

Go,  
Rebuild  
My Church!

**Comprehensive  
Course on the  
Franciscan  
Mission  
Charism**



Sisters  
and Brothers  
in a Secularized  
World

Lesson Unit 14

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our "cloister," we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.

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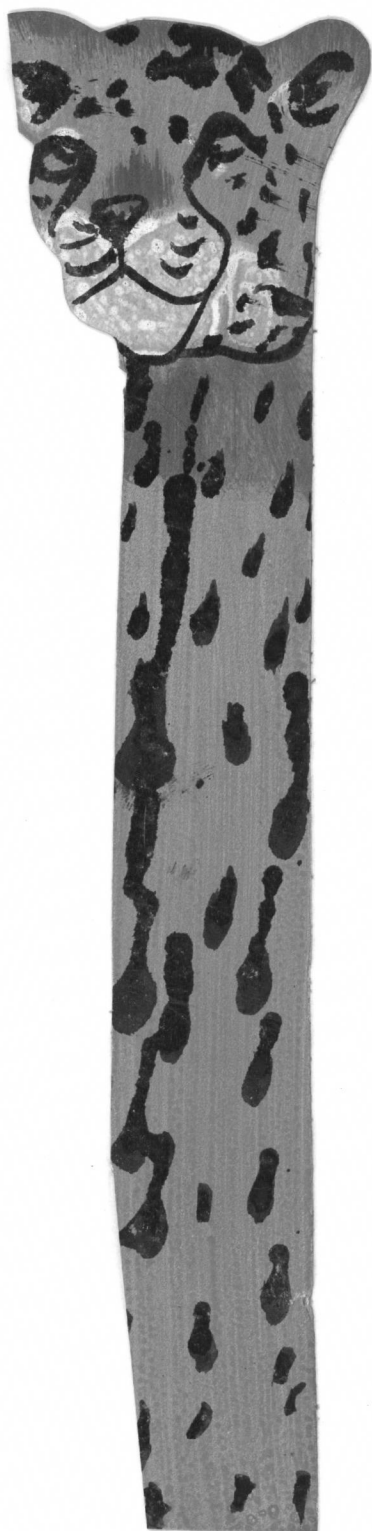


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Lesson Unit 14 • Sisters and Brothers in a Secularized World

# Go, Rebuild My Church!

*A Comprehensive  
Course on the  
Franciscan Mission  
Charism*



## Sisters and Brothers in a Secularized World



### Lesson Unit 14



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# From the Sources



## The Whole World As Our Cloister

One time Francis and his brothers climbed a lofty mountain, where, high above, Lady Poverty had long awaited them. When Francis and his brothers finally made it, she was overjoyed. She hugged them, one after the other, and sat down to eat with them. Together they talked about God and the world. Once finished eating, they swore lasting loyalty to one another. Lady Poverty had one last question for them. "Where do you live?" she asked, "Where is your cloister?" The brothers did not even know what a real cloister was.

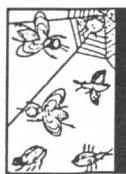


They showed her the whole world, as far as she could see, and said: "This, Lady, is our cloister" (cf. SC 63).



# Introduction

A



Individual themes

Some themes in this course do not have the same relevance for every continent. That is the case, for example, with inculturation (Lesson Unit 17), the option for the poor (Lesson Unit 19), Liberation Theology (Lesson Unit 20). That is the case as well with secularization, the theme handled in the present lesson. Secularization raises a number of questions which confront Europe, North America and Africa. If Franciscans in these countries do not wrestle with secularization, they miss

a new chance for the evangelization which it involves. We address the theme on the basis of documents from the Second Vatican Council, and with the Apostolic Message *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) of Pope Paul VI.

Secularization has already begun to influence many countries outside the North Atlantic area as well, and it will not be long before it works its way into the furthest recesses of our world.

## Survey

B



Start with Jesus Christ

In dealing with this important theme, it is best to start with Jesus Christ: He sanctifies all human reality. He has become *human* in the fullest sense of the word. This has changed the terms of human existence that we can no longer separate *holy* from *worldly*, although they must not be regarded as being identical. The concept of *secularization* is to be understood with this background in mind. It does not mean a world without religion, but a world in which religion as a final authority is not recognized, simply because it claims to be an authority. Religious authority must be prepared to justify itself by plausible arguments, just as other authorities have to do. Given its origins and its history, the term *secularization* needs to be purified of its

negative connotations; and negative aspects must be identified by the term *secularism*. The Enlightenment was partly responsible for the process of secularization, and in connection with it science and technology that were seen as absolute. Contrary to the high expectations placed on them they had also negative consequences, and, as a result of this, religion and spirituality returned into people's lives.

The question arises whether there are not much more fundamental factors underlying this rise of secularization. It has been assumed, for example, that Christianity itself is one of the causes that has led to secularization. Yet, the ecclesial hierarchy reacted in a thoroughly negative way against the Enlightenment and its programme.



Only with Pope Pius XII and under Pope John XXIII and finally in the Second Vatican Council did the Church open itself to the world and recognize the independence and autonomy of so-called earthly reality.

In the so-called *New Humanism* essentially Christian elements can be discerned, that should be open to God and to the final purpose of life. This humanism contains many values that are also specific to the Franciscan way of life. The first task will be to strive to become fully human and to seek for the deeper meaning of human exist-

ence. The spirit of the Beatitudes, the seeking out of the element of holiness in everyday life and the renewal of the liturgy will help us to be Christians in a form appropriate for today.

In the final section, the importance of witness will be addressed; the kind of witness which is expected of us as followers of Francis and Clare. Finally, the fact of living in a secularized world can be experienced as a great liberation; *secularization* makes it possible today to give full form and shape to some of the original Franciscan attitudes.

## Information



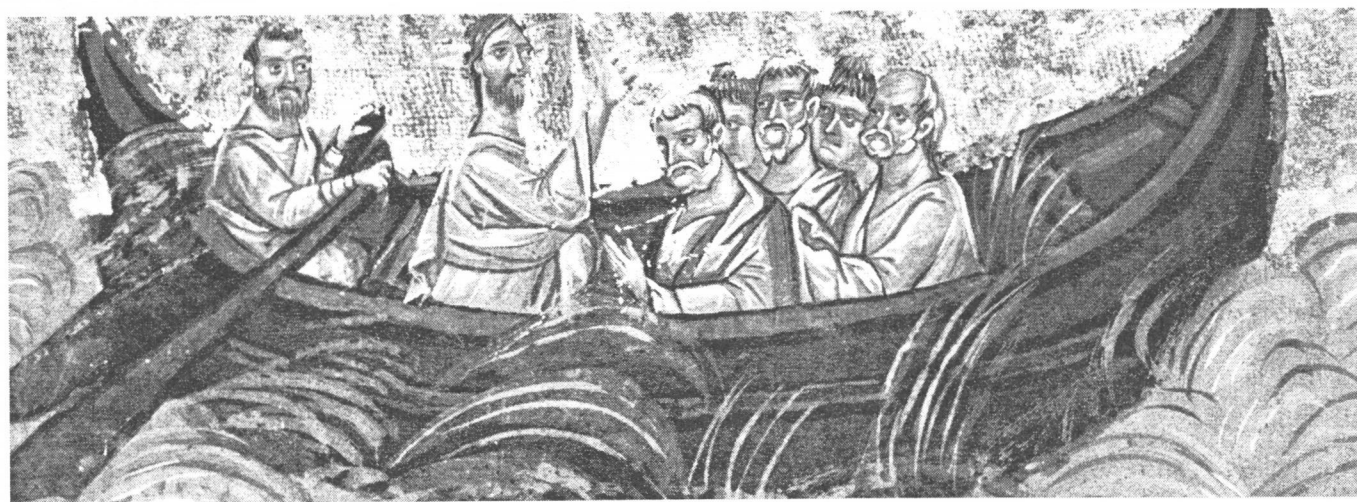
Jesus Christ

### Makes All Human Realities Holy

Jesus is the first one to proclaim the Good News. He was sent into the world by the Father to renew humankind. He became human, like us in all things save sin (cf. Heb. 4:15). In a way, this resulted in a bond between Him and every other person.

