

## CULTURE AND INCULTURATION

### *Culture*

#### **Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, n. 53.**

The word "culture" in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.

Source: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

#### **John Paul II, *Address to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980, n. 6.**

---

*Man lives a really human life thanks to culture.* Human life is culture in this sense too that, through it, man is distinguished and differentiated from everything that exists elsewhere in the visible world: man cannot do without culture.

Culture is specific way of man's "existing and "being". Man always lives according to a culture which is specifically his, and which, in its turn, creates among men a tie which is also specifically theirs, determining the inter-human and social character of human existence. *In the unity* of culture as the specific way of human existence, there is rooted at the same time the *plurality of cultures* in the midst of which man lives. In this plurality, man develops without losing, however, the essential contact with the unity of culture as the fundamental and essential dimension of his existence and his being.

Source: <https://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>

#### **UNESCO Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies World Conference on Cultural Policies Mexico City, 26 July - 6 August 1982 p. 1.**

In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs; that it is culture that gives man the ability to reflect upon himself. It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with a critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through

culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations.

Source: [https://culturalrights.net/descargas/drets\\_culturals401.pdf](https://culturalrights.net/descargas/drets_culturals401.pdf),

### ***Inculturation***

#### **John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 22 November 2001, nn. 16-17.**

16. The process of inculturation is the gradual way in which the Gospel is incarnated in the various cultures. On the one hand, certain cultural values must be transformed and purified if they are to find a place in a genuinely Christian culture. On the other hand, in various cultures Christian values readily take root. Inculturation is born out of respect for both the Gospel and the culture in which it is proclaimed and welcomed. The process of inculturation began in Oceania as immigrant people brought the Christian faith from their homelands. For the indigenous peoples of Oceania, inculturation meant a new conversation between the world that they had known and the faith to which they had come. As a result, Oceania offers many examples of unique cultural expressions in the areas of theology, liturgy and the use of religious symbols.<sup>(40)</sup> The Synod Fathers saw further inculturation of the Christian faith as the way leading to the fullness of ecclesial *communio*.

Authentic inculturation of the Christian faith is grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>(41)</sup> "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" (*Jn* 3:16); in a particular time and place, the Son of God took flesh and was "born of a woman" (*Gal* 4:4). To prepare for this momentous event, God chose a people with a distinctive culture, and he guided its history on the path towards the Incarnation. All that God did in the midst of his chosen people revealed what he intended to do for all humanity, for all peoples and cultures. The Scriptures tell us this story of God acting among his people. Above all, they tell the story of Jesus Christ, in whom God himself entered the world and its many cultures. In all that he said and did, but especially in his Death and Resurrection, Jesus revealed the divine love for humanity. From deep within human history, the story of Jesus speaks to the people not only of his time and culture but of every time and culture. He is for ever the Word made flesh for all the world; he is the Gospel that was brought to Oceania; and he is the Gospel that now must be proclaimed anew.

The Word made flesh is foreign to no culture and must be preached to all cultures. "From the time the Gospel was first preached the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with culture".<sup>(42)</sup> Just as the Word made flesh entered history and dwelt among us, his Gospel enters deeply into the life and culture of those who hear, listen and believe. Inculturation, the "incarnation" of the Gospel in the various cultures, affects the very way in which the Gospel is preached, understood and lived.<sup>(43)</sup> The Church teaches the unchanging truth of God, addressed to the history and the culture of a particular people. Therefore, in each culture the Christian faith will be lived in a unique

way. The Synod Fathers were convinced that the Church, in her efforts to present Jesus Christ effectively to the peoples of Oceania, must respect each culture and never ask the people to renounce it. "The Church invites all people to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to their heart and minds".<sup>(44)</sup> "The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it".<sup>(45)</sup> It is vital that the Church insert herself fully into culture and from within bring about the process of purification and transformation.<sup>(46)</sup>

