

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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It is a great honour for me to speak on this occasion and in this place, contributing with my modest strength to the most opportune celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the activity of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, established by John Paul II through the apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus*. I shall attempt to address this most challenging topic from two complementary points of view: on one side, the history and the strategies of the stewardship of cultural goods; on the other, the specific function of the Church's cultural goods in the present and, that which ought to be of even greater importance to us, in the future. The historical perspective, with its vast time periods and its wisdom, but also with its errors and human imperfections, will allow us to integrate (I hope) the ethical, religious and civil perspective which must animate the rightful care of the generations to come.

These two angles find natural common ground in the universalistic inspiration pervading paragraphs 99-104 of *Pastor Bonus*, giving the Commission whose anniversary we celebrate today "the task of presiding over the stewardship of the historical and artistic heritage of the entire Church", understanding here "all of the works of any type of art of the past which will have to be protected and preserved with the utmost diligence", but also the historical heritage, "all of the documents and juridical instruments which concern and attest to pastoral life and care." These lofty principles were understood as being specific neither to the Vatican City State (which has its own law of stewardship for cultural goods, issued in 2001), nor to any territory defined by political or geographical boundaries, but rather as proper to the Church of Rome with its universal vocation and presence. *Officium curae patrimonii historiae et artis totius Ecclesiae praeesse*: this is the function of the Commission operating within the Holy See, a function without precedent in terms of its extension, which is not to be understood in a territorial sense but rather a cultural and religious one. For this reason, the Commission *auditorium praebet* to the particular Churches, as well as to the bishops and to their structures. Finally, it appertains to the Commission, and this is a declaration of serious import, "to assure that the People of God become ever more aware of the importance and necessity of conserving the historical and artistic heritage of the Church."

Patrimonium, *cura* (i.e. stewardship), *custodiri et conservari*, *competentibus curatoribus committere*: these are some of the key words which recur in the text of the Apostolic Constitution and which have inspired and inspire still the Commission's actions. This is recognizably the language, both civil and juridical, of that which can well be called the culture of stewardship which has slowly emerged in recent centuries of Italy's and Europe's history, gradually extending and imposing itself throughout the world. There is nothing obvious in this language, or better, in the very idea that one has to provide for norms and specific institutions for conserving the cultural heritage. The fact that the majority of countries is to some extent endowed with such norms should not lead us to false conclusions; to the contrary, we must remember that just after the Second World War fewer than half of then existing states (and of their respective territories and colonies) had elaborated any type of stewardship norms. Today the situation has been turned upside-down: few are the states in which some type of stewardship norms, however tenuous and ineffective, have not been in some way introduced. We have witnessed, therefore, a process of growing awareness towards cultural heritage in the past few decades which has involved nearly all countries in the world: this process has its historical origins in the old Italian States, it extended first through all of continental Europe, and then elsewhere. In some cases, the principle of stewardship has acquired

the rank of a constitutional norm; in the Constitution of Italian Republic (dated January 1st, 1948), in particular, it was for the first time placed among the fundamental principles of a modern State (art. 9).

The universal extension of the jurisdiction of the Pontifical Commission reflects therefore a most noteworthy historical process, involving the entire world, of growing awareness of the nature of the cultural heritage and its function in the human community; but at the same time it marks a profound turning point insofar as it de-territorialises the idea and the procedures of stewardship, connecting them closely instead to the mission of the Church in the world. In this sense, the Commission has absorbed and overtaken other organisations such as the Central Pontifical Commission for Sacred Art in Italy founded by Pius XI in 1924, or the Pontifical Commission for the Ecclesiastical Archives of Italy, established by Pius XII in 1954; while the tasks which refer to specifically Italian problems were placed within the aegis of the CEI [Italian Bishops' Conference]. The impetuous growth of a culture of patrimony in recent decades, even in recently independent countries, requires, I believe, that we better understand its nature, found in its historical roots. These roots, as we shall see below, are first of all Italian, or better, Roman; and the norms and decrees of the Popes had a central role to them throughout the centuries. There is no juridical-institutional continuation between the Papal States prior to 1870 and the Vatican City State, and if possible, even more autonomous from the tradition was the establishment of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage which remains to this day its activity; and yet, from the old papal edicts to the present moment runs a recognizable golden thread of continuity, not only due to the identity of the places but also because of the cultural affinity and shared horizon. Thus I shall seek to trace succinctly the origins of the modern concept of “stewardship” and of “cultural heritage” which, as we shall see, have their most important precedents in the very norms brought about by the Roman Pontiffs.

