



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY CONVENTION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE***

Hall of the Popes

Friday, 15 June 2007

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I meet you with great pleasure today, on an especially significant occasion. Indeed, you are intending to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, created by the Servant of God John Paul II on 20 May 1982 with his Letter addressed to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the then Secretary of State.

I greet all those present and I thank you, Cardinal Paul Poupard, in the first place, for your courteous words interpreting the common sentiments. I address to you, venerable Brother who has headed the Pontifical Council since 1988, a special thought of gratitude and appreciation for the important work you have carried out during this long period. At the Dicastery's service, you have devoted and profitably continue to devote your human and spiritual gifts, always witnessing enthusiastically to the attention which prompts the Church to establish dialogue with the cultural movements of our time.

Your participation in numerous congresses and international meetings, many of which were organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture, has enabled you to be ever more thoroughly acquainted with the interest the Holy See takes in the vast and variegated world of culture. I thank you once again for all this and extend my gratitude to the Secretary, Officials and Consultors of the Dicastery.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council paid great attention to culture, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* dedicated a special chapter to it (cf. nn. 53-62). The Council Fathers were concerned to point out the perspective in which the Church views and addresses the promotion of culture, considering this task as one of the "more urgent problems deeply affecting the human race" (*ibid.*, n. 46).

In her relations with the world of culture, the Church always places man at the centre, both as the author of cultural activity and the one to whom it is destined. Servant of God Paul VI had very much at heart the Church's dialogue with culture and personally took charge of it during the years of his Pontificate.

The Servant of God John Paul II, who had taken part in the Council and made his own special contribution to the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, followed in his footsteps.

On 2 June 1980, in his memorable *Discourse to UNESCO*, he witnessed in the first person how much he had at heart to meet man on the cultural plane in order to transmit the Gospel Message to him. Two years later he established the Pontifical Council for Culture, destined to give a new impetus to the Church's commitment to assist the plurality of cultures' encounter with the Gospel in the different parts of the world (cf. *Letter to Cardinal Casaroli*, 20 May 1982; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 28 June, p. 7).

In instituting this new Dicastery, my venerable Predecessor emphasized that it was to pursue its aims by establishing dialogue with all, without distinction of culture or religion, "in a joint search for cultural communication with all men of good will" (*ibid.*).

This aspect of the service carried out by the Pontifical Council for Culture has been confirmed in the past 25 years, since the world has become even more interdependent due to the formidable development of the means of communication and the consequent extension of the social relations network.

It is therefore even more urgent for the Church to promote cultural development, targeting the human and spiritual quality of its messages and content, since culture today is also inevitably affected by the globalization which, unless constantly accompanied by vigilant discernment, can turn against man, ending by impoverishing him instead of enriching him. And what great challenges evangelization has to face in this field!

Twenty-five years after the creation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, it is therefore appropriate to reflect on the reasons and goals that motivated its birth in the social and cultural context of our time. To this end, the Pontifical Council has desired to organize a Study Convention, on the one hand, as a pause for meditation on the existing relationship between evangelization and culture, and on the other, to take stock of this relationship as it appears today in Asia, America and Africa.

How is it possible not to find a special cause of satisfaction in seeing that the three "continental" reports have been entrusted to three Cardinals who are respectively Asian, Latin American and African? Is this not an eloquent confirmation of how the Catholic Church has journeyed on, blown by the "Wind" of Pentecost, as a Community capable of conversing with the entire family of peoples, indeed, shining out among it as a "prophetic sign of unity and peace" (*Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer V-D)?

Dear brothers and sisters, the history of the Church is also inseparably the history of culture and art. Works such as the *Summa Theologiae* by St Thomas Aquinas, the *Divine Comedy*, Chartres Cathedral, the Sistine Chapel or Johann Sebastian Bach's Cantatas are unparalleled syntheses of Christian faith and human expression.

However, if these are, so to speak, the peaks of such syntheses between faith and culture, their convergence is brought about daily in the life and work of all the baptized, in that hidden art which is the love story of each one with the living God and with his brethren, in the joy and effort of following Jesus Christ in the daily routine of life.

Today more than ever, reciprocal openness between the cultures is a privileged context for dialogue between people committed to seeking an authentic humanism, over and above the divergences that separate them. In the cultural arena too, Christianity must offer to all a most powerful force of renewal and exaltation, that is, the Love of God who makes himself human love.

Precisely in his Letter establishing the Pontifical Council for Culture, Pope John Paul II wrote: "Love is like a great force hidden deep within cultures in order to urge them to overcome their incurable finiteness by opening themselves to him who is their Source and End, and to give them, when they do open themselves to his grace, enriching fullness" (*Letter*, 20 May 1982).

May the Holy See, thanks to the service carried out especially by your Dicastery, continue to promote throughout the Church that evangelical culture which is the leaven, salt and light of the Kingdom in humanity's midst.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again I express my deep gratitude for the work done by the Pontifical Council for Culture and I assure all of you who are present here of my remembrance in prayer, and as I invoke the heavenly intercession of Mary Most Holy, *Sedes Sapientiae*, I willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Your Eminence, to your venerable confreres, and to all those who in various capacities are involved in the dialogue between the Gospel and contemporary cultures.

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