

The Courtyard of the Gentiles

The Courtyard of the Gentiles is a proposal to institutionalize dialogue with the secular world launched by the Pontifical Council for Culture at the behest of Benedict XVI. The following set of documents is a compilation which will be an aide to understanding this proposal. *Dn. Charles Fernandes*

Item #1: (The best background to the proposal, which explains Benedict's basic orientation to the question, through without mention of the specific term.): MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE WORLD OF CULTURE -- ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI -- Collège des Bernardins, Paris, Friday, 12 September 2008. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-cultura_en.html

Item #2: (The first specific mention of the proposal is found in this excerpt from Benedict's December 2009 address to the Curia.): ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ROMAN CURIA AND PAPAL REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF CHRISTMAS GREETINGS -- Clementine Hall, Monday, 21 December 2009 (Second Last Paragraph). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091221_curia-auguri_en.html

Item #3: The full text of Pope Benedict XVI's video message to participants at the inaugural "Courtyard of the Gentiles" held on March 24-25 in Paris, France. <http://www.radiovaticana.org/en1/articolo.asp?c=473261>

Item #4: (A journalistic review of the inaugural Courtyard): The "Courtyard" of Paris: An Assessment by Sandro Magister. This item includes interviews with Cardinal Ravasi, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and the agnostic Julia Kristeva.. <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1347285?eng=y>

Item #5: (An excerpt from the Lineamenta of the upcoming synod on New Evangelization scheduled for fall, 2012 which picks up the theme.): SYNOD OF BISHOPS -- XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY -- THE NEW EVANGELIZATION: FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH – LINEAMENTA (Section 5). http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html

(Item #1)

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO FRANCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 150th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE APPARITIONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT
LOURDES
(SEPTEMBER 12 - 15, 2008)

**MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE WORLD OF
CULTURE**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Collège des Bernardins, Paris
Friday, 12 September 2008*

*Your Eminence,
Madam Minister of Culture,
Mr Mayor,
Mr Chancellor of the French Institute,
Dear Friends!*

I thank you, Your Eminence, for your kind words. We are gathered in a historic place, built by the spiritual sons of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and which Your venerable predecessor, the late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, desired to be a centre of dialogue between Christian Wisdom and the cultural, intellectual, and artistic currents of contemporary society. In particular, I greet the Minister of Culture, who is here representing the Government, together with Mr Giscard d'Estaing and Mr Jacques Chirac. I likewise greet all the Ministers present, the Representatives of UNESCO, the Mayor of Paris, and all other Authorities in attendance. I do not want to forget my colleagues from the French Institute, who are well aware of my regard for them. I thank the Prince of Broglie for his cordial words. We shall see each other again tomorrow morning. I thank the delegates of the French Islamic community for having accepted the invitation to participate in this meeting: I convey to them by best wishes for the holy season of Ramadan already underway. Of course, I extend warm greetings to the entire, multifaceted world of culture, which you, dear guests, so worthily represent.

I would like to speak with you this evening of the origins of western theology and the roots of European culture. I began by recalling that the place in which we are gathered is in a certain way emblematic. It is in fact a place tied to monastic culture, insofar as young monks came to live here in order to learn to understand their vocation more deeply and to be more faithful to their mission. We are in a place that is associated with the culture of monasticism. Does this still have something to say to us today, or are we merely

encountering the world of the past? In order to answer this question, we must consider for a moment the nature of Western monasticism itself. What was it about? From the perspective of monasticism's historical influence, we could say that, amid the great cultural upheaval resulting from migrations of peoples and the emerging new political configurations, the monasteries were the places where the treasures of ancient culture survived, and where at the same time a new culture slowly took shape out of the old. But how did it happen? What motivated men to come together to these places? What did they want? How did they live?

First and foremost, it must be frankly admitted straight away that it was not their intention to create a culture nor even to preserve a culture from the past. Their motivation was much more basic. Their goal was: *quaerere Deum*. Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they wanted to do the essential – to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself. They were searching for God. They wanted to go from the inessential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is. It is sometimes said that they were “eschatologically” oriented. But this is not to be understood in a temporal sense, as if they were looking ahead to the end of the world or to their own death, but in an existential sense: they were seeking the definitive behind the provisional. *Quaerere Deum*: because they were Christians, this was not an expedition into a trackless wilderness, a search leading them into total darkness. God himself had provided signposts, indeed he had marked out a path which was theirs to find and to follow. This path was his word, which had been disclosed to men in the books of the sacred Scriptures. Thus, by inner necessity, the search for God demands a culture of the word or – as Jean Leclercq put it: eschatology and grammar are intimately connected with one another in Western monasticism (cf. *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*). The longing for God, the *désir de Dieu*, includes *amour des lettres*, love of the word, exploration of all its dimensions. Because in the biblical word God comes towards us and we towards him, we must learn to penetrate the secret of language, to understand it in its construction and in the manner of its expression. Thus it is through the search for God that the secular sciences take on their importance, sciences which show us the path towards language. Because the search for God required the culture of the word, it was appropriate that the monastery should have a library, pointing out pathways to the word. It was also appropriate to have a school, in which these pathways could be opened up. Benedict calls the monastery a *dominici servitii schola*. The monastery serves *eruditio*, the formation and education of man – a formation whose ultimate aim is that man should learn how to serve God. But it also includes the formation of reason – education – through which man learns to perceive, in the midst of words, the Word itself.