The concept of cultural heritage, as it is understood today, in fact underwent a process of definition over the course of the Nineteenth century based on the idea of *patrimoine* or *patrimoine national*, elaborated in France between the Revolution and the Restoration. This idea, for its part, was inspired by two complementary sources: on one side, the renewed awareness of the centrality of heritage in defining national culture; and on the other, the passionate argument that took place after the French Army, having invaded Europe, withdrew thousands of works of art from Rome and other cities and took them to Paris. In the plundered countries, this stripping was experienced as an act of violence and a wounding, although an even more severe, lucid and coherent reaction came from France itself. Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, in his *Lettres à Miranda sur le déplacement des monuments de l'art de l'Italie* (published anonymously in 1796) vigorously maintained that removing works of art from their original context not only drastically diminishes their value, but constitutes a crime against historical memory. Later, in his *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art* (1815), he argued that moving works of art from their original context entails the destruction of their historical and social function which is that of incarnating the essence and the necessities of a certain culture. The focus of Quatremère's passionate discourse was Rome; it was therefore natural that he would mention, within this context, the long series of pontifical laws and norms aimed at stemming exportation of works of art from that city. The tradition of stewardship, specifically Roman and pontifical, under pressure from the traumatic move of so many masterpieces to Paris, unleashed in this way a vast cultural and political debate throughout all of Europe, creating a ripple effect which has reached even to our times.

The primacy of Rome in a concern for patrimonial conservation that is typical of modern times is the consequence (the other side of the coin, we might say) of the collections of antiquities born in Rome in the Fifteenth century (especially after the return of the Pope from Avignon): from the Sixteenth century onward, collecting antiquities became a ritual and a cultural obligation of every sovereign, aristocrat and scholar in Europe. To halt the flow of antiquities which radiated out of Rome towards Paris, London, Munich and Madrid (i.e. to hinder the blind forces of the market), the Popes took to emanating (usually through the cardinal chamberlain) at a precocious moment

norms and bans in the hope of limiting the export of works of art. This spans from the pontificates of Eugene IV (1437), and especially Pius II (1462), unto the edicts of Cardinals Aldobrandini (1624), Sforza (1646), Altieri (1686), Spinola (1704, 1717). But the very repetition of the “prohibition of the extraction [=removal] of statues, figures, antiquities and the like” shows how little effective this was, and how much the haemorrhage of sculptures, coins and paintings continued.

If compared with such norms, precocious as they were, though aimed merely at limiting the removal of works of art, especially ancient ones, a clear qualitative leap, with the formulation of specific legal principles, was produced between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, in particular relating to two moments of crisis, to which the legal and antiquarian culture of the city and of the pontifical court was able to react in a most creative way. The first of these two “cruxes” to which I would like to dedicate a few words is the question of the sale *en masse* of especially valuable collections of antiquities. The theme came to the fore in 1728 when Cardinal Alessandro Albani, nephew of Pope Clement XI, sold to the King of Poland Augustus II thirty statues from among the best of his collection. The disdain of many Romans was great on this occasion, but the pontifical government did nothing to block the sale, perhaps also because the cardinal chamberlain was Annibale Albani at that moment, the older brother of Alessandro (the statues are in Dresden today). A few years later (1733) Cardinal Alessandro Albani tried to repeat the operation, entering into negotiations with English collectors to sell his second collection of prestigious antiquities, but this time the situation reverses. The exportation is impeded by an edict of the chamberlain (still Cardinal Annibale Albani), and the collection is acquired *en masse* by the pontiff and goes to constitute the nucleus of the Capitoline Museum, the first public museum in Europe (1734).