He shared in our human experiences: joy, sor-

row, success, new beginnings, temptation, the presence and the loss of friends, betrayal, suffering, abandonment by God, death and burial. As a result we meet Him in all our human experiences. Christ sanctified the realities which make up human existence: *"He worked with human hands, acted with a human will, loved with a human heart"* (GS 22).



We meet Christ in all our human experiences.



All these realities – birth, growth, discipline, friendship and love, help for the sick and the dying – we celebrate in the sacraments. Their goal is to vitalize human life and fill it with meaning. From the Church and its sacraments Christians derive the strength to promote the renewal of humankind (cf. Mt 5:1-16; 25: 31-46).

- **The Word Made Flesh**

The eternal divine Word became human in Jesus. That means the Word took on worldliness and temporality; it assumed secularity. In Jesus, God and salvation became present in all of life, not just in one separate and self-sufficient area. Jesus does away with the idea that religion and life represent two distinct areas.

For Jesus every place was holy. Every place was itself a setting for prayer (cf. Jn 4:21), not only the temple in Jerusalem. In Jesus' eyes, not only the Sabbath but every moment was holy and a chance to serve God. He let fall the distinction between pure and impure food, He dropped rituals of cleansing. Each and every thing was of God and in each and every thing God's grace was present.

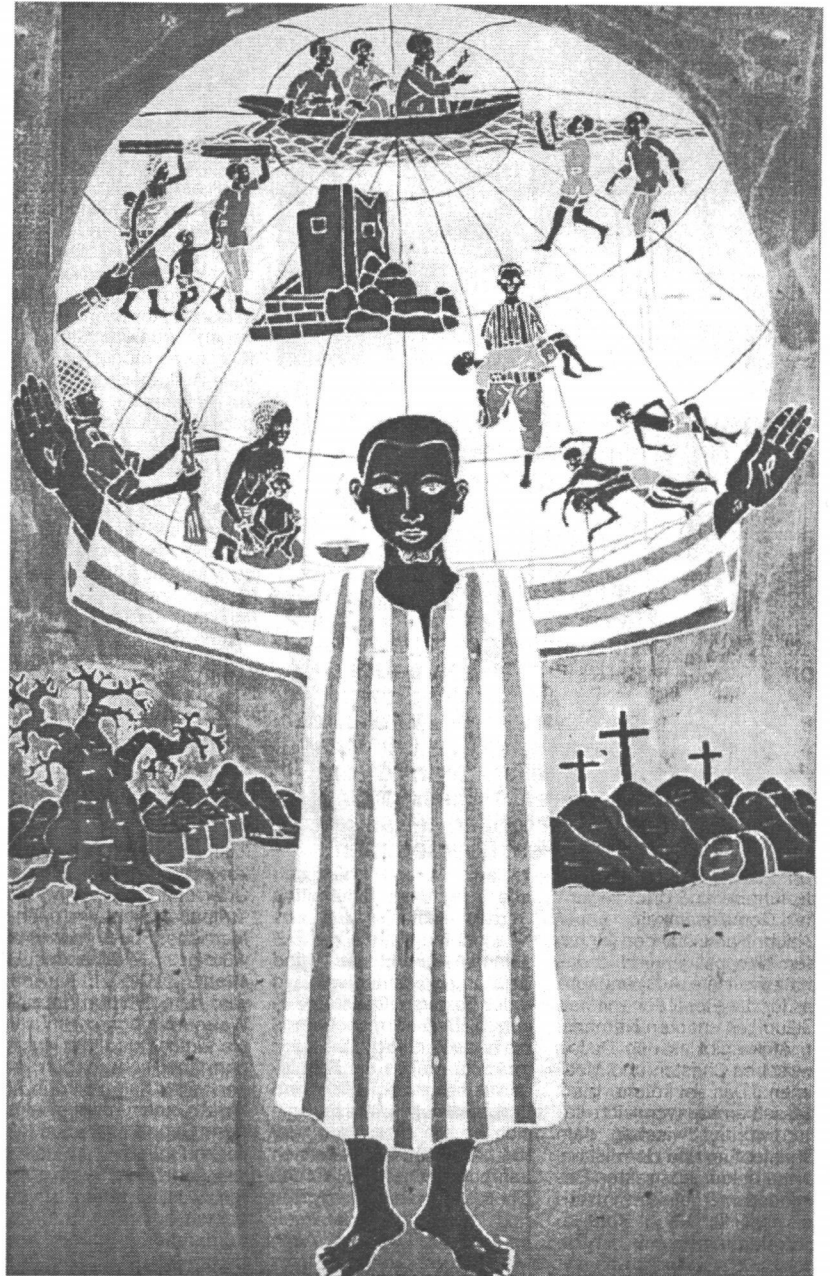
- **No Separation Between Holy and Worldly**

People live religion through their involvement in the world. Each one encounters the saving love of Christ, and does so in the concrete circumstances of life's events (cf. RH 18). Consequently we make known nothing more than what God has always done in the world. It might seem that we bring Christ to people as if He were not already there (cf. GS 22; 38). In truth we can do no more through our mediation than help them become aware of Christ's presence and His influence in the happenings of their

daily life. The Holy (Christ) and the worldly are inextricably bound up with one another.

- **The Holy and the Worldly not the same**

On the other hand, we may not reduce the Holy to the worldly. God is present at the core of the world in Jesus Christ and yet He cannot be encompassed by the world. He is present as well in people and in their efforts to transform human life, but He is not only there.



God is present at the core of the world in Jesus Christ.







## Secularization: The Idea



With secularization we understand different things:

- a process which removes different areas of human life or human life as a whole from the influence of religion;
- the end of religious authorities' control over the minds and lives of people;
- the tendency to live without religion, now that it has become marginal.

A secularized world is a world which explicitly does not subordinate itself to religious authority in any area of public and social life (politics, economy, legal system, education, morality), a world in which people no longer recognize religiously imposed sanctions. The world *saeculum* has come of age and insists on its independence from the Church. This is the case first of all in political life, with the separation of Church and state, and generally in the world of scholarship and culture.