Yet in order to have a full vision of the culture of the word, which essentially pertains to the search for God, we must take a further step. The Word which opens the path of that search, and is to be identified with this path, is a shared word. True, it pierces every individual to the heart (cf. *Acts 2:37*). Gregory the Great describes this a sharp stabbing pain, which tears open our sleeping soul and awakens us, making us attentive to the essential reality, to God (cf. Leclercq, p. 35). But in the process, it also makes us attentive to one another. The word does not lead to a purely individual path of mystical immersion, but to the pilgrim fellowship of faith. And so this word must not only be pondered, but also correctly read. As in the rabbinic schools, so too with the monks, reading by the individual is at the same time a corporate activity. “But if *legere* and *lectio* are used without an explanatory note, then they

designate for the most part an activity which, like singing and writing, engages the whole body and the whole spirit”, says Jean Leclercq on the subject (*ibid.*, 21).

And once again, a further step is needed. We ourselves are brought into conversation with God by the word of God. The God who speaks in the Bible teaches us how to speak with him ourselves. Particularly in the book of Psalms, he gives us the words with which we can address him, with which we can bring our life, with all its highpoints and lowpoints, into conversation with him, so that life itself thereby becomes a movement towards him. The psalms also contain frequent instructions about how they should be sung and accompanied by instruments. For prayer that issues from the word of God, speech is not enough: music is required. Two chants from the Christian liturgy come from biblical texts in which they are placed on the lips of angels: the Gloria, which is sung by the angels at the birth of Jesus, and the Sanctus, which according to *Isaiah* 6 is the cry of the seraphim who stand directly before God. Christian worship is therefore an invitation to sing with the angels, and thus to lead the word to its highest destination. Once again, Jean Leclercq says on this subject: “The monks had to find melodies which translate into music the acceptance by redeemed man of the mysteries that he celebrates. The few surviving *capitula* from Cluny thus show the Christological symbols of the individual modes” (cf. *ibid.* p. 229).

For Benedict, the words of the *Psalm: coram angelis psallam Tibi, Domine* – in the presence of the angels, I will sing your praise (cf. 138:1) – are the decisive rule governing the prayer and chant of the monks. What this expresses is the awareness that in communal prayer one is singing in the presence of the entire heavenly court, and is thereby measured according to the very highest standards: that one is praying and singing in such a way as to harmonize with the music of the noble spirits who were considered the originators of the harmony of the cosmos, the music of the spheres. From this perspective one can understand the seriousness of a remark by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who used an expression from the Platonic tradition handed down by Augustine, to pass judgement on the poor singing of monks, which for him was evidently very far from being a mishap of only minor importance. He describes the confusion resulting from a poorly executed chant as a falling into the “zone of dissimilarity” – the *regio dissimilitudinis*. Augustine had borrowed this phrase from Platonic philosophy, in order to designate his condition prior to conversion (cf. *Confessions*, VII, 10.16): man, who is created in God’s likeness, falls in his godforsakenness into the “zone of dissimilarity” – into a remoteness from God, in which he no longer reflects him, and so has become dissimilar not only to God, but to himself, to what being human truly is. Bernard is certainly putting it strongly when he uses this phrase, which indicates man’s falling away from himself, to describe bad singing by monks. But it shows how seriously he viewed the matter. It shows that the culture of singing is also the culture of being, and that the monks have to pray and sing in a manner commensurate with the grandeur of the word handed down to them, with its claim on true beauty. This intrinsic requirement of speaking with God and singing of him with words he himself has given, is what gave rise to the great tradition of Western music. It was not a form of private “creativity”, in which the individual leaves a memorial to himself and makes self-representation his essential criterion. Rather it is about vigilantly recognizing with the “ears of the heart” the inner laws of the music of creation, the archetypes of music that the Creator built into his world and into men, and thus discovering music that is worthy of God, and at the same time truly worthy of man, music whose worthiness resounds in purity.

In order to understand to some degree the culture of the word, which developed deep within Western monasticism from the search for God, we need to touch at least briefly on the particular character of the book, or rather books, in which the monks encountered this word. The Bible, considered from a purely historical and literary perspective, is not simply a book, but a collection of literary texts which were redacted over the course of more than a thousand years, and in which the inner unity of the individual books is not immediately apparent. On the contrary, there are visible tensions between them. This is already the case within the Bible of Israel, which we Christians call the Old Testament. It is only rectified when we as Christians link the New Testament writings as, so to speak, a hermeneutical key with the Bible of Israel, and so understand the latter as the journey towards Christ. With good reason, the New Testament generally designates the Bible not as “the Scripture” but as “the Scriptures”, which, when taken together, are naturally then regarded as the one word of God to us. But the use of this plural makes it quite clear that the word of God only comes to us through the human word and through human words, that God only speaks to us through the humanity of human agents, through their words and their history. This means again that the divine element in the word and in the words is not self-evident. To say this in a modern way: the unity of the biblical books and the divine character of their words cannot be grasped by purely historical methods. The historical element is seen in the multiplicity and the humanity. From this perspective one can understand the formulation of a medieval couplet that at first sight appears rather disconcerting: *littera gesta docet – quid credas allegoria ...* (cf. Augustine of Dacia, *Rotulus pugillaris*, I). The letter indicates the facts; what you have to believe is indicated by allegory, that is to say, by Christological and pneumatological exegesis.

We may put it even more simply: Scripture requires exegesis, and it requires the context of the community in which it came to birth and in which it is lived. This is where its unity is to be found, and here too its unifying meaning is opened up. To put it yet another way: there are dimensions of meaning in the word and in words which only come to light within the living community of this history-generating word. Through the growing realization of the different layers of meaning, the word is not devalued, but in fact appears in its full grandeur and dignity. Therefore the Catechism of the Catholic Church can rightly say that Christianity does not simply represent a religion of the book in the classical sense (cf. par. 108). It perceives in the words *the Word*, the *Logos* itself, which spreads its mystery through this multiplicity and the reality of a human history. This particular structure of the Bible issues a constantly new challenge to every generation. It excludes by its nature everything that today is known as fundamentalism. In effect, the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a transcending and a process of understanding, led by the inner movement of the whole and hence it also has to become a process of living. Only within the dynamic unity of the whole are the many books *one* book. The Word of God and his action in the world are revealed only in the word and history of human beings.