The matter at hand concerns not only an episode or an anecdote, much less a mere case. The Albani edict of 1733 is of great importance not only because it blocked that sale, but because among the reasons for protecting artistic heritage, it indicated for the first time, beyond the “public decorum of this beloved city of Rome,” also “the great advantage of the public and private good,” namely the notion of *utilitas publica*, which as we shall see comes from Roman Law. The later edict of the chamberlain Valenti (1750) draws on, amplifies and clarifies the same principles and the same language, reminding once again that the conservation of works of art “offers incitement to foreigners to come to this city to see them and admire them.” The watershed of 1733-34 (Albani Edict and Capitoline Museum) presupposes a new culture of contextual stewardship which Pope Clement XII (the Florentine Lorenzo Corsini) adopted in those years as his own. Cardinal Neri Corsini, the Pope’s nephew and inspiration of these measures of his, had promoted the *Museum Florentinum* several years earlier (with the aim of creating an inventory of the Medici collection as the glorious dynasty was underway, with the last Grand Duke Gian Gastone, towards a truly pathetic demise), and had a determining role in the stipulation of the “family agreement” Medici-Lorraine (1737) which tied the grand ducal collections to Florence forever. Clement XII and Cardinal Corsini were responsible, over the course of only a few years, for completely overturning the perspective: in 1733 Cardinal Annibale Albani, as chamberlain, forbade his brother Alessandro to sell his antiquities, as he had failed to do in 1728. The fear of dispersing collections considered essential generates, therefore, strong antibodies: in Florence, first the undertaking of the *Museum Florentinum*, then the “family agreement”; in Rome the edict of 1733 and the foundation of the Capitoline Museum, immediately accompanied by work on a printed catalogue (three volumes, 1741-1755). The establishment of a public museum was not in the least obvious at that time, and the great collections of European sovereigns (including the Vatican collections of the Pope) were accessible only by few and rarely. “It has rendered a great service to the glory of the Pope and to the Public as well” “having united and freed from the danger of being lost or passed on to foreign Cities, the many beautiful relics of Antiquity,” as Lodovico Antonio Muratori commented. In the meantime, the pontifical norms gained a following: to quote an example, the famous *Prammatiche* issued by the King of Naples Charles Bourbon after the digs at Herculaneum and Pompey had begun (1755) take up all of the fundamental concepts of the edict of the cardinal chamberlain Valenti (1750), which in turn takes up and specifies the Albani edict of 1733.

The second of two cruxes I wish to address dates back to the early Nineteenth century. Pius VII's chirograph of 1802 marked a turning point of extraordinary importance for its organisation and coherence. It was issued by edict of the chamberlain Cardinal Giuseppe Doria Pamphilj. The inspirer of this text was actually the very erudite Carlo Fea, Pontifical Commissioner of Antiquities from 1800, not without the influence of Antonio Canova, to whom one should perhaps attribute the idea that heritage is to be conserved also because it is "nourishment of the arts". Fea is also the author (in a memoir of 1806) of the idea of recalling the long tradition of papal norms on monuments and antiquities: for this reason, the directives of Pius II, Sixtus IV and Leo X are quoted in the chirograph of Pius VII. The same principles of the chirograph are then developed and rendered even more detailed and systematic, under the same Pope, by the edicts of the cardinal chamberlain Bartolomeo Pacca in 1819-20. The dates merit pause for reflection: the chirograph of 1802 follows only a few years after the stripping of works of art which Rome suffered at the hands of the French; the Pacca edicts come a few years after France, Napoleon's empire having been defeated, was obliged by the victorious powers (England, Prussia, Austria and Russia) to return the plundered works of art (the Pope's envoy in Paris was Canova at that time). In other words, the double trauma of the loss and recovery of the major masterpieces of Rome (in 1802 and 1819) stimulated a greater focus and awareness, and brought greater integrity to the tradition of stewardship.