Pope Paul VI described secularization in his

Apostolic Letter *Evangelii nuntiandi* as "a just and legitimate effort, in no way contrary to faith and religion, to discover in creation the laws which, in their autonomy, rule each object or each event in the universe, in the conviction that the Creator placed them there" (EN 55).

In this sense the council confirmed the legitimate autonomy of culture and above all that of scholarship (cf. GS 59). One must of course avoid thinking of secularization as an unvarying progression. There are jumps and fissures in the world's "coming of age," and perhaps we simply succumb to an illusion in putting it this way, given the fullness of power which the Church exercised in the last 500 years and with which the Church controlled Catholic populations. There are historians who call the Church's loss of influence a "return to normalcy" (Urs Altermatt). They claim that prior to the Reformation, the factual influence of religious authorities on the daily life of people was as weak as it is today.

## Secularization and Religion



In a secularized world the practice of religion is no longer a collective duty. It has turned into a personal decision which society's members make, or do not make, of their free accord. This said, we must point out that a secularized world is not necessarily a world without religion. Religious motives and moral ideas continue to mix with life, perhaps even to a remarkable degree, but they are no longer imposed by authority. They have to prove their own validity as do other influences and ideas in society.

*One can only turn himself or herself to what is good freely. Our contemporaries prize this freedom highly; they pursue it ardently. And with good reason. However, they often promote it in a distorted way, as the license to do whatever one pleases, even if it is wrong. True freedom is an outstanding sign of God's image in human beings. For God wanted to leave them to their good counsel so that they might seek their Creator of their own accord and come at last to a full and blessed life by freely holding fast to*





*Him. Human dignity demanded, consequently, that people conduct themselves by free and conscious design, each one moved and led from within, not driven by blind inner impulse or by mere external compulsion (GS 17).*

Family and social values which were once influenced by religious values are no longer the main focus for our times. The secularized world practices religious tolerance, which in turn strengthens the tendency to secularization. This consequently, leads to the weakening of religious meaning in the lives of many people and the discontinuation of belief. On the other hand, the same freedom can lead others to greater maturity in their faith.

## Secularization and Secularism

2.2

We have to distinguish between secularization and secularism. Secularization does not mean a world without religion, as already mentioned, but a world in which religious authority and its ministers no longer determine, as the final authority, what may go on in society. Secularism, however, designates the negative aspects of secularization, namely: the absence of any public mention of God, the organization of public life without a basic reference to God, and ultimately the intentional denial of God and opposition to faith in God. In this way of understanding the world, God is looked upon as non-existent, superfluous, or even obstructive. Secularism often results in practical atheism, which might not deny God explicitly but manages to do without God, putting in His place power, property, pleasure. The fundamental values of family and society disappear, especially the values of community and solidarity (cf. Puebla 57).

That leads further, especially among the young, to frustration, isolation, and dependence on drugs, alcohol, gambling, and other forms of bondage (cf. Puebla 58).

A natural scientist does not need God in order to explain the world. If he or she wants to be taken seriously, he or she must act "as if there were no God." That does not mean they cannot believe in God in their personal lives. Atheistic humanism goes further than this. It declares that there is no room for God when we recognize people for what they truly are. If people are to rule, God must be set aside. Ludwig Feuerbach (+1872), the father of atheistic humanism, wrote:

*The purpose of my labours is to make men anthropologists and not theologians [specialists in men and not in God]; to lead them from love of God to love of men and from hope in a beyond, to the tasks of earth.*



He called on people to keep faith with this world, "*which Christians have abandoned*".

Christians certainly did not assume their social responsibilities satisfactorily when, in the course of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of factories in Europe, the poor and even children had to work long hours every day in order to survive. An English bishop is reported to have said: "*Nothing helps make the wheels of a factory turn better than belief in God.*" This

brand of religion, which we look on today as foreign to truly biblical and Christian religion, helped bring about secular humanism and Marxism. The Second Vatican Council took note of the fact that Christians "*bear a measure of responsibility*" for atheism. When they misrepresent the Church's teachings, as that bishop, or fail to satisfy their religious and social duties, "*they hide rather than reveal the authentic face of God and of religion*" (GS 19).

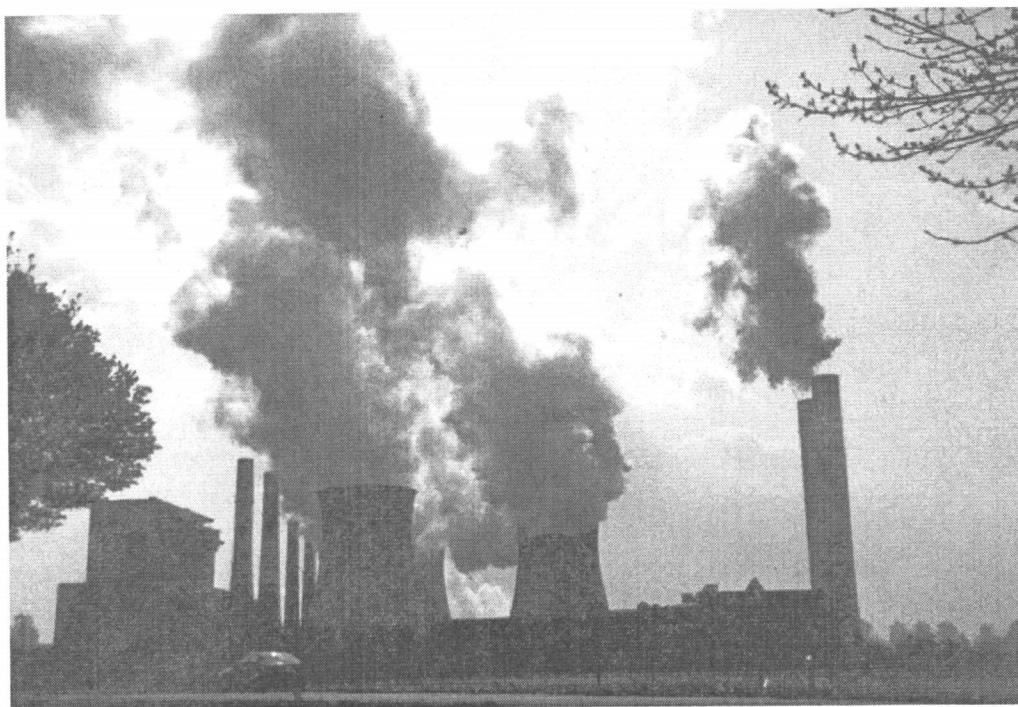
## The Return of the Religious

2.3

For a while now we have been able to observe a counter-movement called postmodernism. Postmodernism designates the period of history which succeeds to modernism and its programme.

Since the Enlightenment, reason has reigned supreme. Reason has reigned with particular success in the natural sciences, which suppose they can do without God and suffer no restraint, and in technology, which pretends that no task lies beyond its means. There long ruled the view that the whole of creation lay open to the examination of human reason and no secrets could hide from its disenchanting gaze. With that view went the conviction that all problems were solvable, if not today, then certainly in the near or distant future.

