



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION  
FOR THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE CHURCH**

*Saturday, 19 October 2002*

*My dear Brothers in the Episcopate, dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. I am pleased to welcome you at the conclusion of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church. I cordially greet each of you and thank you very much for the service which you carry out.

I especially thank Archbishop Francesco Marchisano, President of the Commission, for the sentiments he expressed to me on your behalf and for his helpful synthesis of the activity that has taken place. My thanks also go to the members, officials, and the various experts who generously offer their attentive and profitable collaboration. I want to confirm my appreciation to all of you for what this Commission is doing not only for the care of the rich artistic and cultural heritage which the Christian community has accumulated over the course of two millennia, but also for making better understood the spiritual source from which it flows.

The Church has always maintained that, in some way through all the expressions of art, the infinite beauty of God is reflected and the human mind is almost naturally drawn towards Him. Further, thanks to this contribution, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, "the knowledge of God can be better revealed. Also, the preaching of the Gospel will be rendered more intelligible to man's mind" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 62).

2. The Plenary Assembly which has just ended focused on the theme: "*Cultural Heritage for territorial identity and for the artistic-cultural dialogue between peoples*". In our time, a more marked sensibility for the conservation and the "enjoyability" of artistic and cultural resources

characterizes the policies of public administration and the many initiatives of private institutions.

Our time is characterized, in fact, by the awareness that art, architecture, archives, libraries, museums, sacred music and theater not only constitute a storehouse of historical-artistic articles, but a collection of works which can be enjoyed by the entire community. With good reason, therefore, your Commission has progressively extended its work to a worldwide level, conscious that the ecclesiastical cultural heritage provides a favorable terrain for a fruitful intercultural dialogue. In this light, it is more important than ever that the juridical protection of that heritage be ensured through appropriate guidelines which take into account the religious, social, and cultural needs of the local populations.

3. With heartfelt gratitude, I take this opportunity to note the contribution of the instructions and guidelines provided at the conclusion of the regular Plenary Assemblies of your Commission. Time has shown how indispensable effective collaboration with administrations and civil institutions in order to create together, each according to his/her own competence, effective working synergies to defend and safeguard the universal artistic heritage. The pastoral enhancing of the presentation of her artistic treasure is very much at the heart of the Church. She well knows in fact that to communicate all of the aspects of the message entrusted to her by Christ the mediation of art is extremely helpful (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, n.12).

The organic nature of the Church's cultural heritage does not allow the separation of its aesthetic appreciation from the religious aim of pastoral activity. A sacred edifice, for example, reaches its "aesthetic" perfection precisely during the celebration of the divine mysteries, since it is precisely in that moment that it shines forth in its truest significance. The elements of architecture, painting, sculpture, music, song, and light, form part of the unique combination which welcomes the community of the faithful to its liturgical celebrations, a community comprised of "living stones" who form a "spiritual house" (cf. I Pt 2,5).

4. Dearest brothers and sisters, the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church has already given 12 years of precious service to the Church. I encourage you to continue in your commitment, increasingly involving those who work to give life to our historical-artistic heritage. Through your action, may a fruitful dialogue with the artists of our time increase, encouraging with every means the encounter and embrace between the Church and art. To this end, in my *Letter to Artists*, I recalled that "Humanity in every age, and even today, looks to works of art to shed light upon its path and its destiny" (n. 14).

The Church also wants to offer a seed of hope which overcomes pessimism and confusion through her cultural heritage, that can be the leaven of a new humanism on which effectively to build the new evangelization.

With these sentiments, and invoking the maternal intercession of Mary, the *Tota pulchra*, to you

and to all your dear ones I impart my Blessing.

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