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Calling upon the Angels of a Place: The Renewed Appreciation of Place in the Missiology of Pierre Charles, S.J. (1883–1954)

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Calling upon the Angels of a Place: The Renewed Appreciation of Place in the Missiology of Pierre Charles, S.J. (1883–1954)

ANDREW BARRETTE

In a letter, Pierre Favre entreates members of the Society of Jesus to call upon the angels of the places they enter in order to gain favor in their work there.¹ This spirit echoes through the lifework of the Belgian Jesuit Pierre Charles (1883–1954). Indeed, for Charles, “planting” the visible church, as he puts it, means cooperating with the invisible mission of the Spirit that is at work in creation. He thus suggests that the missionary approach each place as communicating something of the divine mission, as “all this dust that has become both the dwelling and the heritage of God.”² In the following, I show some aspects of this appreciation of place in his missiology, especially as he navigates the Scylla of cultural relativism, on the one side, and the Charybdis of cultural absolutism, on the other. He does so by beginning to the fore how the human spirit operates in and between cultures and religions. To get to this point, let me first say something more about Charles and his work.

Historical Situation and Biographical Outline

Charles was born in Schaerbeek, Belgium, on July 3, 1883. He entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus on September 23, 1899, at Tronchiennes—or, in Dutch, Drongen—near Ghent, in the Old Abbey there, which the Society had relatively recently acquired. From 1905, he studied philosophy in the Jesuit colleges of Louvain, where he met Pierre Scheuer, who was still teaching philosophy, and Joseph Maréchal, who was not yet teaching philosophy but rather biology.³ He also spent time at the scholasticate in Valkenburg in Limburg, studying under Léonce de Grandmaison and Albert Condamin. Between 1907 and 1911, he also studied at Hastings, in England, during which he met Teilhard de Chardin and Pierre Rousselot, as well as other prominent Jesuit intellectuals, like Auguste Valensin.⁴ Following his ordination in 1910, he went to Paris,

1. Pierre Favre, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre: The Memoriale and Selected Letters and Instructions*, trans. Edmond C. Murphy and Martin E. Palmer (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

2. See Pierre Charles, “Essai de folklore théologique,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 68, no. 7 (1946): 745–65, here 762. For a similar sentiment, see also Charles, “Tactique missionnaire ou théologie de l’apostolat?,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 67, no. 4 (1940): 385–96, here 393. See also Pierre Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 69, no. 3 (1947): 225–44, here 242: “The Catholic Spirit has a very clear principle, which immediately provides it with a very firm rule of conduct: believing that all reality, spirit and matter, is the work of God the Creator, the Catholic spirit respects all reality. It excludes only one element, that of which God is not the author: sin, which is always destruction.”

3. Not long after this period, Scheuer would be removed from teaching and Maréchal would be instated as professor of philosophy. Charles remained close to Scheuer, as evidenced by many letters in the archives.

4. The place of Charles in the story of these more well-known Jesuits has not yet been adequately appreciated. I am planning another piece that explores this.

studying at l'Institut Catholique and at the Collège de France, attending the classes of Henri Bergson, Victor Delbos, and corresponding with leading lights of French Catholic thought, like Maurice Blondel and Jacques Maritain. It was during this period that he began writing a series of articles on Immanuel Kant, which culminated in his later declaration that "Kantianism is dead," perishing from "its own stiffness."⁵ Influenced by this intellectual climate, he instead spoke of a "philosophy of life and action" that emerges from lived experience.⁶ Indeed, his early philosophical essays and letters betray a concern not only to describe correctly but to live rightly. This is something that carries over into his other work.

The work of Charles spanned the globe and institutes, both inside and outside the academy. In 1914, amid the outbreak of the Great War, Charles was appointed as chair of dogmatic theology at the Jesuit College of Louvain. He kept this appointment from 1914 to 1954, despite also holding positions in many other places. For example, from 1927, he was lecturer at the University of Louvain's Orientalist Institute and Faculty of Theology; between 1932 and 1938, he taught courses at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome; in 1939, he visited and lectured at Fordham University, keeping in contact with professors and administrators there until his death; and in 1940–41, he lectured at the University of Rio de Janeiro.⁷ He also collaborated in the founding of the Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer (then Institut Royal Colonial Belge), serving as a member of its "Section des Sciences morales et politiques." He also helped to establish the collection of works "Museum Lessianum," publishing the first works in the collection's "Ascetic and Mystical" section, a multi-volume work on prayer. They were such a success that they also quickly appeared in Hungarian, Italian, German, Polish, Dutch, Catalan, Portuguese, and Spanish, and they are his only writings to be translated into English, at least to date.⁸ Between all this, he served on various committees dealing with social policy in various countries throughout Europe as well as throughout Africa and Asia. As a result of this work, he became known around the world as a teacher, scholar, administrator, and priest.