Such boundless trust in reason led humankind to a precipice: more problems were made than



Science and technology lost much of their past authority.

solved. Impotence succeeded to the "*omnipotence complex*" (H. E. Richter) of scientists and their philosophers. Fear reared its head within people's outlook on life.

This has led in the past few years to postmodernism, to a time when reason, and consequently science and technology, have had to surrender much of their past authority. People have hoisted the flag of a new programme: a critique of critical reason for people's sake. Intuition, the



heart, the soul have come to the fore again as ways of knowing. The inward journey and spirituality are recognized and cultivated again as fully valid human activities.

Such a development includes the return of religion not, of course, in the forms of traditional religion but in a wide variety of beliefs and practices which present themselves as alternatives to Christianity and the Church. People turned from the higher religions to look for the truly religious in primitive or archaic cultures where they picked up and held onto what they liked. Once again things appeared in a religious light, while the stars and the planets shimmered in mystery.

The return of the religious certainly presents the biblical religions and the spiritual tradition of Christianity with a new chance. Everything

hinges on the way we display it in our lives. This is all the more necessary as our contemporaries have become susceptible to religious practices which degrade people (sects, cults, fundamentalism). In the tradition of Francis and Clare we, on the other hand, extend the action of God's Incarnation, which enhances the human person and demands a social order in keeping with human dignity.

All the same, we have to reckon with the end of a Christendom which understood itself as the religious norm throughout the world. Alongside the Christian Church, other developed religions and esoteric disciplines are laying out their wares in "the supermarket of religious goods." That lies behind the way some, with more or less justification, speak about the post-Christian age.



## Christianity and Secularization



We can call the overall policy of the Second Vatican Council towards the world an open one. In an honest effort we will now show that, in the

history of the Church, this approach or attitude has not at all been a matter of course.

## The Enlightenment



The foremost place reserved for religion in society, and at times its factual importance, was challenged by the *Enlightenment*, a philosophical movement which recognized no authority other than reason. The first *Enlightenment* thinkers were Francis Bacon (+1626), the father of experimental philosophy, and René Descartes (+1650), whose philosophical system was based on methodical doubt. Later philosophers, above all in France, went much further. Voltaire (+1778) believed in a hidden God but not in divine providence. He carried on a steady campaign against

the faith as embodied at the time by the Catholic Church. Thirty-nine of his books made it onto the Church's index. Rousseau (+1778) wrote in *Emilie*: "All religions are good save the Catholic one." The *Enlightenment* spread throughout the Western world, from England and France to North America, from Spain and Portugal to South America. It emphasized intellectual independence and called for the liberation of reason from every form of control and tutelage. Human independence and freedom were taken as absolute values which should suffer no restrictions.





René Descartes: His philosophical system was based on methodical doubt.

In matters of state, the *Enlightenment* rejected completely kingship by God's grace (a theory of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). It called for the sovereignty of the people – what we call democracy. This contributed to the revolutions in the United States and in France and to subsequent revolutions throughout South America. The rights of individuals had to be protected. The organizational development of such ideas resulted in the separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Above all, the *Enlightenment* promoted freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion.

The *Enlightenment* had many positive sides to it, and we should readily acknowledge them: a human and tolerant spirit, an improved body of law, efforts at social welfare, promotion of research and education, the struggle against ignorance and superstition, defense of human rights. Other elements of the *Enlightenment* deserve criticism: the excessive importance accorded to intellectual prowess, individualism, a principled negative attitude towards authority and religion.

## The Church's Reaction

3.2

Several churchmen, Lamennais (+1854) for one, looked closely at the positive elements of the *Enlightenment* and convinced themselves of their value. Consequently they called for a greater openness of the Church towards the modern world. The official Church would have none of it. The popes above all, who at the time were still the temporal rulers of the Papal States, along with the other rulers of the day, reacted with suspicion, censure, and condemnation. Pope Gregory XVI condemned it all, and Lamennais' views as well, in the encyclicals *Mirari Vos* (1832) and *Singulari Nos* (1834). He branded the demand for modern liberties as demented.

When the Creole populations of Spanish America demanded their freedom, Pope Pius VII

published the encyclical *Etsi Longissimo* (1816). He instructed bishops to bring the faithful to oppose the movement for independence and to remain loyal to his Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain. In 1864 Pope Pius IX published his *Syllabus of Errors*. Among other things, he condemned as heresy the opinion that the Catholic religion should no longer be considered the sole official religion. Heretical as well was the demand that "the Roman ruler could and must accept as given and reconcile himself to progress, liberalism, and modern civilization." The papacy, along with the Catholic Church, found itself under pressure from all sides. Spiritually, it seemed that *modernism* was shaking the very foundations of the Faith; politically, the Church was being shoved aside, demoted from its traditional role.



The violent insurrection of the national state on the Italian peninsula extinguished the Papal States, the *Patrimonium Petri*. At the time the papacy did not think it could do without its territories. So, before the fall of papal Rome, in the decree of 1868 (*Non Expedit*), Pius IX forbade Catholics active and passive participation in the national unification of Italy. The end of the Papal States turned the pope into “*the Prisoner of the Vatican*,” a symbol of the forceful removal of the Church from public life, as well as a self-imposed ghetto. It lasted a whole generation, until 1919, when the Church finally saw fit to let fall the decree of 1868. It was a further ten years until, with the Lateran Accords of 1929, the “*Roman Question*” was resolved. The Church was beset and bothered by the *Zeitgeist*, the feelings of the time, in a way which led to its antipathy for everything modern. Supported by “*sworn functionaries*” (Antimodernism Oath), Rome thought it could handle the errors of the age and the spirit of the times easily. This led, among other things, to a strongly centralized, clerical Church. In such a Church layfolk had nothing to say.

In his important encyclical on the missions, *Sancta Dei Civitas* (1880), Pope Leo XIII had already defined the role of the laity. He wrote:

*Thus, faith is based on the message, the message on the word of Christ (Rom 10:10). Yet, this ministry is due to those who are legitimately ordained. They obtain no small help from all those who support them constantly through material means or when calling God’s blessing upon their work through prayer. This double vocation (of the laity) to donate and to pray is not only of great use for the extension of the Reign of God, but it has also the advantage that it can be easily fulfilled by people of each status.*

Pius X put it still more clearly in his encyclical *Vehementer Nos* (1906):

*The Church is, according to its very nature, an unequal society...There are two categories:*

*shepherd and flock...These categories are so strongly defined that the right and the authority which are needed for the guidance of the members, are exclusively reserved for the shepherds. As to the mass of the faithful, their only duty is to be willingly led and to follow their shepherds as an obedient flock.*

How far removed this attitude is from that of Pope John XXIII, who spoke explicitly of a worldly spirituality, lived “*in the world*”:

*Therefore, no one should cling to the idle delusion that spiritual perfection and ordinary daily occupations are opposed to each other. They are in fact compatible, and no one should think he necessarily needs to withdraw from the works of the transitory life in order to strive for Christian perfection; neither should one believe he couldn’t pursue such actions without the risk of losing dignity as a human being and Christian. It thoroughly corresponds to the plan of Divine providence that people seek education and perfection through their daily work. The condition of almost all people is that they have to dedicate their work to transitory things (MM 255f).*