The whole drama of this topic is illuminated in the writings of Saint Paul. What is meant by the transcending of the letter and understanding it solely from the perspective of the whole, he forcefully expressed as follows: “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). And he continues: “Where the Spirit is ... there is freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3:17). But one can only understand the greatness and breadth of this vision of the biblical word if one listens closely to Paul and then discovers that this liberating Spirit has a name, and hence that freedom has an inner criterion: “The Lord is the Spirit. Where the Spirit is ... there is

freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). The liberating Spirit is not simply the exegete’s own idea, the exegete’s own vision. The Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the Lord who shows us the way. With the word of Spirit and of freedom, a further horizon opens up, but at the same time a clear limit is placed upon arbitrariness and subjectivity, which unequivocally binds both the individual and the community and brings about a new, higher obligation than that of the letter: namely, the obligation of insight and love. This tension between obligation and freedom, which extends far beyond the literary problem of scriptural exegesis, has also determined the thinking and acting of monasticism and has deeply marked Western culture. This tension presents itself anew as a challenge for our own generation as we face two poles: on the one hand, subjective arbitrariness, and on the other, fundamentalist fanaticism. It would be a disaster if today’s European culture could only conceive freedom as absence of obligation, which would inevitably play into the hands of fanaticism and arbitrariness. Absence of obligation and arbitrariness do not signify freedom, but its destruction.

Thus far in our consideration of the “school of God’s service”, as Benedict describes monasticism, we have examined only its orientation towards the word – towards the “*ora*”. Indeed, this is the starting point that sets the direction for the entire monastic life. But our consideration would remain incomplete if we did not also at least briefly glance at the second component of monasticism, indicated by the “*labora*”. In the Greek world, manual labour was considered something for slaves. Only the wise man, the one who is truly free, devotes himself to the things of the spirit; he views manual labour as somehow beneath him, and leaves it to people who are not suited to this higher existence in the world of the spirit. The Jewish tradition was quite different: all the great rabbis practised at the same time some form of handcraft. Paul, who as a Rabbi and then as a preacher of the Gospel to the Gentile world was also a tent-maker and earned his living with the work of his own hands, is no exception here, but stands within the common tradition of the rabbinate. Monasticism took up this tradition; manual work is a constitutive element of Christian monasticism. In his *Regula*, Saint Benedict does not speak specifically about schools, although in practice, he presupposes teaching and learning, as we have seen. However, in one chapter of his Rule, he does speak explicitly about work (cf. Chap. 48). And so does Augustine, who dedicated a book of his own to monastic work. Christians, who thus continued in the tradition previously established by Judaism, must have felt further vindicated by Jesus’s saying in Saint John’s Gospel, in defence of his activity on the Sabbath: “My Father is working still, and I am working” (5:17). The Graeco-Roman world did not have a creator God; according to its vision, the highest divinity could not, as it were, dirty his hands in the business of creating matter. The “making” of the world was the work of the Demiurge, a lower deity. The Christian God is different: he, the one, real and only God, is also the Creator. God is working; he continues working in and on human history. In Christ, he enters personally into the laborious work of history. “My Father is working still, and I am working.” God himself is the Creator of the world, and creation is not yet finished. God works, *ergázetai!* Thus human work was now seen as a special form of human resemblance to God, as a way in which man can and may share in God’s activity as creator of the world. Monasticism involves not only a culture of the word, but also a culture of work, without which the emergence of Europe, its ethos and its influence on the world would be unthinkable. Naturally, this ethos had to include the idea that human work and shaping of history is understood as sharing in the work of the Creator, and must be evaluated in those terms.

Where such evaluation is lacking, where man arrogates to himself the status of god-like creator, his shaping of the world can quickly turn into destruction of the world.

We set out from the premise that the basic attitude of monks in the face of the collapse of the old order and its certainties was *quaerere Deum* – setting out in search of God. We could describe this as the truly philosophical attitude: looking beyond the penultimate, and setting out in search of the ultimate and the true. By becoming a monk, a man set out on a broad and noble path, but he had already found the direction he needed: the word of the Bible, in which he heard God himself speaking. Now he had to try to understand him, so as to be able to approach him. So the monastic journey is indeed a journey into the inner world of the received word, even if an infinite distance is involved. Within the monks' seeking there is already contained, in some respects, a finding. Therefore, if such seeking is to be possible at all, there has to be an initial spur, which not only arouses the will to seek, but also makes it possible to believe that the way is concealed within this word, or rather: that in this word, God himself has set out towards men, and hence men can come to God through it. To put it another way: there must be proclamation, which speaks to man and so creates conviction, which in turn can become life. If a way is to be opened up into the heart of the biblical word as God's word, this word must first of all be proclaimed outwardly. The classic formulation of the Christian faith's intrinsic need to make itself communicable to others, is a phrase from the First Letter of Peter, which in medieval theology was regarded as the biblical basis for the work of theologians: "Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason (the *logos*) for the hope that you all have" (3:15). (The *Logos*, the reason for hope must become *apo-logia*; it must become a response). In fact, Christians of the nascent Church did not regard their missionary proclamation as propaganda, designed to enlarge their particular group, but as an inner necessity, consequent upon the nature of their faith: the God in whom they believed was the God of all people, the one, true God, who had revealed himself in the history of Israel and ultimately in his Son, thereby supplying the answer which was of concern to everyone and for which all people, in their innermost hearts, are waiting. The universality of God, and of reason open towards him, is what gave them the motivation—indeed, the obligation—to proclaim the message. They saw their faith as belonging, not to cultural custom that differs from one people to another, but to the domain of truth, which concerns all people equally.