Amid all the theoretical and administrative work, Charles began developing his theory of mission and missions. From the early 1920s, he worked with fellow Jesuit Albert Lallemand on the "Missiology Weeks." This then led to the 1925 establishment of the Catholic University Association for Assistance to the Missions (AUCAM), followed by that of the "Vlaams Missie Verbond" (Flemish Mission Association). At this time, he wrote the brochure *Le séminaire de Lemfu*, which would form the foundation of the first

5. Pierre Charles, "La métaphysique du Kantisme," *Revue de Philosophie* 22 (1913): 113–36, 253–77, 363–88; (1914): 337–60, 576–600; Charles, "Kant et le Kantisme," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Letouzey and Ané, 1914), 8:293–331; Charles, "L'agnosticisme kantien," *Revue néo-Scholastique de philosophie* 22, no. 87 (August 1920): 257–86; Charles, "Le Kantisme est mort," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 54, no. 10 (1927): 721–41, from which the cited phrase is taken.

6. Charles, "Le Kantisme est mort," 741.

7. For a more exhaustive list, see J. van de Casteele, *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer*, tome 7, A (Brussels: Falk, 1973), 128–41.

8. Pierre Charles, *La Prière de toutes les heures* (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1922) and later the *La prière de toutes les choses* (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1947). It is also likely that he lost at least some of his personal writing in the fire at Egenhoven in 1940. This would explain the relative dearth of earlier materials in his archives.

volume of the *Xaveriana*, which gathered reports and reflections on missionary work. It was also during this period that he began writing essays on what he considered to be the foundational and guiding principles of missions—his “missiology.” He brought these together into two main works that both appeared in 1939 with AUCAM: *Dossiers de l'action missionnaire* (The files of missionary action) and *Missiologie* (Missiology). As An Vandenberghe has shown, these works emerged in a context somewhat distinct from German missiology, especially in Protestant theology.⁹ I say “somewhat” because I do not wish to suggest that Charles was unaware of this movement: in fact, he put his work explicitly in relation to these developments.¹⁰ It is true, nevertheless, that these movements had their own trajectories. Charles, for his part, took up and developed a Scholastic way of thinking.

According to Jean Luc Enyegue, the response to the missiological writings of Charles was mixed.¹¹ Enyegue even suggests that “the disappointment among other theologians in Louvain was immediate, partly due to the fact that Catholic intellectual circles still considered missions to be an ‘apostolate of the savages’ and a matter of secondary importance, reserved to field missionaries.”¹² However, if this were true of some theologians in Louvain, it does not capture the sentiments of at least some of his colleagues at the Jesuit college. The work of Scheuer, Maréchal, as well as their students, for example, shows a great appreciation for other traditions and the importance of missions, if not directly for the work of Charles.¹³ In any case, Enyegue’s suggestion makes some sense of the fact that Charles spent considerable effort showing the historical and doctrinal roots of missions. Some fruits of this effort appear in a series of articles, noted by Joseph Masson, like the one on the apostolic letter of Benedict XV (r.1914–22), *Maximum illud*, in which he stressed the missions as a “permanent task” of the Catholic Church, as well as in the later encyclical *Rerum ecclesiae*, in which he stressed the “building up of native clergy.”¹⁴ In these pieces, Charles’s concern for re-

9. See An Vandenberghe, “Beyond Pierre Charles: The Emergence of Belgian Missiology Refined,” in *Mission & Science: Missiology Revised/Missiologie revisitée*, ed. Carine Dujardin and Claude Prudhomme (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 151–69.

10. Consider, for example, his “Les aspirations indigènes et les missions protestantes,” in *III. Semaine de missiologie de Louvain: Les aspirations et les missions* (Brussels: Desclée, 1925), 17–28; and his “Les méthodes protestantes de pénétration de l’Islam et les missions catholiques,” *Conférences à l’Institut Catholique de Paris (1926–27)* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1927), 266–92, as well as “Théologie de la convention: Théorie catholique et théorie protestante,” *VII. Semaine de missiologie de Louvain: Les conversions* (Brussels: Desclée, 1930), 28–38.