At the risk of over-simplifying, we can distinguish four periods in the relationship of the church to the world:

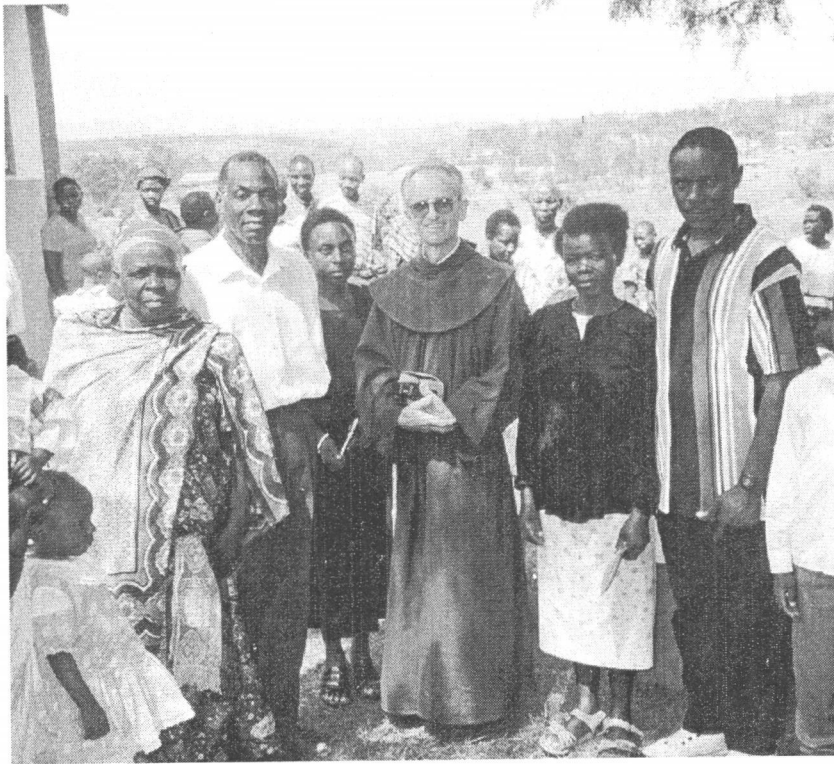
- **World against Church** (the first three centuries): the Church of the Martyrs and the Catacombs;
- **World and Church together** (fourth to seventeenth centuries): the age of Christendom; the Unity of Church and State;
- **Estrangement between Church and World** (eighteenth to twentieth centuries): periods of Enlightenment and Modernity;
- **Church and World in Dialogue** (Second Vatican Council): post-Modernism and the post-Christian age.



The Church has found in a long spiritual process, a new human view of the world. On her journey she discovered anew her sources and relevance for appreciating the modern age. In this regard we can speak about a new humanism which has taken shape within the secular-

of God in no way lessens or denies human responsibility for the secular world (cf. GS 34).

The Christian humanist Teilhard de Chardin in *The Divine Milieu* caught well the human and divine dimension about which we speak in the following text:



Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (EN 41).

ized world. This way of thinking places the human being and not God at the centre of its thinking. Christianity has much in common with this new humanism. Christians embrace the principle that they bear responsibility for their brothers and sisters and for the course of history (cf. GS 55). Furthermore, Christianity enriches humanist ideas and attitudes by adding the Divine reality. God and humanity do not face one another as rivals, and the affirmation

*We are deserters? We are sceptical of the future of the material world? We are disgusted by human labour? Oh, how little you know us... You suspect us of not sharing in your worries, your hopes, your elation at penetrating the secrets and conquering the powers of Earth. "Such feelings," you say, "can only be shared by people who fight together for their existence. You Christians, however, profess yourselves already saved!" As if, for us, as much as and still more than for you, it were not a question of life and death that the Earth succeed, even in its most natural powers! For you (and precisely here you are not human enough, you do not go to the very limits of your humanity) it is only a question of the success or failure of a reality which, even if visualized with the features of some super-humanity, remains vague and unclear. For us, in factual truth, it is a question of completing the triumph of the very God. I grant you, one thing is bitterly disappointing: many Christians live their lives as do other people, too little*

*conscious of the "divine" responsibilities of their lives. They take it easy, without feeling goaded or drunkenly driven to advance the Kingdom of God in all areas of human endeavour. But ascribe that to our frailty. In the name of our faith we have the right and the duty to commit ourselves passionately to the things of Earth... You are humans? "Plus et ego!" (cf. 2Cor 11: 22f: "Are they Hebrews? So am I"). (The Divine Milieu, 38-39).*



## The Struggle for Human Fullness

4.1

If we intend to assume responsibility for our brothers and sisters and for history's course, we have to seek human fullness in our own lives as well as in our communities.

There are human qualities which we readily represent as specifically feminine: for example, care for others, amiability, trust, sensitivity, intuition, interiority, compassion... We all should seek such qualities, for we direly need them in today's world. Humankind seems to have reached a critical juncture in its history. Many propose that

this has come about, in part, as the result of an undue emphasis on so-called male qualities: for example, efficiency, toughness, determination, rationality. As a consequence we see excessive exploitation of people and of nature, resulting in the emergence of an impersonal and purely functional society. Every individual should try to interiorize and cultivate both sets of female and male qualities. Only in this way can man and woman assume together their common responsibility for history's course in our critical times.

## The Search for Deeper Meaning in Our World

4.2

If we want to discover the gospel in a secularized world, we first of all have to take account of our own experience at a deep level. We do so by gradually finding our way from surface understandings to deeper meanings; and with time we come to the source which holds everything together: the 'holy', present at the very core of human life. If we help one another as we learn to do this, then we are assuming our responsibility as Franciscan Christians for the course of history.

*We are not mistaken when we take ourselves as superior to material things and not just as parts of nature or anonymous elements in human society. For through our inner being we go beyond the totality of things. We enter these inner depths when we withdraw into our*

*heart. God, who searches all hearts, awaits us there; and there, under the eyes of God, we decide our fate (GS 14).*

In the consumer society of today, the steady summons to satisfy artificially cultivated needs stands in the way of serious consideration of life's meaning. We have to learn again how to put the question of final purpose and present means as we sort out our experiences and think about life. This takes place in living life, not outside of life. In some cases that can lead to the desire to develop tighter bonds with others and to realize that unity in a given community. It can lead as well to the choice of a more simple lifestyle, which handles material things with respect and without exaggerated needs.

## The Spirit of the Beatitudes

4.3

An openness to final meaning or to the *holy* in one's life and the passionate interaction with God deep within one's being makes one recep-

tive to the spirit of the Beatitudes: poverty, meekness, hunger and thirst for justice, purity of heart, mercy and peace.





## The Holy in the Ordinary Things of Life

4.4.

We are all responsible for our brothers and sisters, but not all are called to exceptional and spectacular deeds. We have to learn again how to encounter the Holy in life's simple things. How do we develop greater attention for God's

presence in every dimension of our life and above all in unimportant and ordinary things: in others' company, at meals, while consoling those who hurt, in mutual service, in solidarity with the unloved, the suffering, the dying?