The fundamental structure of Christian proclamation "outwards" – towards searching and questioning mankind – is seen in Saint Paul's address at the Areopagus. We should remember that the Areopagus was not a form of academy at which the most illustrious minds would meet for discussion of lofty matters, but a court of justice, which was competent in matters of religion and ought to have opposed the import of foreign religions. This is exactly what Paul is reproached for: "he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" (*Acts* 17:18). To this, Paul responds: I have found an altar of yours with this inscription: 'to an unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (17:23). Paul is not proclaiming unknown gods. He is proclaiming him whom men do not know and yet do know – the unknown-known; the one they are seeking, whom ultimately they know already, and who yet remains the unknown and unrecognizable. The deepest layer of human thinking and feeling somehow knows that he must exist, that at the beginning of all things, there must be not irrationality, but creative Reason – not blind chance, but freedom. Yet even though all men somehow know this, as Paul expressly says in the Letter to the Romans

(1:21), this knowledge remains unreal: a God who is merely imagined and invented is not God at all. If he does not reveal himself, we cannot gain access to him. The novelty of Christian proclamation is that it can now say to all peoples: he has revealed himself. He personally. And now the way to him is open. The novelty of Christian proclamation does not consist in a thought, but in a deed: God has revealed himself. Yet this is no blind deed, but one which is itself *Logos* – the presence of eternal reason in our flesh. *Verbum caro factum est* (Jn 1:14): just so, amid what is made (*factum*) there is now *Logos*, *Logos* is among us. Creation (*factum*) is rational. Naturally, the humility of reason is always needed, in order to accept it: man's humility, which responds to God's humility.

Our present situation differs in many respects from the one that Paul encountered in Athens, yet despite the difference, the two situations also have much in common. Our cities are no longer filled with altars and with images of multiple deities. God has truly become for many the great unknown. But just as in the past, when behind the many images of God the question concerning the unknown God was hidden and present, so too the present absence of God is silently besieged by the question concerning him. *Quaerere Deum* – to seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is today no less necessary than in former times. A purely positivistic culture which tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm, as being unscientific, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences. What gave Europe's culture its foundation – the search for God and the readiness to listen to him – remains today the basis of any genuine culture. Thank you.

(Item #2)

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ROMAN CURIA
AND PAPAL REPRESENTATIVES
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF CHRISTMAS
GREETINGS***

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 21 December 2009*

Finally, I would like once again to express my joy and gratitude for my Visit to the Czech Republic. Prior to this Journey I had always been told that it was a country with a majority of agnostics and atheists, in which Christians are now only a minority. All the more joyful was my surprise at seeing myself surrounded everywhere by great cordiality and friendliness, that the important liturgies were celebrated in a joyful atmosphere of faith; that in the setting of the University and the world of culture my words were attentively listened to; and that the state authorities treated me with great courtesy and did their utmost to contribute to the success of the visit. I could now be tempted to say something about the beauty of the country and the magnificent testimonies of Christian culture which only make this beauty perfect. But I consider most important the fact that we, as believers, must have at heart even those people who consider themselves agnostics or atheists. When we speak of a new evangelization these people are perhaps taken aback. They do not want to see themselves as an object of mission or to give up their freedom of thought and will. Yet the question of God remains present even for them, even if they cannot believe in the concrete nature of his concern for us. In Paris, I spoke of the quest for God as the fundamental reason why Western monasticism, and with it, Western culture, came into being. As the first step of evangelization we must seek to keep this quest alive; we must be concerned that human beings do not set aside the question of God, but rather see it as an essential question for their lives. We must make sure that they are open to this question and to the yearning concealed within it. Here I think naturally of the words which Jesus quoted from the Prophet Isaiah, namely that the Temple must be a house of prayer for all the nations (cf. Is 56: 7; Mk 11: 17). Jesus was thinking of the so-called "Court of the Gentiles" which he cleared of extraneous affairs so that it could be a free space for the Gentiles who wished to pray there to the one God, even if they could not take part in the mystery for whose service the inner part of the Temple was reserved. A place of prayer for all the peoples by this he was thinking of people who know God, so to speak, only from afar; who are dissatisfied with their own gods, rites and myths; who desire the Pure and the Great, even if God remains for them the "unknown God" (cf. Acts 17: 23). They had to pray to the unknown God, yet in this way they were somehow in touch with the true God, albeit amid all kinds of obscurity. I think that today too the Church should open a sort of "Court of the Gentiles" in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery, at whose service the inner life of the Church stands. Today, in addition to interreligious dialogue, there should be a dialogue with those to whom religion is something foreign, to whom God is unknown and who nevertheless do not want to be left merely Godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown.

(Item #3)

Pope at the Courtyard of the Gentiles, full text



Below the full text of Pope Benedict XVI's video message to participants at the "Courtyard of the Gentiles", in Paris, France:

Dear young people, dear friends!

I know that at the invitation of Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, the Archbishop of Paris, and of Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, you are gathered in great numbers in front of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. I greet all of you, together with our brothers and friends from the Taizé Community. I am grateful to the Pontifical Council for having taken up and extended my invitation to open a number of "Courts of the Gentiles" within the Church. This image refers to the vast open space near the Temple of Jerusalem where all those who did not share the faith of Israel could approach the Temple and ask questions about religion. There they could meet the scribes, speak of faith and even pray to the unknown God. The Court was then an area of separation, since Gentiles did not have the right to enter the consecrated area, yet Jesus Christ came to "break down the dividing wall" between Jews and Gentiles, and to "reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility in himself". In the words of Saint Paul, "He came and proclaimed peace..." (cf. *Eph* 2:14-17).