11. Jean Luc Enyegue, “Pierre Charles, S.J. (1883–1954): Pioneer of Catholic Missiology,” Boston University, <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/cd/charles-pierre-1883-1954> (accessed September 10, 2025). Enyegue summarizes the spirit of Charles’s missiology with the following: “It recognized the divine origin of all things, and its task was to ‘restore’ these realities to their divine origin (*ad Fontalem originem*), and to do so through the Church.” See also V. Y. [Valentin-Yves] Mudimbe, “Charles, Pierre,” in *Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2021), 111–13.

12. Enyegue, “Pierre Charles, S.J. (1883–1954).”

13. Maréchal, at the time, was finishing work on Hindu mysticism, with the support of Scheuer. And their student, Richard de Smet, S.J., would do much work in India, to cite just one example.

14. See Joseph Masson, “Im memoriam: Le P. Pierre Charles, S.J., missiologue,” in *Les dossiers de l'action missionnaire* (Louvain: AUCAM, 1938), 1:7–11, and “The Legacy of Pierre Charles, S.J.,” *Occasional Bulletin* (October 1978): 118–20. In this respect, consider the following essays by Charles: “L’encyclique sur les missions,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 53, no. 5 (1926): 321–29, and “Tactique missionnaire ou théologie de l’apostolat?”

lations with people and places is made clear: if the church is to visibly appear in these places, it is to do so at once in a way that people would recognize as their own and in a way that is in accordance with the church. In order to achieve this, there is a need for a method of fostering effective communication.

A main struggle for Charles was in determining how to take up what was true in modern anthropology without succumbing to a reductive anthropologism ringing in the ears of modern science. To understand this further, let me rehearse, following Charles, some of the salient points of this issue.

New Sociological Methods and Pressing Questions of Unity and Uniformity

For Charles, a tendency toward *unity* in human history does not mean a tendency to *uniformity*. To clarify what is meant by this, let me highlight his understanding—Scholastic, ultimately—of how human desire evidences the imperfection or incompleteness of human being.¹⁵ We desire to have what we do not yet have; we desire to know what we do not yet know; we desire to be what we are not yet. Indeed, if what is desired is truly good, the human being becomes more complete by coming into unity with it. The intellect, for example—what Charles calls the “faculty of wonder”—is manifest in what we might identify as the intelligent desire to know.¹⁶ When someone comes to know, they are unified with the known, that is, with that good of the intellect—true being. This actualization of knowledge not only unifies the individual human being but unifies human being as such in a unity of form, in the sense that the intellectual form of human being is realized. Of course, there are differences in the manifestation of the intelligent desire to know, as the material upon which human intelligence actuates differs. Indeed, the unity of human being does not mean that being human is reducible to uniformity. The operation of intelligence instead “cultivates” the material of places and makes it meaningful to living.¹⁷

So, uniformity of culture does not follow from the unity of intellect. The material differentiation of human experience instead gives a rich tapestry to the world in which intelligence operates. Somewhat like how an appetite for food does not give rise to only one sort of cuisine but rather emerges alongside what is available to eat, which is, in turn, refined into ever more sophisticated cuisines that may be shared with others who have an appetite, so too does culture arise, vary, come to be shared. Again, this variance is not willy-nilly but in accord with the human intelligence as it operates in its milieu. Upon encounter with variances and differences, the uniform can be called forth in order to unify: one can, for example, invite the other to a meal or ask questions to un-

15. As he says, in apparent accord with the Platonic understanding of desire as a lack: “Desire can only exist in that which is not one”; see Pierre Charles, “Le Plotinisme,” *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie* 97 (1923): 70–85, here 81.

16. For this point, along with the essays cited in the previous footnote, see Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” 242–43; also, Pierre Charles, “Missiologie et acculturation,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 75, no. 1 (1953): 15–32, esp. 23.