It is possible that in this way we experience something of what we hear today about African tribes. When, after a stormy discussion, it suddenly and unexpectedly becomes still, or when suddenly a wind rises and sweeps up leaves, sand, and twigs, then someone will murmur: "*God is passing by!*"

God is  
present in  
the suffering  
and dying

## Liturgical Renewal

4.5.

God's healing and saving presence among us should become a daily experience in everyone's life (cf. GS 19, 21-22, 38). The Holy Eucharist must relate to and unfold within this experience. The encounter with the Holy in daily life will lead us to rediscover the meaning for our lives of our participation in the Church's liturgy and our recourse to the sacraments. With joy we will find in the Eucharist what we long for: a love which shares itself; the divine Thou Who speaks and gives Himself; the table around which we gather; the wish of peace which draws all brothers and sisters together, a peace which the world cannot give and yet can receive again and again.

We will gladly enter again the water which makes us new and refreshes us in Jesus Christ. Anyone who wants to know again this dimension of worship has to find a way to leave behind the secularization of this age and seek an encounter with the Holy. That must happen first of all in and through the personal relationships of one's daily life, rather than in traditional religious language, practices, and rites. For these have lost too much of their meaning for people today, even though, in new conditions, they might become again an area of energy and inspiration.





## Let People Know!

5.

In these circumstances our Franciscan way of passing on the Good News has to reveal itself in our very lifestyle, in our “*presence, life and*

*solidarity with others*” (EN 21). Immersion in life’s hard tasks speaks to others in a way religious language and ritual do not (cf. LU 13).

## Franciscan Witness today

5.1.

The apostolate of simple presence is what works today (cf. EN 69). In our generally secularized world, many people know little or nothing about the gospel, the kingdom of God, the faith. However, they do understand and value qualities like love and neighbourliness. They understand a readiness to go among and help the poor, to see the importance of reconciliation, justice, and peace. All of these are Franciscan values. They belong to the essence of God’s kingdom. Where love is, there is God. God rules there. God’s kingdom reigns when faith is alive. When people live that way, the kingdom of God becomes a visible reality. These values also express and manifest the deep needs and longings of today’s secularized people.

Today’s secularized world differs in basic ways from the world of Francis of Assisi. Even so, Francis did live in ways which take on exceptional importance in today’s world. These are the ways which the brothers and sisters of the Franciscan movement must concretize in their lives: joy and freedom; trust in every individual; a feeling of family with all peoples and all creatures; a sensitivity to the God who encompasses all in love; the ability to see the face of Christ in the poor; a feeling of responsibility for a mission to the whole world – to name but a few of the ways. The secularized world offers us the opportunity to unpack and display the whole gamut of Franciscan values.

## Freedom for Living

5.2.

More freedom means more responsibility as well. Life in a more or less secularized environment challenges us as Franciscans. That gives new meaning to the phrase about “*going through the world*” (RegNB 14). The world lies before us, given our call to mobility, in accord with our various gifts and talents. We no longer need to keep our fences in repair, as in pre-secularized

times, nor to heed the details of lesser religious practices – whereby matters of much greater importance such as justice, mercy, uprightness (cf. Mt 23:23) slipped from sight, and other matters to which the secularized world ascribes fundamental importance.

On such journeys through the world today, especially in big cities, we meet people of other



cultures. They can enrich us with their religious depth as well as with their cultural values. If we behave “*modestly and humbly*,” we will “*speak politely*” (RegNB 3:11) with these people and confirm them in their values. We will try as well to assume these values into our own culture (cf. Mattli 1978, 41; RM 7,37c: Modern Areopagus). And then, when necessary, we can help

people shake themselves loose from superstitious practices and humanly destructive religious practices. With all appropriate means we will encourage them to look for true human values and demand honesty, courage, love, fidelity. In this way, we contribute to the possibility that in these values, they recognize the saving presence of God (cf. Mattli 1978, 30).

### The ‘Grace of Work’ and the ‘Spirit of Prayer’

5.3.

Individually and communally we will welcome the “*grace to work*,” while at the same time cultivating with care the “*spirit of prayer*” and devotion which all other things should serve (cf. RegB 5). One who has joined the Franciscan movement does not have to change jobs, “*if the work is not contrary to the good of the soul and can be carried out honestly*.” That being the case, one has complete freedom “*to pursue the trade one has*

*taken up*” (RegNB 7:3). Today that would correspond to a *worldly* occupation. The OFM General Chapter in Madrid (1973) ruled, in accord with original practice, that the brothers “*work at salaried trades and other jobs, in businesses and professions, which belong neither to the Church nor the Order. We hold that brothers can carry out every sort of labour or professional activity which agrees with the Christian and Franciscan way of life*” (27-28).

### Franciscans in the Local Church

5.4.

We live our Franciscan vocation in the local church where we reside. There we have the task of living our Christian and Franciscan values as the circumstances suggest. If we heed the wishes, the desires, the needs of the Christian community which we serve, we will practice genuine gospel values. They already lie hidden and half-formed in the secularized world. In this fashion we can respond to the sense of emptiness or the search for meaning, to “*the powerful and equally desperate call for*



We live our Franciscan vocation in the local Church where we reside.

*the Good News*” (EN 55) addressed to us by our contemporaries.

If we take the “*new humanism*” seriously, we will tend to strengthen our responsibility for our brothers and sisters in all areas of life, whatever the circumstances. We will accompany them on their way toward an “*integral humanism*”

which consists in communion with all and everyone before God. The Church is both its sign and servant (LG 1; AG 1).



## Church and Franciscan Sources:

Scripture	Mt 5:1-16; 23:23; 25:31-46; Jn 4:21; Heb 4:15
Church Documents	Etsi longissimo; Mirari vos; Non expedit; Sancta Dei civitas; Singulari nos; Syllabus Errors; Vehementer nos; AG 1; EN 21, 55, 62, 69; GS 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, 34, 38, 55, 59; LG 1; MM 255f; Puebla 57, 58; RM 37c, 42f.
Franciscan Sources	RegNB 3:11; 7:3; RegB 5; SC 63
OFM	OFM: General Chapter Madrid 1973, 27f.
OFMCap	OFMCap: Mattli 1978, 41
OFMConv	
Inter-Franciscan Documents	
Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Secular Franciscans	
Supplements	

Note: Course participants may add documents of their own communities to the list of sources.

## Exercises

D



### Exercise

Read and reflect on the following extract from Pope Gregory XVI's 1832 encyclical *Mirari Vos*:

*We come now to another grave cause of evils by which the Church is actually struck to our sorrow, that is indifference or the wrong assumption that one could gain the eternal salvation of the soul with any creed, as long as one's conduct is oriented to the norm of the right and the morally good. Out of this most abominable source of indifference flows the absurd and wrong opinion, or even mania, that everybody should be given and assured the liberty of conscience.*

### Questions

1. What effect does this text have on you?
2. What are your thoughts on the relation of conscience:
  - to pope and Church?
  - to state and law?
  - to community and individual?