At the heart of the "City of Light", in front of the magnificent masterwork of French religious culture which is Notre Dame, a great court has been created in order to give fresh impetus to respectful and friendly encounter between people of differing convictions. You young people, believers and non-believers alike, have chosen to come together this evening, as you do in your daily lives, in order to meet one another and to discuss the great questions of human existence. Nowadays many people acknowledge that they are not part of any religion, yet they long for a new world, a world that is freer, more just and united, more peaceful and happy. In speaking to you tonight, I think of all the things you have to say to each other. Those of you who are non-believers challenge believers in a particular way to live in a way consistent with the faith they profess and by your rejection of any distortion of religion which would make it unworthy of man. Those of you who are believers long to tell your friends that the treasure dwelling within you is meant to be shared, it raises questions, it calls for reflection. The question of God is not a menace to society, it does not threaten a truly human life! The question of God must not be absent from the other great questions of our time.

Dear friends, you are challenged to build bridges between one another. Take advantage of this opportunity to discover, deep within your hearts and with serious arguments, the ways which lead to profound dialogue. You have so much to say to one another! Do not turn away from the challenges and issues before you!

I believe deeply that the encounter of faith and reason enables us to find ourselves. But all too often reason falters in the face of self-interest and the lure of profit, and is forced to regard the latter as the ultimate criterion. Striving for truth is not easy. But each of us is called to make a courageous decision to seek the truth, precisely because there can be no shortcut to the happiness and beauty of a life of genuine fulfilment. Jesus says as much in the Gospel: “The truth will make you free”.

Dear young people, it is up to you, in your own countries and in Europe as a whole, to help believers and non-believers to rediscover the path of dialogue. Religions have nothing to fear from a just secularity, one that is open and allows individuals to live in accordance with what they believe in their own consciences. If we are to build a world of liberty, equality and fraternity, then believers and non-believers must feel free to be just that, equal in their right to live as individuals and in community in accord with their convictions; and fraternal in their relations with one another. One of the reasons for this Court of the Gentiles is to encourage such feelings of fraternity, over and above our individual convictions yet not denying our differences. And on an even deeper level, to recognize that God alone, in Christ, grants us inner freedom and the possibility of truly encountering one another as brothers and sisters.

Our first step, the first thing we can do together, is to respect, help and love each and every human being, because he or she is a creature of God and in some way the road that leads to God. As you carry on the experience of this evening, work to break down the barriers of fear of others, of strangers, of those who are different; this fear is often born of mutual ignorance, scepticism or indifference. Work to create bonds with other young people, without distinction and keeping in mind those who are poor or lonely, unemployed, ill or on the margins of society.

Dear young people, what you can share is not only your experience of life, but also your approach to prayer. Believers and non-believers, as you stand in this court of the Unknown, you are also invited to approach the sacred space, to pass through the magnificent portal of Notre Dame and to enter the cathedral for a moment of prayer. For some of you this will be a prayer to a God you already know by faith, but for others it may be a prayer to the Unknown God. Dear young friends who are non-believers, as you join those who pray in Notre Dame on this day of the Annunciation of the Lord, open your hearts to the sacred texts, let yourselves be challenged by the beauty of the music and, if you truly desire it, let your deepest feelings rise towards the Unknown God.

I am happy to have been able to speak to you this evening for the inauguration of the Court of the Gentiles. I hope you will be able to join me for the other events to which I have invited you, especially the World Youth Day to be held in Madrid this coming summer. The God whom believers learn to know invites you to discover him and to find ever greater life in him. Do not be afraid! As you walk together towards a new world, seek the Absolute, seek God, even if for you he is the Unknown God. And may this God, who loves each and every one of you, bless you and keep you. He is counting on you to be concerned for others and for the future, and you can always count on him!

(Item #4)

The "Courtyard" of Paris. An Assessment

An exchange between Cardinal Ravasi and the agnostic Julia Kristeva. And with them, dozens of other thinkers, believers and nonbelievers. In Chicago, in Quebec, in Stockholm, the next stages of the dialogue desired by Benedict XVI

by **Sandro Magister**



ROME, March 29, 2011 – The idea came from Benedict XVI himself. And the name, too: Courtyard of the gentiles. "To the dialogue with the religions," he said, extending Christmas greetings to the Roman curia on December 21, 2009, "must be added today the dialogue with those to whom God is unknown."

And the idea took off. After a prologue on February 12 in Bologna, at what was the first great university of Europe, the Courtyard of the gentiles held its first encounter on March 24 and 25 in Paris, in the "Ville

Lumière," in the city that is the symbol of the modern Enlightenment.

Those "gentiles" who entered the temple in Jerusalem in a space reserved not for the Jews, but for them, are today those far from God, the nonbelievers.

But theirs is not a closed courtyard, as Paul said in writing to the Christians of Ephesus. Because Christ knocked down precisely that wall of separation which divided Jews and gentiles, "in order to create in himself, of the two, a single new man, making peace, reconciling both in a single body."

This was the goal in Paris. Believers and agnostics spoke out in friendship. On borderland terrain. Each with his feet planted in his own space, but ready to listen to the reasons of the other.

Even the locations of the encounter had symbolic significance. UNESCO, l'Institut de France, the Sorbonne are secular places par excellence. While the Collège des Bernardins is an ancient cenacle of Catholic culture. And the cathedral of Notre-Dame was both of these at the same time: the square for all men of good will, and the interior of the cathedral for prayer led by the community of Taizé, with doors open.

