would come in front of me, nobody would dare. In other cultures, they will say watch your time, in other cultures they would say take your time. Culture and many others, I think that way of approaching culture would be more concrete and simpler and it would help us even engage in individual and corporate examination of consciences. I see many of my brother priests here, look at your room does it reflect a celibate culture? The way you arrange your bed and your things, you are celibate. Your bed should be single, not double. Jesus dealt with his own culture, but he offered a new way of living, thinking, of acting and speaking. How did he use and arranged space? Let the children come to me. He allowed a woman, known as a public sinner, to come close, to anoint him and he touched a person with leprosy, a new use of space, emerging from Jesus. His heroes, the centurions, the syrophenician woman, lowly fishermen. His rituals, his meals, Oh Jesus ate a lot. He was always in meals. But during those meals, he ate with those



people that would never be invited to meals. Time it is my father who will determine my hour. Jesus is reshaping culture. In our contemporary time, there are many shapers of culture the most obvious is the economic system. What is a good life? What is a comfortable life? Parents, when your child tells you I want to pursue a degree in music, most likely some parents will say, you will not become rich as a musician, enter into something else. Even the value system, what I study is dictated upon by the economic system. Belonging to a group, exclusive clubs, gated subdivisions, science and technology, social communications had been great movers and creators of cultures these past decades.

When I was much younger, very few people had a camera and you had to buy films, 6 exposures, and 12 exposures so you choose the shot carefully. Now everyone has a camera imbedded in the mobile phone, now everyone is a photographer, and so they say may I have a photo with you? Chances are if there are 5 people there would be 10 shots. Each one has his or her own camera, and each one saying "One more, one more, one more!" Wars, ethnic and religious conflicts, natural calamities, typhoons, earthquakes and the ensuing migration, the refuge crisis are shaking the grounds of cultures both of the displaced people and of the places of destination. Even as we speak right now, there is brewing tension between the preservation of cultural identity and the welcome that we should afford people coming from other cultures. Many conflicts that harmed our world today, involved disconnectedness of cultures and even clashes of cultures. That is why dialogue is indispensable and that leads me to dialogue. Are you still awake? Now, dialogue. A big, big term especially for the churches in Asia. But how can we approach dialogue more simply in the context of cultures? The way we have described cultures. Let us learn from the business world. Let us dialogue with the world of business. You know in looking for managers and high level administrators, business establishments and corporations set as one of the criteria what they call cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence, IQ, is Intelligent Quotient and EQ emotional quotient are not sufficient anymore. Cultural intelligence is important. There are three components of cultural intelligence. First, I know my culture and I know how my culture affects my attitudes, priorities, work ethic and relationships. I don't only know my culture I know how my culture has formed me and has affected me. You know when I was a student in the United States, one day my professors gave out class notes, but somehow it did not reach me. As a Filipino, I'd do as what every Filipino would do I ask my classmate who was seated next to me, I asked to pass on to me the notes doing the hand gesture in the Filipino way (kalabit), to call his attention. And he said, hey what are you doing and I said yes what did I do? And I started groping for the English word, I kalabitated you, I kalabitized you. I did not find that word in English maybe that action was not part of their culture, so from that time on I was always in this (praying position). They thought that I was praying all the time, but it was to avoid this normal natural reaction on my part. So that is part of the cultural intelligence, I know my culture, and how it affects me. Secondly, I study and try to know from within the cultures of other



people so I begin to understand why they behave as they do. And the third is I determine the path for my culture and their culture to learn from each other.

To challenge each other, to purify each other hopefully the result is the affirmation of the beauty of each culture, the diversity of each culture but now walking together towards the common good. Ultimately cultural intelligence, CQ, IQ, EQ is the capacity to engage in and facilitate the dialogue. The church needs cultural intelligence. If it wants to dialogue with traditional and emerging culture, we need that. I proposed that even in seminary training in the beginnings of formation in religious life we should be aware of what we are doing to develop cultural intelligence because they develop somehow an ecclesiastical culture when they go out to the parishes another culture and they don't know how to dialogue because they did not develop cultural intelligence. But dialogue grows with discernment we should avoid the first danger a facile or easy condemnation of values of other cultures that looks strange to us. For all we know they may contain elements of the Christian vision, but expressed in a different way. But we should avoid the second danger, which is accepting anything we should refuse to recognize values that enjoy widespread social acceptance that are incompatible with the Christian vision.

