



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE

Friday, 13 January 1989

Eminent Cardinals,

Dear Friends, 1. I am happy to offer a most cordial welcome, this morning, to all of you who have come from various parts of the world to participate in the meeting of the Pontifical Council for Culture. This is the seventh consecutive year that I have the pleasure of receiving this Council. In the Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, in clarifying the tasks and the organization of the Roman Curia, I was anxious to confirm that "the Council fosters relations between the Holy See and the world of culture, especially encouraging dialogue with the various cultures of our times, so that human civilization may become more and more open to the Gospel and so that those who practice the sciences, letters and the arts may feel that the Church recognizes them as persons devoted to the service of the true, the good and the beautiful" (Art. 166). Your annual session represents a high point in your common reflection and engagement for the concrete promotion of the meeting of the Church with all human cultures, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and of the Synods of Bishops. According to the mandate which I have entrusted to you, every year you conduct a general survey of the principal cultural trends which affect the milieus, the regions and the disciplines which you represent. In this way you pass on to the Pope and to the Holy See the tendencies and aspirations, the anxieties and hopes, the cultural needs of the human family, and you ask yourselves what the best way is for the Church to respond to the crucial questions posed by the contemporary spirit. The diagnosis that you supply on the state of present cultures is a great service to the Church, and I encourage you to continue to improve it constantly. Beyond your personal witness and experiences, you are called, in fact, together with other individuals and qualified groups, to a *spiritual discernment of the cultural trends* which affect the men and women of today. By way of meetings, research and publications, you are providing a new thrust within the Church for responding to the challenges which the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the Gospel represent. This discernment is a matter of some urgency if we are to be better able to understand present mentalities, to discover therein the thirst for truth and love which only Jesus can fully satisfy, and to find the ways for a new evangelization through an authentic apostolate of culture. 2. By looking at the world from a universal point of view, you are better able to grasp the apostolic significance of your labours and to find a solid motivation for pursuing your mission. Through this work of evangelical discernment, the Church has but one objective: to proclaim better to every conscience and to every culture the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ - inasmuch as all human reality, individual and social, has been liberated through Christ, individuals as well as human activities, of which culture is the most eminent and the most incarnated

expression. The salvific action of the Church with cultures is exercised in the first place through the mediation of individuals, families and educators. Thus an adequate formation is indispensable to help Christians learn to show clearly how the Gospel leaven has the power to purify and elevate the modes of thought, judgement and action which constitute a specific culture. Jesus Christ, our Saviour, offers his light and hope to all those men and women who cultivate the sciences, the arts, letters and the numerous fields developed by modern culture. All the sons and daughters of the Church should then be aware of their mission and discover how the dynamism of the Gospel can penetrate and regenerate the dominant mentalities and values which inspire each of the cultures as well as the opinions and the attitudes which flow from them. Everyone in the Church, through prayer and meditation, will be able to carry the light of the Gospel and radiate its ethical and spiritual ideals. In this way, through this patient work of gestation, humble and hidden though it is, the fruits of Redemption will gradually penetrate cultures and will enable them to open themselves fully to the riches of the grace of Christ.³ The Pontifical Council for Culture is already engaged in an effort which stimulates the Church in this great modern undertaking, the evangelization of cultures and the cultural advancement of all human beings. You have managed to establish a *promising collaboration* with the Episcopal Conferences, with the international Catholic organizations, with Religious Institutes, with the Catholic associations and movements, with cultural and university centres. In close and fruitful collaboration with them, you have held meetings in various parts of the world, and noteworthy results have already been achieved, to which a number of publications as well as your *Bulletin* attest. I observe too that your work is developing in connection with several Departments of the Holy See, in such a way as to render more visible the cultural dimension which is an important component of the apostolic mission of the Roman Curia.⁴ Among your current projects, two initiatives merit special attention, first of all because of their own importance, and also because they have been conducted in collaboration with various departments of the Holy See, in the spirit of the reform of Roman Curia. With satisfaction I would first point to the study on *the Church and university culture*, which you are pursuing with the Episcopal Conferences, in collaboration with the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Council for the Laity. You have already published a synthesis which illustrates the significant tendencies and the spiritual needs of the university milieu, as well as the new aspects of the university apostolate for the local Churches. I urge you to continue this common reflection which will, I am sure, give rise to concrete recommendations and beneficial exchanges of apostolic experiences. The Church finds in the university world a privileged place for dialogue with the trends of spirit and styles of thought which will distinguish tomorrow's culture. Christian hope should go to meet the new aspirations of consciences and animate the minds of university youth who will very soon be in charge of so many responsibilities, "so that human civilization may become more and more open to the Gospel". With all my heart I encourage this university apostolate which gives students the concrete possibility of reflecting on their faith at an intellectual level paralleling their scientific and humanistic development in the other disciplines, and which helps them to express that faith in believing and praying communities.⁵ Finally, I wish to underline the active role which the Pontifical Council for Culture has played in the work of the International Theological Commission on the subject of *faith and inculturation*. You participated closely in the drawing up of the document which has just been prepared under this title and which will further our understanding of the biblical, historical, anthropological, ecclesial and missionary significance of the inculturation of the Christian faith. The stakes here are decisive for the Church's activity, both within the various traditional cultures and with the complex forms of modern culture. Your responsibility is henceforth to translate these theological guidelines into concrete programmes of cultural apostolate, and I am delighted that a number of episcopal conferences, notably in Latin America and in Africa, intend to devote themselves to this. I encourage these pastoral experiments and hope that their fruits may be shared with the whole Church.⁶ I have often had occasion to say, but I would like once more to do so, that it is through culture that man lives a truly human life. The fundamental link of the message of Christ

and the Church with the human person in his or her humanity helps develop culture at its most intimate foundation. This means that *the cultural upheavals of our times invite us to return to the essentials* and to rediscover the fundamental concern *which is man* in all his political and social dimensions, to be sure, but the cultural, moral and spiritual ones as well. Indeed, it is nothing less than the very future of humanity that is at stake. To inculturate the Gospel is not to bring it back to the ephemeral, and to reduce it to the superficial which influence the changing current situation. On the contrary, it is with full spiritual courage that we insert the force of the Gospel leaven, and its newness, which is younger than anything modern, into the very heart of the profound disturbances of our time, to give life to new modes of thinking, acting and living. It is fidelity to the covenant with eternal wisdom which is the ceaselessly self-renewing source of new cultures. Individuals who have received the newness of the Gospel appropriate and interiorize it in such a way as to re-express it in their daily lives, in accordance with their particular genius. In this way, the inculturation of the Gospel goes hand in hand with the renewal of cultures and thus promotes them in the Church as well as in the State.⁷ *In conclusion, I can only thank God* for the work of apostolic discernment and evangelical inculturation which your Council contributes to the Church's service. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, I invoke upon your work the light and the strength of the Holy Spirit. All my best wishes go with you, beginning with you, Your Eminences: Cardinal Paul Poupard, whom I have asked to replace dear Cardinal Garrone as President of the Council; Cardinal Eugenio de Araujo Sales, who continues to enable you to benefit from his experience; and Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum, who regrets not having been able to participate in this assembly. I assure all members of the International Council, as well as your collaborators at Palazzo San Calisto, a place in my prayers. As a pledge of my affection for you, your families, and for all those who are the subject of your concern, I cordially give you my Apostolic Blessing. ©

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