The program of the two days, with the places of encounter and the profiles of the speakers, are on a website in French created for the occasion by the pontifical council for culture and the Institut Catholique de Paris:

> **Parvis des gentils, 24-25 mars 2011**

Benedict XVI's message to the participants in the encounter, transmitted on a screen in the square outside of Notre-Dame on the evening of March 25, is on this page of www.chiesa:

> **"In this courtyard of the Unknown God..."**

But in order to understand better the vision of Benedict XVI that lies behind the Courtyard of the gentiles, one must reread the final part of the speech that he gave on September 12, 2008 in Paris, at that same Collège des Bernardins which was the setting of one of the encounters in recent days:

"The fundamental structure of Christian proclamation 'outwards' – towards searching and questioning mankind – is seen in Saint Paul's address at the Areopagus [...]: 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities' (Acts 17:18). To this, Paul responds: 'I have found an altar of yours with this inscription: 'to an unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (17:23). Paul is not proclaiming unknown gods. He is proclaiming him whom men do not know and yet do know – the unknown-known; the one they are seeking, whom ultimately they know already, and who yet remains the unknown and unrecognizable. The deepest layer of human thinking and feeling somehow knows that he must exist, that at the beginning of all things, there must be not irrationality, but creative Reason – not blind chance, but freedom. Yet even though all men somehow know this, as Paul expressly says in the Letter to the Romans (1:21), this knowledge remains unreal: a God who is merely imagined and invented is not God at all. If he does not reveal himself, we cannot gain access to him.

"The novelty of Christian proclamation is that it can now say to all peoples: he has revealed himself. He personally. And now the way to him is open. The novelty of Christian proclamation does not consist in a thought, but in a deed: God has revealed himself. Yet this is no blind deed, but one which is itself Logos – the presence of eternal reason in our flesh. 'Verbum caro factum est' (Jn 1:14): just so, amid what is made (factum) there is now Logos, Logos is among us. Creation (factum) is rational. Naturally, the humility of reason is always needed, in order to accept it: man's humility, which responds to God's humility.

"Our present situation differs in many respects from the one that Paul encountered in Athens, yet despite the difference, the two situations also have much in common. Our cities are no longer filled with altars and with images of multiple deities. God has truly become for many the great unknown. But just as in the past, when behind the many images of God the question concerning the unknown God was hidden and present, so too the present absence of God is silently besieged by the question concerning him. 'Quaerere Deum' – to seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is today no less necessary than in former times. A purely positivistic culture which tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm, as being unscientific, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster

for humanity, with very grave consequences. What gave Europe's culture its foundation – the search for God and the readiness to listen to him – remains today the basis of any genuine culture."

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After the debut in Paris, the Courtyard of the gentiles, under the leadership of Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, already has more appointments scheduled in various places of the world: in Tirana, in Stockholm, in the United States, in Canada, and also in Asia, where Western-style atheism is less present but various forms of religiosity no less far from the Christian God are widespread.

The following is an initial assessment of the encounter in Paris, on the part of Cardinal Ravasi, and a conversation with a French intellectual of Bulgarian origin, Julia Kristeva, who has been one of the most dedicated participants in the Courtyard.

Both of the interviews were conducted by Lorenzo Fazzini for the newspaper of the Italian episcopal conference, "Avvenire."

RAVASI: "THE DIFFICULT THING WILL BE DIALOGUE WITH THE INDIFFERENT"

Q: Your Eminence, the first Courtyard is concluded. Your assessment?

A: Very positive, on multiple levels. First of all the thematic level, which turned out to be very creative. We hope to collect all of the talks, because they permit the creation of guidelines for future Courtyards. In the second place, there was the utmost expansion of cultural expression, from the socio-political genre to UNESCO, to the intellectual expression of the Sorbonne, and finally to the thematic expression at the Collège des Bernardins. We plan to address more categorized themes in the future, for example faith and science, or faith and art.

Q: What reaction have you seen in French culture and society, on the issue of the encounter between atheists and Catholics?

A: Yesterday the agnostic philosopher Jean Luc Ferry asked me for an audience at the nunciature, because he wants at all costs to write a book with me on the Gospel of John. Something that used to be unthinkable! This is an emblematic episode, because on the secular side there is a desire not only to talk together, but also to elaborate a common reflection with believers. Ferry is one of the most prominent figures of French culture. And the rector of the Sorbonne himself has approached me on the issue of "secularism,"

asking me what we as Catholics have to say about this argument. The secular French atmosphere has shown itself to be much more open than we thought to religious issues, to theological elaboration.

Q: No fear on the part of the atheists that the Church might attempt a sort of hidden evangelization?

A: No. I have found this concern only in the media. I have found no fear on the part of our interlocutors. Besides, the entire initiative of the Courtyard was presented as a strictly cultural event.

Q: How do you plan to address the "new atheists"?

A: On the one hand, there exists an ironic and sarcastic atheism, which has become a significant element: Michel Onfray is part of this, but he has written to one of my colleagues to tell us that he wants to show how his proposal does not share this view. So we will also study this form of atheism, "lesser" from an intellectual perspective, but "greater" in terms of popularity. But there also exists the camp of indifference, which in my view is more grave and important. Asking oneself about the questions of the "humanists" – as Julia Kristeva does, for example – represents the ultimate problem for the indifferent. On this front, we have no true interlocutor. We have few studies available on this issue, apart from the sociological work of Charles Taylor, in order to ascertain the profound structures at the basis of this attitude. This will be the most difficult work to be done in the future.

Q: What is in the future for the Courtyard?

A: Adjusting the presentation according to the situations. For example: in Québec or in Chicago, where we will go next, we will have to stay in the field of technology and science, and not make such "lofty" proposals as the ones made here in Paris. There remains the problem of continuity: a proposal like the Courtyard should be a fixture of the pastoral activity of every diocese.