Why does the church engage in dialogue with cultures? For mission. Mission. For the capacity of the church to exist in as an effective witness to the Gospel before today's culture necessitates dialogue and cultural intelligence. We just cannot blame cultures or the enemies of truth within and outside the church. If the Gospel is to be a leaven of transformation, we need to know the Gospel, but we also need to meet people in their cultures. We need cultural intelligence for the sake of the Gospel and of humanity. Are we still together? Yes, so culture and dialogue as a bridge to the second part, let me test the theme of our Eucharistic Congress, Christ in You, Hope of Glory. How do the other cultures outside of the Christian culture, how do they understand the theme of this culture? Christ in You, the Hope of Glory. Of course for us, we are affirming the presence of Jesus. Christ in Us, especially in the Eucharist. Vatican II in the constitution on the liturgy that Jesus is present to the church in the person of the minister, in the Eucharistic species, most specially the real presence, in the Word, in the praying community, but how do you talk about presence, real presence in world shaped by virtual reality? Where is the real Chito Tagle? Some of you prefer to look there. It seems that virtual presence is easier on the eye than this one. Now where is the real? May I know how many of you were born with the cellphone, with the internet, that what we call the digital natives? I think most of us here are digital migrants. We are moving into this culture. The migrant workers, the Filipino migrant workers thanks to digital technology have contact with their families through Skype, Facebook, text messages and other digital means. Here in the Philippines, and I know elsewhere, many mass protest movements have been organized through social media.



A community is being generated by cyber technology. Is that real? Is that virtual? Yet, the same digital world or culture has formed many young people to put prominence on image. Image is everything. So I should look good on Facebook.

So what is the better angle? This or that? What is real? I want to be a celebrity. Even fundamentalists, violent tendencies, and the recruitment to join these terrorist groups are happening on social media. Is that virtual? Is that real? Unfortunately, even exploitation through cybersex. That's one culture we have to contend with, the culture of the virtual digital world. I would be very interested of a workshop on the real presence in a digital virtual world. When you talk to young people on real presence, what enters into their mind? The adoration? The monstrance? The consecration or a Facebook page? I was having a photo with someone who said, Cardinal may we have a photo. She said to me, I am your friend. And I looked at her, I said, I don't know her. Then she said, a friend on Facebook. I said, Oh, okay. Is the real friend? I think, looking at my reaction, she immediately unfriended me. Now is that real or virtual? But I have learned from experts in the digital culture that the term "real" for them means authenticity, integrity, credibility. When we dialogue with the culture of the virtual, they will look for authentic and the credible presence of Jesus in the minister, in our words, in our Christian community we assert the real presence of Jesus for those in a digital virtual culture, that means I will look for a credible, believable, authentic manifestation of Jesus. With that I turn to the second part. I will try to go to two I have time only for two emerging cultures and I would propose a way of Eucharistic Dialogue with those cultures. The first is the culture of alienating individualism. And we propose the Eucharistic culture of convocation, gathering, communion in love. One of the great gifts of our time is the value placed on the individual human person. The appreciation of the person is good and necessary for society. This is what sociologists, psychologists call "individualization" and that is important. Individualization prevents human beings from being reduced from mere spare parts of a big social machinery. Unfortunately this healthy process of this individualization has been pushed to an extreme called "individualism" where the individual and the community become enemies. The individualistic culture takes the "*Laissez-faire*" attitude that the individual reigns supreme and individuals can look after themselves look at the many books, self-help books. You can repair this by yourself. You can do this by yourself. Self Help. I don't need you... I can do it by myself. I don't know, whether the culture of selfie, I don't need the photographer, I can do it by myself. Why am I raising my voice? But we have to be critical; we have to be critical about all of these things. In the culture of alienating individualism, the individual alone must achieve something in society. This culture protects individual rights but does not sufficiently stress duties to other persons and to society. Individualism is fueled in the economics' fear by competitiveness rather than cooperation and the educational system reinforces



these with beautiful words. Creativity, initiative, personalization, we need to be careful what do we mean by those words. Now the culture of individualism has social forms. For societies can also be individualistic, for example, ethnocentrism, nationalistic xenophobia, religious intolerance, it stigmatizes persons, discriminates against them and sees strangers in a distorted recognition. The culture of individualism sets up barriers and relegates the unwanted to ghettos. The culture of individualism engages in scapegoating, blaming the ills on society on the stranger, the alien, the migrant, the refugee, the poor, the minority, the irony of it all is that this culture of individualism that wants to protect the individual is one of the causes of the disappearance of the individual. An individualist loses friends and neighbors, eventually becoming a nobody. An individualist inhabits a world that is so narrow that it does not have room for anyone including himself or herself. Human persons are fulfilled both individually and socially and at the same time, we should also be critical of cultures that disregard legitimate individuality in the name of false communitarianism. I'm over simplifying the description of the culture of individualism, but I leave it to your reflection. Let me turn to the Eucharist, the Eucharist offers an experience of another culture, the culture of convocation, "*convocare*", you are called with others. You are called to be with others, and you are called to be with others in a meal that the Lord hosts. When the Lord host a meal, be prepared to be with surprising others. But, in the meal hosted by the Lord, persons recognize a close neighbor, a fellow sinner, a sister, a brother, with a place at the family table. In each one, I see myself, as I see a brother or sister, I also discover myself. Sinful but loved. Underserving but invited, shamed but embraced, lost but trusted. That was how Jesus hosted and participated in meals by calling together the most unimaginable combination of people to a community to become his family, his Body because he has convoked them. Remember how Jesus broke the isolation of those pushed aside by a culture of alienating individualism, Matthew the tax collector, Zaccheus, the sinful woman who washed the feet of Jesus, the centurion, the syrophenician woman, and recall the eternal isolation of the rich man who totally ignored the poor man Lazarus.

