

CULTURE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Faith, Unbelief, and Culture

What is culture?

SIGNIFICANT DOCUMENTS

- *Gaudium et Spes* (GS)
- *Evangelium Vitae* (EV)
- *Fides et Ratio* (FR)

OTHER DOCUMENTS

- Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis: Privileged Pathway for Evangelization and Dialogue*, 28 March 2006.
- Pontifical Council for Culture, *Where is Your God?: Responding to the Challenge of Unbelief and Religious Indifference Today*, 13 March 2004.
- Pontifical Council for Culture & Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the "New Age"*.
- Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 23 May 1999.

DEFINING CULTURE

- What is it?

"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 labour, 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." (GS 53)

- Culture and the individual
 - Culture and the family
 - Culture and the region
 - Culture and the society
 - Modern (westernized) culture
 - Progress brings problems and anxieties; permanent values are hard to discern (GS 4). Science seems to hold the answers (GS 5)
 - Local, village life is lost (GS 6)
 - There is a questioning values and religion (GS 7)
 - Conflicts between different groups are brought to the fore (GS 8)
 - A desire for a world community is emerging (GS 9)
 - Social divisions reflect interior divisions (GS 10)
 - Culture and the world
 - Humanity is achieved through culture (GS 53)
 - Local cultures have their own genius and modern culture has its own character as well (GS 54)
 - Globalization promotes the sharing of cultures (GS 55)
- How does it function?
 - Culture and human aspirations
 - Culture and the quest for God
 - Culture and the Trinity

Levels/Degrees/Types of Culture

- High culture
- Folk/indigenous culture

- Low/Pop culture

Historical Western Culture

- Classical culture
- Medieval culture
- Modern culture
- Postmodern culture

THEOLOGY OF CULTURE

- Culture and revelation
- Cultural pluralism (FR 70)
 - Christians are not strangers to cultural differences
 - The universality of the Gospel demands engagement with different cultures
 - Christ enables the many to become one
 - Faith shows what unites different cultures
 - Faith shows the truth that each culture holds
- Cultures and human experience (FR 71)
 - Cultures are the expression of a perspective on the truth of human life
 - Cultures survive by assimilating other perspectives
 - Each culture is open to divine revelation
 - "While it demands of all who hear it the adherence of faith, the proclamation of the Gospel in different cultures allows people to preserve their own cultural identity"
 - No one culture can judge the rest
 - "Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter [with the Gospel]; 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."
- Universal Christian claims (GS 24-28)
 - The unity of the human family is a Christian hope
 - Individual destiny is tied to social destiny
 - Each person must be treated with respect
 - Respect and love should be especially given to those who are other than us
 - When human activity produces good, this must come from God
 - Societies that promote truth and order are graced
 - Human progress is not sustainable unless it is focused on God
 - The earthly and heavenly city should penetrate each other and the heavenly should permeate the earthly ever more
 - The Church proclaims and safeguards the good of humanity
 - The Church promotes and ensures the sanctity of the world

INCULTURATION

The Church's response to culture

- The Church has the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (GS 4)
 - Christians are interested in cultures to the extent that they cultivate goodness. Material cultural artefacts manifest and promote the goodness of humanity (GS 57)
 - Faith develops in a unique way in each culture; at the same time, the Gospel purifies and renews each culture (GS 58)
 - Culture is a good, but it should be subordinated to the perfection of humans and the good of the community and society (GS 59)
 - Healthy aspects of cultures should be promoted, like the opportunity for education for all (GS 63)
 - Culture and Church teaching may be in tension, but harmony should be promoted (GS 62)

- All cultures have the potential of elevating the mind to God and thus of producing liturgical art (GS 62)
- Cultures and theology (FR 72)
 - Greek philosophy was the first context of theology, but this does not prohibit other contexts
 - Inculturation of theology is desirable and necessary
 - Discernment is necessary in the integration of theology into different cultures
 - The universality of the human spirit is the first criterion
 - The second is that theology cannot abandon what it has learned in a Greco-Roman context
 - “To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history.”
 - Cultures must not be seen to be enclosed islands of truth; it must be recognized that cultures are inherently capable of engaging the faith
- Criteria
 - Culture of Life and Culture of Death is present in the world. They are not coterminous with any given culture. They are tendencies within every culture. A critical assessment is necessary. (EV)

ASSESSING CULTURE

The good and the bad

- What expresses the characteristic of a people?
- What expresses religious concerns?
- What is good and what needs to be corrected?

Integrating faith and culture

- The historical problem with cultural evaluation
- Does Christianity have a culture?
- Is something Christian just because it is traditional?
- What should be the Church’s response to culture?

Critical Appreciation

- Deciding between what is an authentic cultural expression and what is not
- What culture can be a witness to the gospel? What aspects of culture?
- Are there criteria for utilizing a given cultural expression?
- Are some expressions legitimate and others not?
- Are some levels of culture more apt than others? Are some levels better than others?