



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE

Consistory Hall

Friday, 18 March 1994 Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Friends, 1. I welcome you this morning with joy, members, counsellors and co-workers of the Pontifical Council for Culture. You have gathered under the presidency of Cardinal Paul Poupard for the first plenary session of the dicastery in its present form, after the merging of the former Pontifical Councils for Dialogue with Non-Believers and for Culture prescribed by the Motu Proprio *Inde a Pontificatus* of 25 March 1993. You know that from the beginning of my Pontificate I have insisted on the crucial significance of the links between the Church and culture. In my letter on the occasion of the foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, I recalled: "a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived" (cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment*, 2 [16 Jan. 1982]). Two points should be made: most of the countries with a Christian tradition are experiencing a serious rift between the Gospel message and large areas of their culture, while an acute problem in the young Churches is the relationships between local cultures and the Gospel. This situation already points the way ahead for your task of evangelizing cultures and inculturating faith. I should like to clarify a few points which I consider particularly important. 2. *The phenomenon of non-belief*, together with its practical consequences—the secularization of social and private life, religious indifference or even the unequivocal rejection of all religion—remains one of the most urgent matters for your reflection and your pastoral concern. It would be appropriate to seek its historical, cultural, social and intellectual causes, and at the same time to promote a respectful and open dialogue with those who do not believe in God or who profess no religion; organizing meetings and exchanges with them, as you have done in the past, cannot but be productive. 3. *The inculturation of the faith is the other major task of your Dicastery*. Specialized research centres will help you to carry it out. But it must not be forgotten that this "must involve the whole people of God, and not a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei*" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 54). Through a lengthy process of reflection the Church gradually becomes aware of all the wealth of the deposit of faith *through the life* of God's people: the process of inculturation is a transition from *implicit lived experience to explicit consciousness*. Similarly, baptized persons, who live Christ's mystery in the Holy Spirit under the guidance of their pastors, are led little by little to discern within the various cultures those elements that are compatible with the Catholic faith and to reject others. This

slow maturing process demands great patience and wisdom, great openness of heart, an informed sense of Tradition and a healthy apostolic daring, like that of the Apostles, the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church.⁴ In creating the Pontifical Council for Culture, it was my intention to give "the whole Church a common impulse in the continuously renewed encounter between the salvific message of the Gospel and the multiplicity of cultures". I also gave it the mandate "to become a participant in the cultural concerns which the departments of the Holy See encounter in the evangelization of cultures, and to ensure co-operation between the cultural institutions of the Holy See" (John Paul II, *Letter of Foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 2 [20 May 1982]). In this perspective I commissioned you to oversee and co-ordinate the activity of the Pontifical Academies, in conformity with their aims and statutes, and to remain in regular contact with the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, "to assure a harmony of purpose and a fruitful mutual co-operation" (John Paul II, *Inde a Pontificatus*).⁵ In order to accomplish your task better, you are called *to establish closer links with the Episcopal Conferences* and especially with the cultural commissions which should exist within all the Conferences, as you have recently requested. These commissions are meant to promote Christian culture in the different countries and to dialogue with cultures that are strangers to Christianity. The many *Catholic cultural centres* throughout the world, whose work you support and seek to spread, are certainly privileged institutions for the promotion of Christian culture and dialogue with non-Christian cultural environments. In this regard, the first international meeting which you have just organized at Chantilly bodes well for further fruitful exchanges.⁶ On the same lines, you *co-operate with International Catholic Organizations*, especially those that bring intellectuals, scientists and artists together, and undertake "appropriate initiatives concerning the dialogue between faith and cultures, and intercultural dialogue" (cf. John Paul II, *Inde a Pontificatus*, 3). In addition, you *follow the policy and the cultural activity of governments and international organizations*, such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation and other bodies, in your concern to give a fully human dimension to their cultural policies.⁷ Your intervention, whether direct or indirect in the areas where the great policies and thought of the third millennium are forged, aims at *giving a new impulse to Christian contributions in the field of culture*, which has its place in the contemporary world as a whole. In this vast enterprise, as urgent as it is necessary, you are to continue a dialogue that appears very promising, with the representatives of agnostic trends or with non-believers, whether their inspiration is derived from ancient civilizations or from more recent intellectual endeavours.⁸ Christianity "*is a creator of culture in its very foundation*" (John Paul II, *Address to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* [2 June 1980]). In the Christian world, a truly prestigious culture has flourished throughout the centuries, as much in the area of literature and philosophy as in the sciences and the arts. The very concept of beauty in ancient Europe is largely the result of the Christian culture of its peoples, and its landscape reflects this inspiration. The centre around which this culture has developed is the heart of our faith, the eucharistic mystery. Cathedrals, humble country churches, religious music, architecture, sculpture and painting all radiate the mystery of the *verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine*, towards which everything converges in a movement of wonder. As for music, I am glad to commemorate Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina this year, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of his death. It would seem that, after a troubled period, the Church regained a voice made peaceful through contemplation of the Eucharistic mystery, like the calm breathing of a soul that knows it is loved by God. Christian culture admirably reflects man's relationship with God, made new in the redemption. It opens us to the contemplation of the Lord, true God and true man. This culture is enhanced by the love that Christ pours into our hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5) and by the experience of disciples called to emulate their Master. Such sources have given rise to an intense awareness of the meaning of life, a strength of character that blossoms in the heart of Christian families and a sense of finesse unknown in the past. Grace awakens, frees, purifies, orders and expands the creative powers of man. While it invites asceticism and renunciation, it does so in order to free the heart, a freedom

eminently conducive to artistic creation as well as to thought and action based on truth.⁹ In this culture, therefore, the *influence of the saints* is decisive: through the light that they emanate, through their inner freedom, through the power of their personality, they have made a mark on the artistic thought and expression of entire periods of our history. It is enough to mention St. Francis of Assisi. He had a poet's temperament, something which is amply confirmed by his words, his attitude, his innate sense of symbolic gesture. Although his concerns were far removed from the world of literature, he was, nevertheless, the creator of a new culture, both in thought and in art. A St Bonaventure or a Giotto could not have developed had it not been for him. This, dear friends, is where the true requirements of Christian culture dwell. This marvellous creation of man can flow only from contemplating the mystery of Christ and from listening to his word, put into practice with total sincerity and unreserved commitment, following the example of the Virgin Mary. Faith frees thought and opens new horizons to the language of poetry and literature, to philosophy, to theology, and to other forms of creativity proper to the human genius. You are called to develop and to promote this culture: some of you will attend to dialogue with non-believers, while others will search for new expressions of Christian life, all through a more vigorous cultural presence of the Church in this world which is seeking beauty and truth, unity and love. My Apostolic Blessing and my affectionate gratitude, accompany you as you carry out these beautiful, noble and necessary tasks. 18

March 1994 © Copyright 1994 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana