



John Paul II institutes the Pontifical Council for Culture by a letter to H.E. Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of State - May 20, 1982

Your Eminence,

Since the beginning of my pontificate, I have considered the Church's dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake. There exists, in fact, a fundamental dimension capable of strengthening or shaking to their foundations the systems into which humanity as a whole is organized, and of liberating human existence, individually and collectively, from the threats hanging over it. This fundamental dimension is the human person, the totality of the human person.

Now, culture allows us to live a fully human life. "Yes, the future of humanity depends on culture", as I said in my speech to UNESCO on 2 June 1980, speaking to an audience which was so very different in its backgrounds and convictions. And I added, "We rediscover ourselves on the ground of culture, the fundamental reality which unites us... We rediscover ourselves through that which is all around us and, in a certain sense, in us as humans".

For these reasons, beginning from 15 November 1979, it has been my wish to consult about the fundamental problem of the Holy See's responsibility with regard to culture with all the members of the Sacred College meeting in Rome, and afterwards, on 17 December 1980, with all the Heads of Departments, in order to discuss with them the opinions received in the consultations of which I had asked Cardinal Gabriel-Marie Garrone to take charge.

Preliminary Study

Finally, at my request, the Cardinal chaired a Council which was set up on 25 November 1981 and was requested to study in practical terms, over several months, how best to ensure the relations of the Church and the Holy See with culture, in all its different expressions.

I would like to express to the Cardinal my deep gratitude for the exemplary work performed by him to this end, with the generous support of bodies with close relations with the world of culture: the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, the Secretariat for Non-

Believers, the Pontifical Academy of Science, and the Research Centre of the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

The Heritage of Vatican II

The time has come to profit from these labours. For this reason, it seems to me opportune to found a special permanent body for the purpose of promoting the great objectives which the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council proposed regarding the relations between the Church and culture. In fact, the Council emphasized, by giving it a whole section in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the fundamental importance of culture for the full development of the human person, the manifold links between the message of salvation and culture, the reciprocal enrichment of the Church and the different cultures as they have shared history with different civilizations, as well as the necessity for believers to understand in depth the way of thinking and feeling of the other people of their time, as these are expressed in their respective culture *Gaudium et Spes*, nos 53-62).

In the wake of the Council, the Session of the Synod of Bishops held in autumn 1974 clearly realized the role of the different cultures in the evangelization of peoples. And my predecessor Paul VI, gathering together the fruits of its labours in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, declared: "The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture and are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 20).

When I too came to gather together the rich heritage of the Ecumenical Council, the Synod of Bishops and my esteemed predecessor Paul VI, I declared in Paris, on 1 and 2 June 1980, to the Catholic Institute and later to the extraordinary assembly of UNESCO, that there is an organic and constitutive link existing between Christianity and culture - with humans, therefore, in their humanity. This link between the Gospel and culture, as I said in my address to that learned body of men and women of culture and science from all over the world, "is in fact the creator of culture at its very foundations". And if culture is that by which a person as a person becomes more human, what is at stake in this case is the very destiny of humans. Hence the importance for the Church, whose concern it is, of a careful and far-sighted pastoral activity with regard to culture, and in a particular way with regard to what is called living culture, that is, the whole of the principles and values which make up the ethos of a people: "The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith... A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out", as I said on 16 January 1982 (Discourse to the participants at the National Congress of the Movement of Cultural Commitment).

To be sure, many bodies within the Church have been working for a long time in this field (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* Easter 1979), and there have been innumerable Christians who, according to the Council, have striven, along with many believers and non-believers, so that "all the individuals and social groups of a particular people will be able to attain a full development of their cultural life in harmony with their capabilities and their traditions" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 60). Even when ideologies which are agnostic and hostile to the Christian tradition, or even openly atheistic, are the inspiration of certain influential thinkers, then all the greater is the urgency for the Church to join in a dialogue with cultures so that modern man may discover that God, far from being a rival to humans, gives them the gift of self-fulfilment, in his image and likeness. In fact, people know how to go infinitely beyond themselves, as is clearly demonstrated by the efforts made by so many creative geniuses in order to catch and fix, in works of art and thought, transcendent values of beauty and truth, more or less fleetingly intuited as an expression of the absolute. In this way, the meeting of cultures is nowadays a privileged

area of dialogue between those committed to the search for a new humanism for our time, beyond the differences which separate them: as Paul VI said in the name of all the Fathers of the Ecumenical Council, of which I too was a member, "We too, more than anyone else, have a care for the human person" (Closing discourse, 7 December 1965). And he told the General Assembly of the United Nations, "The Church is an expert in humanity" (4 October 1965), that humanity which she serves with love. 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.