17. See Pierre Charles “La mentalité des primitifs,” *Revue des questions scientifiques*, ser. 4, 3 (1923): 146–65; for the naming of this faculty, see 156. There is a follow-up essay, also on Lévy-Bruhl, in which this is operative, namely Pierre Charles, “La philosophie du primitif,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 57, no. 2 (1930): 110–26.

derstand the other. In fact, Charles finds, this tendency to unity appears spontaneously in human living. Thus, he notes: “The march of human evolution does not lead to a generally progressive differentiation, but to increasing unification.”¹⁸ The spontaneous appearance of wonder, of wonder about others evidences a tendency toward this unification. Making this tendency reflectively explicit is central to his missiology. Doing so neither imposes nor coerces the other to another cultural expression for the sake of *uniformity* but to promote unification itself, then. Indeed, for Charles, it is with this exercise of intelligence that we may become neighbors and, ultimately, friends with each other.¹⁹

In this respect, it is also important to understand that Charles takes human being as living in a cosmological context. In other words, he understands all human development as occurring in a world order—a *cosmos* that has a *logic*. By this is meant not a science of premises and conclusions but an order and, indeed, a *created order*. In this respect, the shared foundation of human intelligent desire—of an *eros* that seeks unity—is really founded upon and operates within an already given love, *agapē*. With this in mind, Charles treats his work within a “cosmopolitan” context—a *cosmos* as a *place wherein order prevails despite decline and disorder*.²⁰

Charles elaborates upon the history of the theoretical formulation of this cosmopolitanism in his *Dossiers*. For example, he treats how the Greco-Roman sense of place came to be transformed in the Judeo-Christian context. From practical living came the formulation of the concept of the *genius loci*, which gave expression to how a specific spirit was associated with a specific place. From this initial generalization, the later Romans not only recognized that this or that place was special but also that they were setting it into a greater context, namely the *empire*.²¹ Of course, as Charles stresses, this context was a *divided* order of *power*—of masters and slaves, of Roman citizens and *the alien*. Thus, places—*loci*—themselves appear as *expressions of imperial power*, in one way or another, whether as places that lack it or hold it, transfer it, grow it, and so on. The early Christians, living in this context while also having the resources of the Jewish context, expound how *Logos* relates to the *logic*, so to speak, of worldly power.²² This tradition thus recognizes the specific and general *genius loci*, without reducing it to human power structures and struggles. Instead, there is the *divine Logos* present in each place, with which humans may either cooperate or not. In that way, the ground for such cooperation is fecund from the start. It is the human task to cooperate with the order of the universe by way of unifying with others and with God. Therewith, Charles identifies, within the Christian context, the way in which the invisible mission of the Spirit aids human being in the ordering of the universe. In other words, there comes a complete transformation of the entire universe as a place for grace. So, once again, a cooperation with divine power means serving this ordained end of creation—to sin, on the other hand, means to fail it.

18. Charles, “La philosophie du primitif,” 115, translation my own.

19. An angel, too, is a compassionate friend, as he says in “Essai de folklore théologique,” 756.

20. See Charles, *Dossiers*, “Le mission et le cosmos,” starting at page 41.

21. See Charles, *Dossiers*, 45–8.

22. Charles, *Dossiers*, 45–8.

In human living, there appears a very real inclination to dominating power over reality. This tends to fragment reality rather than bringing it to unity. For human beings do not always exercise their intelligence: there is also the failure to be intelligent, the failure to be reasonable, as it were. To speak to that point, let me emphasize that, for Charles, acts of intelligence unify human being as well as provide the material for further unification. For when one human being intelligently makes the world, even on the other side of the globe, it adds to the common fund of human beings; and when another intelligence understands these intelligent activities, there is a further unification between intelligences. Coming to know each other brings us closer together, in other words. On the other hand, failing to know each other as intelligence drives us farther apart. Charles discovers a manifestation of this inclination even in science. In this regard, the main figure in Charles's sights was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, an influential and pioneering anthropologist at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A main presupposition of Lévy-Bruhl, as Charles puts it, is that the life of the so-called "primitive" is "pre-logical."²³ At present, all that is necessary to make clear is that fundamental to his position, as Charles notes: "Primitive mentality is not a rudimentary form of our own, and it is not by developing that it eventually joins us."²⁴ It is of another type, though, as Charles notes, in the conditions in which it is exercised, it is normal as well as intelligible. While Lévy-Bruhl claims the "primitive" is "pre-logical" and incapable of grasping rational causality (as this too is a law of logic), he also finds that they nevertheless have a sense of the "normal."²⁵ The constitution of the "normal" living of the primitive is not according to logic. In other words, he gives a sort of *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*—a "philosophy of worldviews." The "primitive" is simply a different type of human, to be classified as otherwise than the "logical" human. What this means, as Charles notes, is that the position Lévy-Bruhl sketches out simply gives a sort of justification for bringing logic to a "pre-logical" land, that is to say, an anthropological basis for the assertion of power structures. For it is not merely a *difference* of types, after all, but a positing of a *lack*—"pre-" versus a full-blown "logic." And to bring logic to pre-logical places and peoples, all manners of "science" are applied, not least of which are erroneous understandings of evolution, of notions of "selection," and "survival of the fittest."