My dear brothers and sisters let us begin the dialogue with the culture of alienating individualism in our homes. Restore the family meals. The basic unit of the meal is the table, the common table. Nowadays, the basic unit of the meal is my plate. And if I have my plate with food on it, I can go anywhere and eat by myself, but that is not a meal, that is just eating. Individualistic persons know how to eat, but they don't know how to participate in a meal. May I ask ourselves here, are our sacraments and pastoral services accessible the poor? Are our parishes welcoming to the deaf and other people with disabilities? Do the wounded lost, shamed, humiliated, and despised,



find a family in our communities? And on the other hand, our individual gifts allowed to grow in our communities. Let me end this section with a story.

When I was a parish priest, in the 1990s, I invited some of the youth, the sick, the poor, the women, the people with disabilities and the unknowns to come up to the altar so that their feet could be washed at the commemoration of the Lord's Supper in Holy Thursday and by the way last January 6, Pope Francis issued this directive that from now on, in the washing of the feet, the people of God must be represented. I know in some cultures, they even pass on to their children the sash and drew, drew dust. That particular Holy Thursday, we invited the poor girl who regularly sold flowers and candles at the church grounds to be one of the twelve. This girl had polio. She had to walk on crutches. Many people must have bought from her. Candles, flower, without seeing her, without knowing her. But that evening, to commemorate the Supper of our Lord, she processed to the altar bearing the pains and sufferings of the poor and the lame. I will never forget how it felt to hold, to wash, and to kiss her foot, her limp and shriveled foot. It would be forever etched in my memory. And I understood what Jesus meant when Peter refused to be washed, washing the shriveled foot of this girl, I felt she has become part of me, and I have become part of her, and her broken body has found its proper place within this family called Body of Christ and I few hours after the mass, she came to me exuberant with the good news. "Father, people flocked to me after the mass and they bought my flowers and candles. Then she asked me, will you wash my feet again next year?" She is no longer just a polio-stricken flower and candle vendor, she has entered the community; the wall of alienation has been torn down at the Supper of the Lord.

Last October 2015 with the team from Caritas Internacionalis, I went to a refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece close to the border with former Yugoslavia republic of Macedonia. The thousands of tired, hungry, weary, dirty, confused and anxious refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and we remember them and the many, many other refugees from Asia and different parts of the world. They were longing not only for food, drink, shelter and safety but for hospitality and welcome and in the midst of the tensions and commotions, I notice an energetic lady, the vice-mayor of Idomeni, who was managing the distribution of food, we were following her directions. During a pause, we asked her whether it was her job as vice-mayor to manage the distribution of food. She said, "No, this is my volunteer work". Quite amused, I asked her "Why do you need to volunteer? You already are a busy woman. As vice-mayor of the town her answers my brothers and sisters, "My ancestors were also refugees, I have refugee DNA in my body. I will never forsake them; they are my brothers and sisters." She affirmed and lived the culture of con-vocation, of communion at the table of distribution of bread,