KRISTEVA: "SECULAR FRIENDS, DO NOT BE AFRAID OF RELIGION"

Q: In your book "The need to believe," you write that humanism "is not contrary to the religions, nor in agreement with them." Can you explain why?

A: We find ourselves in a period in which dialogue between Christians and humanists is very important. Nothing makes this encounter easier: both of these communities are in a crisis of identity, and as a result are vulnerable and have difficulties with their

interlocutors. For me, this exchange is absolutely necessary in order to address the current economic and political crisis. But first of all it must be understood what I mean by humanism. I am referring to something separate from religion, which was born in the Renaissance with Erasmus, traversed the Enlightenment with Rousseau, and came down to us, for example in psychoanalysis. It represents what Hannah Arendt and Alexis de Tocqueville called "the uninterrupted thread of tradition." This process is irreversible, and today is faced with the danger of freedom, of extreme individuality and unbridled passions. But it brings us to the need to reinterpret our "uninterrupted" tradition, because something has been lost.

Q: So even humanism without faith needs religion?

A: Humanism must find its own deeper richness, and a new relationship with the systems of morality. Personally, this means an encounter with Catholicism, through which it is possible to reestablish my own Enlightenment. The new modern phenomena of the question of women, of childhood, of young people, pose the problem of a new relationship with religious experience, for example in prayer. This encounter must not lead to a mere "grand fraternity" between humanism and religion, but rather to the rebuilding of an entire tradition. From this arises the need for the religions as well, which are usually dogmatic, to be capable of playing a role.

Q: In a conference at the cathedral of Notre-Dame, you stated that Christianity brought about a revolution in regard to suffering. The Christian religion is often criticized for an anti-human attitude toward suffering...

A: I think that Christianity, above all in its practice, was an innovation in the history of the understanding of suffering. According to the Christian, suffering does not constitute a defeat of man, nor does it cause the exclusion of the suffering person from society. Suffering does not constitute a diminishing of man, nor does it make him less of a man. On the contrary: it becomes the path to God. Christ, in suffering, manifests God himself. The human being who suffers becomes worthy of companionship and respect. Two roads open from here. On the one hand, a certain suffering-centeredness that leads to excesses (Nietzsche called it "victimistic," today it is called "bionegative Christianity"). On the other hand, we find the triumphant Christianity that in the face of suffering unleashes compassion for the other: this is the companionship of charity. It takes place in proximity to the poor, the marginalized, the disabled. And in the face of the moral deregulation of the world of entertainment and capitalism, which interprets everything in a productive sense, we risk losing the sense of the vulnerability of the person. We need Christian tenderness, and we must enlist Christianity to defeat that world which wants to negate suffering.

Q: What examples do you see of this Christian "tenderness"?

A: I think of certain Christian and Catholic organizations, which come to the aid of the least, where the state does not reach. Today the figure that seems most significant to me is Jean Vanier. For one year, I corresponded with him about our experience of suffering,

in particular of handicaps, on all levels: political, social, intellectual, and existential. Jean Vanier is a unique example: he has founded 140 of his "L'Arche" communities. He is perpetuating what Saint Francis did centuries ago in Italy.

Q: What is your assessment of the "Courtyard of the gentiles"?

A: It is a wonderful initiative, although I don't know what results it will bring. It is something surprising, a beginning of that dialogue which seems necessary to me, but of which many are afraid. Both believers and nonbelievers are walking on tiptoes out of fear of losing. I am reminded of the appeal of John Paul II, whom I met in Bulgaria. We all remember his "Be not afraid." He was speaking to Catholics in reference to communism. And the results were seen: Solidarnosc was born, and the Berlin Wall fell. I want to say it to my secular friends: "Be not afraid of religion." You have ways of thinking about the need for religion without the fear of being swallowed up by obscurantism. We can do better than Voltaire, overcoming the abuses of religion and looking at the positive side of belief.

Q: "Make God present in the world" is the manifesto of the current pope. Do you see a danger in this perspective of Benedict XVI?

A: When he talks about "making God present in the world," the pope is doing his job: it would be bizarre if he didn't talk about it! Besides, it must be emphasized how among the monotheistic religions, only Christianity has promoted the idea of universality. It seems to me that the pope's tendency is in this direction. The monotheistic religions are exposed to the risk of imposing themselves as truth, even violently, but at the same time they propose within themselves the theme of plurality, the seed of diversity and of the foreign. My hope is that, from the encounter of the Courtyard, we may set out toward that path of universality.

(Item #5)

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**THE NEW EVANGELIZATION
FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

LINEAMENTA

"New Evangelization": The Meaning of a Definition

5. Though well-known and undoubtedly a part of the Church's many projects, the "new evangelization" remains a relatively new expression and concept in ecclesial and pastoral circles. Consequently, its meaning is not always clear and precise. Initially introduced by Pope John Paul II during his apostolic visit to Poland,^[11] without any specific emphasis or idea of its future role, the "new evangelization" was used again and given new life in the Holy Father's Magisterium to the Churches in Latin America. Pope John Paul II used the term to reawaken and elicit renewed efforts in a new missionary and evangelizing undertaking on the continent. In this regard, he said to the bishops in Latin America: "The commemoration of this half millennium of evangelization will have full significance if, as bishops, with your priests and faithful, you accept it as your commitment; a commitment not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression."^[12] Consequently, the new evangelization is not a matter of redoing something which has been inadequately done or has not achieved its purpose, as if the new activity were an implicit judgment on the failure of the first evangelization. Nor is the new evangelization taking up the first evangelization again, or simply repeating the past. Instead, it is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today. In the past, the Latin American continent was facing new challenges (the spread of a communist ideology, the appearance of the sects). The new evangelization emerged after a process of discernment undertaken by the Church in Latin America to consider and evaluate the overall situation.