Such an approach, Charles finds, undergirds false claims regarding the superiority and inferiority of cultures. Indeed, as Charles notes, the method is laden with a crucial methodological presupposition that bestows an "arbitrary homogeneity" on the data.²⁶ This arbitrary element comes from an uncritical presupposition of the theorist, namely that *this* mass of material shall be treated differently than *those*. The way that the presupposition falls is, naturally, left to the whims of the "theorist." Thus, the method is uncritically, taking its principle of organization, as Charles puts it elsewhere, "to suppress anything that does not conform to my own style."²⁷ So, to return to the supposed

23. See Charles, "La mentalité des primitifs," 145–46.

24. Charles, "La mentalité des primitifs," 147–48.

25. Charles, "La mentalité des primitifs," 147.

26. Charles, "La mentalité des primitifs," 154.

27. Charles, "L'esprit catholique," 227.

evolutionary example, it is not much of a leap to suppose that the lack of the ability to defend oneself implies a deficiency of culture, even a deficiency of a type that constituted the culture.²⁸ After all, why would the people not fight for their survival, if not on account of some deficiency?

An alternative method, as Charles suggests, is a continual critique of presuppositions in the gathering and interpretation of that data. The one seeking to understand must be, as he puts it, “broader-minded [*l’esprit plus large*] than his own necessarily narrow system of living [...] never imposing, as a sovereign law, his personal tastes, conventions, preferences, aesthetic opinions, prejudices of race, caste or education, on the immense and bewildering human variety that is the church’s heritage—present or future.”²⁹ For such broad-mindedness, a cultivation of intelligence and will is required such that it encounters the exercise of intelligence and will in others. Again, a desire for unity cannot collapse into a desire for uniformity: one must “get behind,” as it were, the manifestation of human desire in order to find the foundations of it in intellect and will. In so doing, one can understand, again as Charles puts it, the way “a group’s culture gives meaning to its efforts to live.”³⁰ With this method, Charles puts into question the very concept of “primitive,” as it tends to emerge from an approach that sets one way inferior to a superior, which, by the way, is almost always the theorist’s own.³¹

So, where Lévy-Bruhl denies knowledge of causality to the “pre-logical” human being, Charles finds it in the way places become meaningful and valuable to people. This occurs, he finds, in the operation and expression of intelligence and love. In the measure that occurs, a cultural unity appears as, he continues, “that part of the environment in which a human group lives and which it has made itself.”³² Indeed, human beings tend to make sense of themselves in relation to their environment, as, say, the geographical features near them—the rivers, lakes, and so on—are constitutive of the meaning of place.³³ As Dirk van Overmeire puts it, relating the point to the work of Charles, geographies play an important role in the constitution of interpersonal relations.³⁴ That is to say, the very *place* of human dwelling becomes imbued with a *personal* meaning.

To elucidate the point, especially in relation to a cosmological and religious understanding, Charles gives examples of the appearance of places of worship. With respect to the encounter between cultures, he speaks about the circle as a gathering place in Oglala tradition. They organize in such a way, as Charles reports, “because everything natural is circular.” The place becomes significant in relation to the grander place in

28. For more on this common refrain of racist ideologies, see Pierre Charles, “Les antécédents de l’idéologie raciste,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 66, no. 2 (1939): 131–56.

29. Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” 226.

30. Charles, “Missiologie et acculturation,” 25.

31. Charles, “La mentalité des primitifs,” 148–50. He says: “What is a *primitive*? It is a bit baffling to find the names of the most diverse and least culturally homogeneous peoples jumbled together.”

