

We no longer find that cultures are a hindrance but rather a medium to receive and cultivate something beyond ourselves.

Cultures are not to be exclusive and separated from one another; they are to be a fertile ground for faith, hope, and charity.

Transcendence allows us to participate in creating cultures and transforming them. We find ourselves loving all people and bringing them to the Reign of God.

Cultural harmony helps people explore new cultures, learn new languages, find new ways to express their faith, and make opportunities to reconcile all cultural conditions to a Culture of Life. Harmonious cultural movements are in sync with the Spirit's flow and with the Church's evangelization and re-evangelization.

### **Faith Movements in Cultural Development:**

- ◆ Faith inherited by culture
- ◆ Faith challenged by culture
- ◆ Faith infusing culture

### **Inculturation in Church Writings and Practices:**

In the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, John Paul II mentioned inculturation as: "The incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church."

In *Redemptoris Missio* this pastoral posture continued as: "The intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."

### **Faith Moves Across Cultures**

St. Peter has meal with the Gentiles (Acts 10)

St. Paul speaks with the Greeks in Athens (Acts 17)

St. Patrick in Ireland

Sts Cyril and Methodius for the Slavics

Jose de Anchieta for Brazil's indigenous people

Roberto de Nobili in India

Matteo Ricci in China

Alexandre de Rhodes in Vietnam

## ***FAITH-POWERED CULTURE***

*When the Cultural Medium  
Is Inspired by Christ*

*When the Gospel Becomes  
the Daily News*

*When Cultures Embrace the  
Culture of Life*

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## *And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

In any authentic Christian journey, faith and culture are active and operative. Their inter-relationship is sometimes obvious and sometimes subtle.

The cultural foundations of one's faith generally combine assumptions with outward expression. Regardless of its mode of expression, culture is important to the relationship between Christianity and society.

Christians, whose primary relationship is with God, know that this primary relationship affects and influences all others.

People live in a cultural context and are influenced by it; therefore, entering a faith-based relationship with a person or a people is to enter into their cultural milieu.

There are many ways for faith to enter a culture and for the faithful to enter a faith-based relationship with others. Understanding the various stages of

cultural development is critically important. The stages of cultural development may be ranked as follows: cultural identity, cultural transcendence, and cultural harmonization.

### **1. Cultural Identity**

Each of us inherits a cultural identity. We are born into a specific era and to a specific family. We become citizens of a country, share the language of our family and the religion they choose. Within this context we live and grow, and our identity is shaped.

We absorb our cultural heritage almost without a second thought and may grow up without another point of reference. When our family and society think and behave in specific ways, we tend to go in that direction.

We may assume, therefore, that many people of faith are culturally conditioned. By extension many Christians are cultural Christians and many Catholics are cultural Catholics. Living out one's faith in this mode may result in having a faith that goes untested. If a culture no longer supports our faith, faith may more easily fall away. Although culture and faith may work well together as cultural identity is being shaped, if they are separated it can be both disillusioning and awakening.

### **2. Cultural Transcendence**

In time we may reach the limit of our inherited culture and move beyond it. Though we know that we are shaped by culture, and may find our inherited culture beautiful, powerful, and refreshing, we also may find it to be biased, narrow, and out of step. We may reject it and ask: "Does another cultural point of reference exist besides this one?"

As we move out of our cultural heritage and no longer identify with it, we ask similar questions of our faith. The cultural context that we once used to support our faith begins to change. Karl Rahner observed that Christians in this stage either become non-believers or mystics. We come to a place where faith becomes counter cultural and transcendent, or we lose the old faith that once was carried by our culture.

### **3. Cultural Harmonization**

One can return to an inherited culture and yet appreciate other cultures, since each has its own beauty and ugliness, strengths and weaknesses, gifts and limits. We may find ourselves in the midst of cultures but be enlightened and renewed by faith.