## Exercise

Read the following excerpt from Pope John Paul II's 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*:

*Nr. 42. The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity towards the poor, the weak and those who suffer. The complete generosity underlying this attitude and these actions stands in marked contrast to human selfishness. It raises precise questions which lead to God and to the Gospel. A commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also a witness to the Gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed towards integral human development.*

*Nr. 43. Christians and Christian communities are very much a part of the life of their respective nations and can be a sign of the Gospel in their fidelity to their native land, people and national culture, while always preserving the freedom brought by Christ. Christianity is open to universal brotherhood, for all men and women are sons and daughters of the same Father and brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*The Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poorest of the poor and by imitating Christ's own simplicity of life. The Church and her missionaries must also bear the witness of humility, above all with regard to themselves – a humility which allows them to make a personal and communal examination of conscience in order to correct in their behaviour whatever is contrary to the Gospel and disfigures the face of Christ.*

### Questions

1. What elements for this sort of evangelization do you see in your community or surroundings?
2. What problems would it face from the Church, society, the Order?



## Exercise

Father Teilhard de Chardin, in his poetic way, often mulled over questions which had to do with the new humanism in a secularized world. This was so even though he did not use these terms. There follow two long passages from his writings.

**a) From 'The Mass over the World', written in 1923 in Ordos, China:**

*The wonderful union between the charm of creatures and their inadequacy, between their gentleness and*

*their malice, between their disappointing weakness and their terrifying power, all bound to Thy power of attraction, enchant my heart and then fill it again with aversion. Teach my heart the true purity, not that anaemic separation from things, but a pure elevation, soaring and surpassing all created beauties of this world. Reveal to my heart the true love, not made of a sterile fear of causing pain, but the determined will to break open the doors of life, together with all the others. Finally, give my heart, give it above all,*



through an ever-growing contemplation of Thy Omnipresence, the blissful passion of discovering more and more of this world, to create and suffer so that it may enable me to penetrate ever more deeply into Thee.

O my God, all my joy and my success, the whole sense of my existence and all my 'joie de vivre' depend on this fundamental contemplation of Thy union with the Universe. Let others, consonant with their more lofty vocation, preach the glories of Thy pure Essence! But as for me, I am subject to my calling that is deeply rooted in the fibres of my nature: I want nothing else but to express the myriad extensions of Thy Incarnate Being as they penetrate Matter. Never will I do anything else but proclaim the mystery of Thy Flesh, O Soul, that shines through in everything that surrounds us.

I dedicate myself to Thy Body in its total extent – that is, the world which has become through Thy power and through my faith the marvellous and living crucible in which all disappears in order to be reborn again. I dedicate myself through all the forces that Thy creative attraction has caused to break out in me, – through my all too weak scientific knowledge, – through my religious consecration, – through my priesthood, – and, which means the most to me – through the very roots of my human convictions – I dedicate myself in order to live for Him and for Him to die, Jesus!

**b) From 'The Divine Milieu', written in 1926/1927 in Tientsin, China:**

We forget it time and again: the supernatural is a leaven, a soul, not a complete organism. It wants to transform nature, but it could not do without matter, which nature offers it.

If the Jews could survive intact for three thousand years waiting expectantly for the Messiah, that was only possible because He appeared to them clad in the aureole of the glory of their people. Their whole life long the disciples of St. Paul yearned desperately for the Great Day, because they expected from the Son of Man the personal and tangible solution of their problems and of the injustices of life. The expectation of Heaven can only exist when it has become flesh. What form can we give our expectations today?

The form of an immeasurably and totally human hope! Let us contemplate the Earth around us: What is happening under our very eyes in the great mass of the peoples? Where does this disorder in society originate, this restless ferment, these swelling waves, these currents that circle and meet, these confused, frightening and strange urges? Humanity is obviously undergoing a crisis in its development. Dimly it is becoming aware of what is lacking and of what it can achieve. Before its eyes, the universe is beginning to glow like the horizon whence the sun will rise. Mankind has a premonition of something to come, and it is waiting.

Christians, who, like everyone else, are exposed to this magnetic attraction, hesitate a while and are alarmed, as we say, and restless. Is there fear of an idol whose worship is being forced upon them?

Our research on the 'Divine Milieu,' which we have just concluded, permits us to give an answer to this foreboding:

No, we disciples of Christ must not hesitate to seize this force that needs us and is needed by us! On the contrary, if we do not want to run the risk of wasting this strength and of being destroyed, we must participate in the truly religious efforts by which modern men experience so powerfully the immensity of the universe, the greatness of the spirit and the sanctifying value of every newly discovered truth. In this school, our present Christian generation will learn again the joy of waiting expectantly.

Over a long period of time we have allowed ourselves to be penetrated by these thoughts: the progress of the universe and especially of our human universe is neither a rivalry with God nor a senseless waste of forces that we owe Him. The greater Humans become, the more united humanity, the more conscious of its strength, all the more beautiful will Creation be, all the more perfect our adoration, and Christ will find a body all the more worthy of Resurrection.

It is as impossible for the world to have two climaxes, as it is to find two centres to a perfect circle! The Star that the world is awaiting, - whose name it cannot yet discern, – whose true transcendence it cannot measure, whose divine and spiritual rays it cannot even yet recognize, this Star is Christ Him-



self, on Whom our hope lies. In order to summon the 'parousia', we only need the heart of the world to beat within us and Christianize it!

Why, then, do you fear, O men of little faith, the progress of Earth? Why do you grudge it? Why do you multiply apace prohibitions and prophecies: "Do not go... do not try! Everything worth knowing is known! The Earth is void and empty! There is nothing more to be discovered!"

Try everything for Christ! Hope everything for Christ's sake! See, exactly the opposite is the Christian attitude: to sanctify does not mean destruction but super-creation! We cannot yet know all that the Incarnation of Christ is expecting from the powers of the earth. We can never hope enough from the growing unity of humankind.

Lift up thy head, O Jerusalem! Consider the great number of those that are constructing and those that are seeking, in their laboratories, in studies, in the deserts, in factories, in the huge social crucible... Do you see them, all these people engaged in efforts? And lo! all that ferments and ripens in art, science and philosophy through strenuous searching, all of it is for you!

Come! Open your arms and your heart! Receive the tides and the flood of human sap, as Jesus, your Lord,

once did! Suck it up, this juice, for without being baptized by it, you will wither away aimlessly and pointlessly, like a flower without water. And rescue it, since it would be lost and bring forth sterile offshoots without your sun.

Where have they gone, this temptation of too great a world, this seduction of too beautiful a world? – They are no more!

Now the Earth may seize and take me up in its gigantic arms. Now it may fill my body with its life or welcome me back into its dust. Before my very eyes it can adorn itself with magic, with terror or with mystery! It can intoxicate me with the perfume of its tangibility and unity! It can force me to my knees in expectation of what is there ripening in its womb. For its enchantments can harm me no longer, since the Earth has become, beyond its own limits, the Body of Him Who is and Who will come: the 'Divine Milieu!'

### Questions

Teilhard de Chardin wrote these texts forty years before the Second Vatican Council.