Moreover, it is urgent that our contemporaries, and Catholics in particular, question themselves seriously about the conditions which are at the basis of the development of peoples. It is more and more clear that cultural progress is intimately bound up with the construction of a world with more justice and brotherhood. As I said in Hiroshima on 25 February 1981 to the representatives of science and culture gathered in the University of the United Nations, "The construction of a more just humanity and a more united international community is not a dream or a vain ideal. It is a moral imperative, a sacred duty, which human intellectual and spiritual genius can set about by way of a new mobilization of each person's talents and energies and by exploiting human cultural and technical resources" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 February 1981).

The Council for Culture

Consequently, by virtue of my apostolic mission, I feel the responsibility laid upon me, at the centre of the Universal Church's collegiality and in contact and agreement with the local Churches, of intensifying the relations of the Holy See with every manifestation of culture. This will also ensure a new relationship, in fruitful international collaboration, within the family of nations or great "communities of peoples united by different bonds, but above all and essentially, by culture" (Discourse to UNESCO, 2 June 1980).

For this reason, I have decided to found and institute a Council for Culture, capable of giving the whole Church a common impulse in the continuously renewed encounter between the salvific message of the Gospel and the multiplicity of cultures, in the diversity of cultures to which she must carry her fruits of grace.

And so, Your Eminence, since I know that you closely share my concerns, after having given deep thought to the reasons just expressed and having prayerfully considered its opportuneness, I put you in charge of presiding over the organization of this Pontifical Council for Culture, which includes a Presidential Committee and an Executive Committee, as well as an International Council made up of qualified representatives of Catholic culture throughout the world, which will meet at least once a year. Through you, the Pontifical Council will remain linked directly to me, as a new and original service which reflection and experience will little by little allow to be given a suitable structure, since the Church does not stand outside culture but inside it, as a leaven, on account of the organic and constitutive link which joins them closely together.

The Council will pursue its ends in an ecumenical and brotherly spirit, promoting also dialogue with non-Christian religions, and with individuals or groups who do not profess any religion, in a joint search for cultural communication with all men of good will.

It will regularly report to the Holy See on the major cultural aspirations of today's world, researching the expectations of contemporary civilizations and exploring new ways of cultural dialogue; this will allow the Pontifical Council for Culture to carry out better the tasks for which it has been instituted and which, in outline, are:

1. To give witness, to the Church and to the world, to the deep interest which the Holy See has, by its specific mission, in the progress of culture and fruitful dialogue between cultures, as well as in their beneficial encounter with the Gospel.

2. To become a participant in the cultural concerns which the Departments of the Holy See encounter in their work, in such a way as to facilitate the coordination of their tasks in the evangelization of cultures, and to ensure co-operation between the cultural institutions of the Holy See.

3. To enter into dialogue with the Episcopal Conferences, with the aim, among others, of drawing benefit for the whole Church from the researches, initiatives, accomplishments and productions which allow the local Churches to take an active part in their own cultural environment.

4. To collaborate with international Catholic organizations of a university, historical, philosophical, theological, scientific, artistic and intellectual nature, and to promote their reciprocal co-operation.

5. In a fashion appropriate to it, and always excepting the specific competencies of other bodies in the Curia in this matter, to keep up with the activities of international bodies, beginning with UNESCO and the Cultural Co-operation Council of the Council of Europe, which are interested in culture, the philosophy of science and the human sciences, and to ensure the effective participation of the Holy See in international congresses concerned with science, culture and education.

6. To keep up with the policies and cultural activities of the different governments of the world which are legitimately concerned to give a fully human dimension to the promotion of the common good of the people for whom they have responsibility.

7. To facilitate Church-culture dialogue at the level of universities and research centres, organizations of artists and specialists, researchers and scholars, and to promote worthwhile meetings between these cultural groups.

8. To welcome to Rome representatives of culture interested in a better understanding of the Church's activities in this field, and in benefiting the Holy See with their rich experience, by offering them in Rome a meeting-place for dialogue.

These broad orientations, put gradually into effect under your supreme management and as possibilities permit, but with a clear and constant commitment, will most certainly be a witness and an incentive.

It is with great confidence and high hopes, Your Eminence, that I entrust such an important charge to you, and at the same time I invoke upon this enterprise, which is nowadays so opportune and necessary, the abundance of divine aid.

With my special Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome, at the Basilica of Saint Peter, on the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, 20 May 1982, the fourth year of my Pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II