In this sense, Pope John Paul II again took up the expression in his Magisterium and proposed it to the universal Church. "Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed. Today all Christians, the particular Churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit."^[13] The new evangelization is primarily a spiritual activity capable of recapturing in our times the courage and forcefulness of the first Christians and the first missionaries. Consequently, it requires, first of all, a process of discerning the vitality of Christianity and a reconsideration of its accomplishments and the difficulties it has encountered. At a later date, Pope John Paul II clarified his idea of a new evangelization: "The Church today ought to take *a giant step forward* in her evangelization effort, and enter

into *a new stage of history* in her missionary dynamism. In a world where the lessening of distance makes the world increasingly smaller, the Church community ought to strengthen the bonds among its members, exchange vital energies and means, and commit itself as a group to a unique and common mission of proclaiming and living the Gospel. 'So-called younger Churches have need of the strength of the older Churches and the older ones need the witness and impulse of the younger, so that individual Churches receive the riches of other Churches'".^[14]

Presently, in reviewing the dynamics of the "new evangelization", the expression can now be applied to the Church's renewed efforts to meet the challenges which today's society and cultures, in view of the significant changes taking place, are posing to the Christian faith, its proclamation and its witness. In facing these challenges, the Church does not give up or retreat into herself; instead, she undertakes a project to revitalize herself. She makes the Person of Jesus Christ and a personal encounter with him central to her thinking, knowing that he will give his Spirit and provide the force to announce and proclaim the Gospel in new ways which can speak to today's cultures.

Understood in this manner, the idea of a "new evangelization" was again taken up and proposed in the continental synodal assemblies, celebrated in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000. At that time, it became an accepted expression in the pastoral and ecclesial thought of the local Churches. A "new evangelization" is synonymous with renewed spiritual efforts in the life of faith within the local Churches, starting with a process to discern the changes in various cultural and social settings and their impact on Christian life, to reread the memory of faith and to undertake new responsibilities and generate new energies to joyously and convincingly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.^[15] In this regard, the words of Pope John Paul II to the Church in Europe are particularly indicative and concise: "...an urgent need [has arisen] for a 'new evangelization', in the awareness that 'Europe today must not simply appeal to its former Christian heritage: it needs to be able to decide about its future in conformity with the person and message of Jesus Christ'".^[16]

Despite the fact that the expression is widely-known in the Church, it has failed to be accepted fully and totally in discussion within both the Church and the world of culture. Some are hesitant to use the term, thinking that it is a negative judgment on the Church's past and a desire to remove certain pages from the recent history of local Churches. Others, especially among other Christian confessions, are suspicious that a "new evangelization" camouflages the Church's intention to proselytize.^[17] Still others tend to think that the term might lead to a change in the Church's attitude towards non-believers, turning them into participants in a debate and no longer partners in a dialogue which sees us as sharers in the same humanity in search of the truth about existence. Regarding this last concern, Pope **Benedict XVI** had the following to say during his [Apostolic Visit to the Czech Republic](#): "Here I think naturally of the words which Jesus quoted from the Prophet Isaiah, namely that the Temple must be a house of prayer for all the nations (cf. *Is* 56: 7; *Mk* 11: 17). Jesus was thinking of the so-called 'Courtyard of the Gentiles' which he cleared of extraneous affairs so that it could be a free space for the Gentiles who wished to pray there to the one God, even if they could not take part in the mystery for whose service the inner part of the Temple was reserved. A place of prayer for all the peoples by this he was thinking of people who know God, so to speak, only from afar; who are dissatisfied with their own gods, rites

and myths; who desire the Pure and the Great, even if God remains for them the 'unknown God' (cf. *Acts* 17: 23). They had to pray to the unknown God, yet in this way they were somehow in touch with the true God, albeit amid all kinds of obscurity. I think that today too the Church should open a sort of "Court of the Gentiles" in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery, at whose service the inner life of the Church stands. Today, in addition to interreligious dialogue, there should be a dialogue with those to whom religion is something foreign, to whom God is unknown and who nevertheless do not want to be left merely Godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown."[18]

As believers, we must also show concern for persons who call themselves agnostic or atheists, who may have fears when we speak of a "new evangelization", thinking that they are the primary objective of the Church's missionary activity. Even they, however, must consider the question of God. The search for God gave birth to western monasticism, and, with it, western culture. The first step in evangelization is seeking to keep this search alive and maintaining dialogue, not only with those professing a religion, but also with those who consider religion non-essential in life.

The image of the "Courtyard of the Gentiles" serves as a further element in our thinking on the "new evangelization" by showing that the Christian must never forego a sense of boldness in proclaiming the Gospel and seeking every positive way to provide avenues for dialogue, where people's deepest expectations and their thirst for God can be discussed. This boldness allows the question of God to be placed in context through one's sharing of personal experiences in seeking God and recounting the gratuitous nature of the personal encounter with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This will firstly require self-evaluation and purification, so as to recognize any traces of fear, weariness, confusion or a retreat into oneself resulting from cultural factors. This step must immediately be followed by renewed efforts and initiatives, relying on the grace of the Holy Spirit, at experiencing God as Father, which, in turn, can then be communicated to others in virtue of our personally encountering Christ. This is not a matter of successive stages as much as spiritual modes of the Christian life. St. Paul the Apostle spoke of them, when he described the experience of faith as a liberation "from the dominion of darkness" and an entrance into "the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (*Col* 1: 13, 14; cf. also *Rom* 12: 1,2). At the same time, this boldness is not something absolutely new or totally unheard of in Christianity, since indications of this boldness are already present in patristic literature.[19]