1. To what degree has his vision been realized?
2. How can his vision still give hope today?

## Applications

E



### Application

In 1953, Dag Hammarskjöld, at the time General Secretary of the United Nations, had a meditation room installed in the United Nations building in New York. On one wall hung a large abstract painting, done by Bo Beskow of Sweden, and a six-ton polished block of Swedish iron ore stood in the centre. The room,

in Hammarskjöld's words, was dedicated to peace and to those who had given their life for peace. He described the meditative purpose of the room in these words:

*We all possess within ourselves a centre of quiet surrounded by silence. This building, which is dedicated to the work and the negotiations in the service of*



peace, should have a room that is consecrated to complete silence and inner stillness. The intention was to create a place, by means of this small room, whose doors should stand wide open to the unlimited and vast realm of thought and of prayer. People of many different faiths will meet here. Therefore, none of the religious symbols with which we are normally familiar will be met here.

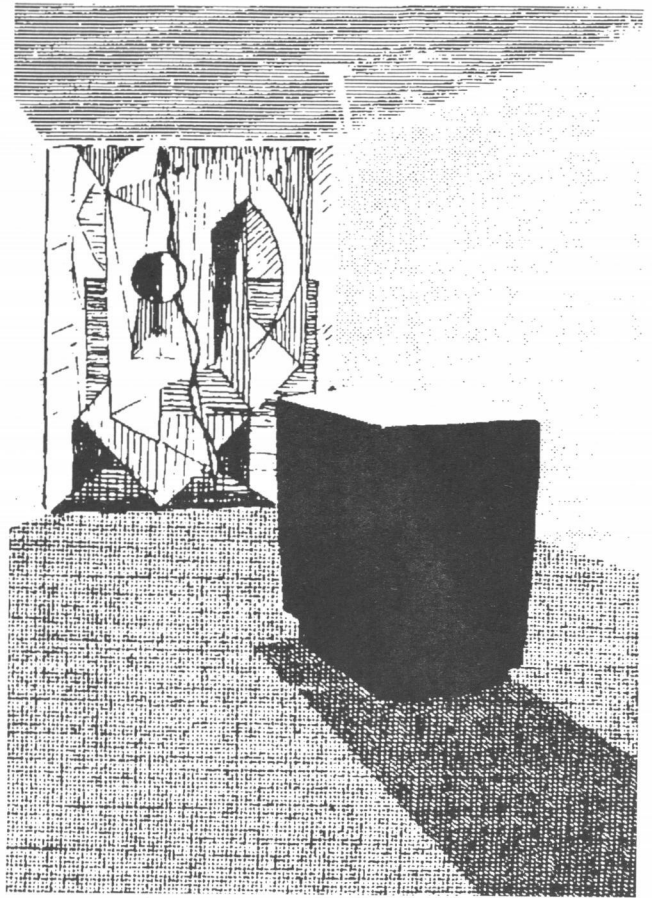
However, there are simple things that speak to all of us in the same language. We have looked for such things and believe that we have found them in the beam of light that strikes the shining surface of the heavy block in the middle of the room. Thus, we see in it a symbol of the light of heaven that gives life to the earth on which we stand. This may be for many of us a symbol for the light of the Spirit giving life to matter.

The block in the middle of the room has even more to say to us. We can see it as an altar, empty, not because there is no God, or as if it were an altar dedicated to an unknown God, but because it is dedicated to the God Who is worshipped by humankind under many names and under a multitude of guises.

The heavy block of iron-ore should also remind us of the solid and permanent aspects in a world of movement and change. Iron seemingly possesses the weight and permanence of eternity. It wants to serve as a reminder that patience and loyalty must be the foundations of any human effort.

The material composition of the block leads our thoughts to the necessity of choosing between destruction and construction, between war and peace. Humankind has forged swords from iron and has also made ploughshares of it; iron has been used to build tanks and houses. The block of iron-ore is a part of the wealth that we have inherited with our planet. But how do we use it?

The ray of light falls upon the block in a room of the utmost simplicity. There are no other symbols, nothing to distract our attention or to break the stillness within ourselves. When our eyes wander to the wall, they meet a simple pattern that conveys a feeling of harmony, freedom and balance to the room.



Meditation room in the building of the United Nations, New York.

An old adage says that the reason for a vessel does not lie in its outer shell but in the space within it. The same can be said about this room. It is destined for people who come here in order to fill the room with what they encounter in the centre of their own stillness. (Source unavailable)

### Questions

Let the idea of a room for meditation work on your mind.

1. Does the room suggest a humanism which is open to God?
2. Can you accept the non-religious room and its painting as symbols of religious realities?
3. Would you see in the room a symbol of tolerance for all countries represented in the United Nations?







## Application

Former Christian symbols often live on in secular form.

- ▶▶▶ Church space gives way to the soccer stadium, processions to demonstrations.
- ▶▶▶ Statues of saints to banners, hymns to slogans.
- ▶▶▶ Rosaries to demonstration chants.

- ▶▶▶ Religious symbols mutate into political ones, as with doves, ploughs, and so on.

### Assignment

Add further examples of pseudo-religious expressions to those already given.



## Application

Values are usually passed on by proof of their genuineness. Their number will diminish, for no longer do all of them meet with general agreement. Christian values can no longer be imposed by law and penal sanction in a secular state.

### Question

What consequences does this have for the political responsibility of Christians?

## Thoughts for Reflection

*I was asked: Some people withdraw from society and delight in total solitude. There they find peace, as they do in Church: Is this best?*

*I answered: No! And I tell you why. One who stands in the truth, I say, is true wherever he is and with whomever he is. But one who stands in untruth is*

*not right wherever and with whomever he is. Who stands in the truth has God in him. Who has God truly in him has Him in all places, in crowds and among people, just as if he were in church or in the desert or in his cell. If he has Him and Him alone, such a man no one can obstruct (Meister Eckhart, 1260-1327).*





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**GS: Gaudium et Spes:** The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

**LG: Lumen Gentium:** The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

**RM: Redemptoris Missio:** John Paul II, The Mission of the Redeemer.

**MM: Mater et Magistra:** John XXIII, Christianity and Social Progress.



# Picture Credits



## P icture Credits

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| <p><b>Cover</b> St Francis. Anonymous, about 1500, in the old refectory of the monastery at Poggio Bustone.</p> <p><b>P. 3</b> Risen Christ. Detail. Batik of Leopold Kimdrebeogo, Burkina Faso.</p> <p><b>P. 5</b> Photo: WV, in "Kontinente" 2/94.</p> <p><b>P. 7</b> Miniature of a Greek Gospel manuscript of 14th century, Paris, National Library.</p> <p><b>P. 8</b> Risen Christ. Batik from Burkina Faso by Leopold Kimdrebeogo.</p> | <p><b>P. 10</b> Woodcut by W. Habdank</p> <p><b>P. 11</b> Photo: R. Gross, in "Zivildienst" bulletin 3/97.</p> <p><b>P. 13</b> R. Descartes. From: "Alle Welt" magazine, 9/10/96.</p> <p><b>P. 15</b> Franciscan Friar Minor, Angola.</p> <p><b>P. 17</b> Hospice movement. Photo: E. Herb, KNA Bild.</p> <p><b>P. 19</b> Franciscan Sister of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Namibia.</p> |
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