An authentic inculturation of the Gospel has a double aspect. On the one hand, a culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived. On the other hand, the Gospel challenges cultures and requires that some values and forms change.<sup>(47)</sup> Just as the Son of God became like us in all things except sin (cf. *Heb 4:15*), so the Christian faith welcomes and affirms all that is genuinely human, while rejecting whatever is sinful. The process of inculturation engages the Gospel and culture in "a dialogue which includes identifying what is and what is not of Christ".<sup>(48)</sup> Every culture needs to be purified and transformed by the values which are revealed in the Paschal Mystery.<sup>(49)</sup> In this way, the positive values and forms found in the cultures of Oceania will enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived.<sup>(50)</sup> The Gospel "is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel's truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways".<sup>(51)</sup> Transformed by the Spirit of Christ, these cultures attain the fullness of life to which their deepest values had always looked and for which their people had always hoped. Indeed, without Christ, no human culture can become what it truly is.

### The Current Situation

17. In recent times the Church has strongly encouraged the inculturation of the Christian faith. In this regard, Pope Paul VI insisted when he visited Oceania that "far from smothering what is good and original in every form of human culture, Catholicism accepts, respects and puts to use the genius of each people, endowing with variety and beauty the one, seamless garment of the Church of Christ".<sup>(52)</sup> These are words which I echoed when I met the Aboriginal people of Australia: "The Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human, and when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God".<sup>(53)</sup> The Synod Fathers asked that the Church in Oceania develop an understanding and presentation of the truth of Christ drawing on the traditions and cultures of the region. In missionary areas, all missionaries are urged to work in harmony with the indigenous Christians to ensure that the faith and life of the Church are expressed in legitimate forms appropriate to each culture.<sup>(54)</sup>

From the time the first immigrants and missionaries arrived, the Church in Oceania has inevitably been involved in a process of inculturation within the many cultures of the region, which often exist side by side. Attentive to the signs

of the times, the Synod Fathers "recognized that the many cultures each in different ways, provide insights which help the Church to understand better and express the Gospel of Jesus Christ".<sup>(55)</sup>

To guide this process, fidelity to Christ and to the authentic Tradition of the Church is required. Genuine inculturation of the Christian faith must always be done with the guidance of the universal Church. While remaining wholly faithful to the spirit of *communio*, local Churches should seek to express the faith and life of the Church in legitimate forms appropriate to indigenous cultures.<sup>(56)</sup> New expressions and forms should be tested and approved by the competent authorities. Once approved, these authentic forms of inculturation will better enable the peoples of Oceania to experience in their own way the abundant life offered by Jesus Christ.<sup>(57)</sup>

The Synod Fathers expressed the desire that future priests, deacons and catechists be thoroughly familiar with the culture of the people they are to serve. In order to become good Christian leaders they should be trained in ways that do not separate them from the circumstances of ordinary people. They are called to a service of inculturated evangelization, through sensitive pastoral work which allows the Christian community to welcome, live and pass on the faith in its own culture in harmony with the Gospel and the communion of the universal Church.<sup>(58)</sup>

As their guiding vision, the Synod Fathers evoked the ideal of the many cultures of Oceania forming a rich and distinctive civilization inspired by faith in Jesus Christ. With them, I pray fervently that all the peoples of Oceania will discover the love of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, so that they will experience and build together the civilization of love and peace for which the world of the Pacific has always longed.

(40) Cf. *Propositio* 1.

(41) Cf. *Propositio* 2.

(42) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 70: AAS 91 (1999), 58.

(43) Cf. *Propositio* 2.

(44) John Paul II, Address to Aboriginal People, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 978; see also Paul VI, Address to Aboriginal People, Sydney (2 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 69.

(45) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 71: AAS 91 (1999), 60.

(46) Cf. *Propositio* 2.

(47) Cf. *ibid.*

(48) *Propositio* 4.

(49) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 61: AAS 88 (1996), 38.

(50) Cf. *Propositio* 2.

(51) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 71: AAS 91 (1999), 60.

(52) Address to the Bishops of Oceania, Sydney (1 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 56.

(53) Address to Aboriginal Peoples, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 977.

(54) Cf. *Propositio* 2.

(55) *Ibid.*

(56) Cf. *ibid.*

(57) Cf. Special Assembly For Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 12.