32. Charles, “Missiologie et acculturation,” 17.

33. For many examples of this, see Charles, “Essai de folklore théologique.”

34. Dirk van Overmeire, “Intertwining Identities and Geographies: Pierre Charles SJ (1883–1954) and Margaret Thornton RSCJ (1898–1977),” *Trajecta* 21, no. 2 (2012): 170–91.

which everyone already is. He continues, speaking on the unifying function of the place, saying that the “consequence of this seemingly insignificant cultural trait is, as in our Round Table conferences, the perfect equality of rights of all participants and the old native custom of never interrupting a speaker even if he talks non-stop all night long.”³⁵ The place makes explicit what is naturally implicit by bringing people together. Now, one can imagine a facile critical dismissal of such a place: there are non-circular shapes occurring in nature, the relationships in the artificial circles are unfair, unbalanced, imperfect, as proved by the unyielding person, and so on. But this dismissal overlooks the intelligent spirit at work here. There is instead a need to understand how there is an intelligent gathering of people in a place in order to listen to each other *and* to the place itself. In this approach, there is no desire to conflate in *uniformity* with the interpreter, but to come into unity by way of understanding. Of course, in this process of unification, the conversations play a vital role. It is necessary to listen to what the Oglala themselves have to say about their practice, even as one tries to understand for oneself. For, again, no mere difference by itself is at stake, but rather the spiritual unification of human being, in increasing measure.

Indeed, it is a mistake, Charles suggests, to measure the significance of such a place according to the amount of materials present. He elucidates the point by calling to mind the example of the chapel of San Damiano, rebuilt by Saint Francis, imagining the following sentiments of a critical visitor to it:

“It is far too bare [...],” we murmur, full of wisdom that we believe to be profound and “reasonable” ideas that we spread all over the place. “This is not a church; it is a barn. It needs more ornaments: statues, paintings, chromos on the walls, artificial flowers, and trunks for alms or for Saint Anthony’s bread. And a few benches for the faithful. They shall come in greater numbers, if they can find something to sit on comfortably, or something to kneel on, some small, padded cushions. Then, the thing will be more decent; the look more pleasing; and devotion will increase.”³⁶

Charles replies that such a critique misses the spiritual significance of the simplicity of the chapel: “It recalls one of the aspects of redemption, and the Savior’s advent in the stable of Bethlehem.”³⁷ It recalls *places*, that is, sets of meanings and values in relation to each other. The materials and even the material lack moves one into the realm of the spiritual. To be sure, the great vaulted ceilings and wide columns communicate the grandeur of that sphere and point beyond themselves to a *grand place* beyond imagination. Yet, our critical visitor makes the mistake of draping the meaning of one place onto another, rather than understanding the significance of each place. They seek the material “profusion,” as Charles says, with “marble everywhere, twisted columns

35. Charles, “Missiologie et acculturation,” 125–26; the example repeats in other writings, for example Charles, “La philosophie du primitif,” 126.

36. Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” 236–37.

37. Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” 236–37.

[...] altars that climb to the vault, colossal statues with grand conquistador gestures. Everything ornate, gilded and polished.”³⁸ Just because a place does not *look like* one’s own, does not mean the Spirit is not present. To overcome this tendency to material profusion, it is necessary to remain open to the spirit that produced these places.

Of course, as Charles writes, “just any culture is not enough.”³⁹ Not all cultural expressions are good, just as not all cultures promote goodness. In other words, not all cultures are legitimate. For him, a lack of intelligence and love means a lack of legitimacy. A “culture” that promotes unreasonableness and hate is, in fact, no culture at all. Thus, for Charles, the Catholic spirit must learn to distinguish and to promote *legitimate* freedom of spirit and practice an “intolerance” of the negation of this freedom.⁴⁰ Of course, to realize this takes a great deal of work, theoretical and practical. But his lifework gives an example of trying to live out the principle set at the beginning of this essay, namely to “respect reality,” which includes places and people.⁴¹

As this essay began with a reference to Pierre Favre, who would regularly send missionaries through Louvain, so missionaries would be sent, some centuries later, from Louvain. Pierre Charles thus participates in a tradition as he formulates the meaning of missions in the fact of new scientific methods. To understand this formulation, it is necessary to understand how places come to be constituted through intelligence. Moreover, it is essential to encounter each place as already charged with meaning and value. This approach takes up and realizes the real human desire for unity. As Charles shows, there is great benefit from a serious retrieval and renewal of this desire in each place we visit.

38. Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” 236–37.

39. Charles, “Missiologie et acculturation,” 25.

40. Charles, “L’esprit catholique,” 226.

41. Charles, “Missiologie et acculturation,” 21: “All racism is cultural in origin. Children are unaware of it, until the day when, through inculturation, the adult group inculcates it in them.”