in a refugee camp. The isolation of a discarded in a broken world, have found a family even for a fleeting moment and finally may I continue? Do I have time? I will watch my time too. The second and final type of culture, what Pope Francis has been talking about, the throw away culture and what do we propose in the Eucharist, the culture of gift and sharing. In our time we see a culture of achievement, of success, people are driven to work hard for self-advancement and for the good of their families. Human work that develops human talent and promotes social progress must be encouraged. The sad reality however, is that human achievement is often fueled by materialism. The accumulation, the consumption of goods, even when they are not needed becomes a badge of dignity, competitiveness, inequality and affliction emanate from this culture. Buying for the sake of having, leads to throwing away and we throw away the goods that the poor should benefit from that could not afford to buy. But is it not ironic that the culture of accumulation is also the culture of throwing away. Who has something to throw away, only those who have accumulated and they have accumulated what they do not need. As they say the more you grow, the more you throw. You throw so that you can buy more, and you throw again, you throw what you were not able to consume and what a scandal when many people live in the midst of trash discarded by others and I appeal to you my dear brothers and sisters when you send relief goods to victims of natural calamities please do not send what you have thrown away. You are just decluttering your closet. Imagine, during the time of Haiyan/Yolanda, as we were unpacking the donations there was a wedding gown. Who would use a wedding gown? They were just throwing away unused clothing to the poor, in a culture of achievement for profit, a good life and success, we lose the sense of having been graced, having been gifted, having been blessed, everything is my achievement and because I have achieved this I can dispose of it as I will. But you don't dispose and throw away a gift. If we are simple, if we live by restraint we could go against by throw away culture. Let us begin now, husbands who are here are you tempted to throw away your wife like a home appliance? She is a gift don't throw her away. Wives are you about to throw away your husbands like junk think twice, your husband is a gift. Parents do you see your son/ daughter, that gives you some difficulties a thing to be thrown away or do you see him/ her as a gift of God? Mothers, do you consider the baby in your womb a burden or a problem to be thrown away or a gift of life? Teachers, will you throw away slow learners among your students or will you treasure them as gifts especially when you are teaching in a Catholic school. Politicians, will you throw away people's taxes for your parties and shopping or guard them as gifts for social service? My dear reverend novice mistress, do you treat a rather unique novice as a problem to be thrown away or a gift of mystery? How do you solve a problem like Maria? Bishops, do you see our rather independent minded priest worthy of being thrown away or as gifts providing



collaboration? Priest, religious and lay people do you want to throw us bishops away too? Believe it or not, even bishops could be gifts. The Eucharist responds to the throw away culture with the culture of gift. You never throw away important gifts, bread and wine, gifts of God, gifts of the earth, and gifts of human hands will become the gift of Jesus' presence, a gift of presence but mind you, the bible is filled with people who were thrown away, Joseph thrown away and sold by his brothers, David threatened to be thrown away by King Saul, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist thrown away into hiding during her pregnancy, Joseph and Mary thrown away to the manger by closed doors, Jesus thrown away by the jealousy and fear of power hungry politicians, thrown away by self-righteous leaders and finally thrown away by the betrayal and denial of friends, all of them were thrown away by an unfriendly world but God took them in his gentle hands and gives them to us as his gifts. On the night Jesus was betrayed, on the night when all the forces were conspiring to throw him away, he gave himself as a gift of love. No one takes my life from me, I lay it down on my own by where, beware what you throw away, it will return as God's gift to us.

Kristine Suna-Koro rightly observes that it is incongruous to delight in Jesus's Eucharistic body if we throw away into invisibility some who make up the body of Christ and let me read quickly some of the questions she raises for our examination of conscience. A useful starting point according to her might be to inquire, where do our sacramental bread and wine come from? Has the flour been produced by migrant or even slave labor? Is the wine imported from a winery that employs workers without paying them a living wage and thus prompting them to cross borders to survive? And the catered food and dishes for synags (synagogues), conventions, assemblies, conferences and task forth functions in Metropolitan Hotel chains who cooks and cleans up afterwards. And what about the shoes, ties, hats, gloves, shirts and dresses called Sunday best who makes them and who dry cleans them? Are they brothers, sisters, or just invisible expendable migrants and refugees disregarded as pawns on the chess board of humanity?" To the many people who arranged the seats here before we come every morning and who stayed behind while we are probably already sleeping in our hotels, thank you. To those who are preparing our food early morning and who clean up after us and stay 'til the late hours of the night, thank you. For the drivers, who wait for hours to pick us up and to take us back home missing their families and their meals, thank you! You make this Eucharistic Congress truly a culture of Eucharistic love. I close now. Promise. Let me close by returning to the refugee camp in Idomeni. Before leaving the camp I went back to the Caritas desk, to thank the volunteers, but then I saw a new set of volunteers, a very small group, a young couple with a baby, a family. I asked them where they came from, they said we are from Australia, but we were born in the Philippines. So I excitedly declare, "Hey I'm also Filipino,"



and the woman said “yes you look familiar, I see your photograph everywhere.” And then I asked them, “What are you doing here?” The answer, “We are with a group touring Greece but we heard about this refugee camp. We decided to cut short our tour, leave the group and serve the refugees even for a day. “That couple with a child is a wonderful gift. I believe that for every piece of bread, every bottle of water, for every smile they gave, the refugees would not feel like trash, thrown away as rubbish on the rough seas and lands, but as gifts to be treasured. Let us behold Jesus in the Eucharist, let us allow him to form in us a community of neighbors, brothers and sisters, no more barriers, only bridges. Let us allow him to open our eyes, to see in creation, in persons, in the poor, the discarded, but truly gift of God, no one thrown away only gifts to be treasured. This culture of communion and gift shared will make a Eucharistic community, a real, a credible, presence of Christ. In the cultures of the world and provide the world a reason to hope, Christ in us, our hope of glory. Thank you very much.