From one edict to another (in particular, from 1733 to 1819), the inspirational principles of papal measures protecting cultural heritage are repeated with ever greater clarity: "The ancient monuments have made and will always make illustrious, admirable and unique this dear city of Rome," stated the Pacca edict, "they draw foreigners to admire it (...) and inflame the noble emulation of many artists who come here from every part of Europe." The popes, it adds, were always, and want to be ever more "the supreme protectors and vindicators of the ancient monuments," caring always for their "conservation and repair", always vigilant to transfer to public possession (of the city or pontiff) all goods in danger or of outstanding value. These laws had been dismissed on occasion, says the chamberlain, but they had an ancient tradition because the "necessary concern and intentions" which the pope now seeks to recall in life are in essence the same "as the many Pontifical Laws and those the ancient emperors had decreed and established in every age." Minute norms follow, laid out in 61 articles to be then clarified in further directives. In these edicts, the notion of the public usefulness of the cultural heritage comes up again in an ever more conscious and ordered way. It justifies vigilance over all monuments and artworks of the Papal States, as well as those in public and private possession, including those belonging to cardinals.

The extraordinary importance of the norms of the Papal States is attested to by the fact that they inspired similar norms in all of the other states in which Italy was divided at that time: in this way the premises for united Italy's legislation on stewardship came to be created (Italy's legislation goes from the laws of 1902, to 1909 and 1939, all the way to the recent Code of Cultural Goods, approved 2004, with modifications through 2008). We ask therefore: how is it that the old Italian states all acted as if they were in mutual agreement, all moving in the same direction? There was no inter-state accord that obliged them to issue stewardship laws, and even less to imitate each other in formulating them (while in today's Europe, despite intense diplomatic activity and the existence of a Parliament and thousands of common norms, reaching an agreement and mediation on the notion of patrimonial stewardship has been impossible thus far); nevertheless, they did it, of course with laws that were diversified in form but yet very similar in spirit. The response to this question, I believe, is to be sought not only in the authority of the pontifical see, which certainly had a role in making the norms issued from Rome "imitable" elsewhere, but also in the long spans of history and in particular in two related points: on one side the concept of "public usefulness" (*publica utilitas*), on the other the idea of citizenship as elaborated in Italian cities from the Twelfth century on, of which each city's monument played a part as a point of pride, a principle of civic identity, the focal point of an emotive identification coinciding with the very idea of belonging to a well governed community. In Rome, civic identity and the sovereignty of the Pope were always interwoven in a quite peculiar way; but the

aspiration to the common good played a central role, demanding a firm legal foundation so as to be able to impose respect for norms which were quite restrictive of private property.

From the above mentioned Albani Edict (1733) onwards, the pontifical norms made constant, insistent reference to the notion of *utilitas publica*, binding it closely to the intrinsic statute of monuments of art and history. These norms, although restrictive of private property, were held to be not only possible, but just and fair in the name of higher interests, because it was considered that things of art and history held privately acquire a certain public value from their aesthetic, historical and cultural merits. The *utilitas publica*, in turn, is grounded in a principle of Roman law: the *legatum ad patriam* or *dicatio ad patriam*, namely, the legal principle according to which whatever is placed, even by a private citizen, in a public place (e.g. in the facade of a building) falls at least in part into the juridical condition of *res populi romani*, and entails the establishment of a sort of public domain. According to this legal and institutional tradition, two distinct “patrimonial” components coexist in cultural heritage: one refers to the legal property of individual goods whether private or public; the other refers to historical and cultural values, solely of public pertinence. In this perspective, the same expression “cultural heritage” assumes a particular meaning, the opposite of any proprietary individualism, and is related to collective values, the bonds and social responsibilities that take on the form of a pact of citizenship by means of reference to a common heritage of culture and of memory and make possible “public usefulness” and thus every organized community. It is in this sense that cultural heritage, on the heels of centuries of history, has assumed a notable civil function.

In the *longue durée* of this history, Rome and the pontifical governments, I repeat, had an essential function, or more properly incipient function, setting off a century-long process which spread throughout Italy and Europe, and has progressively involved almost every corner of the globe. Up to now, however, we have spoken of the Pope in the role of sovereign and of his rulings insofar as they were linked to his territory. Quite different is the nature of the Pontifical Commission whose twentieth anniversary we are celebrating today: it was instituted by the Pontiff not in the role of sovereign of a territorial state, however small and institutionally different from the one prior to 1870; but rather, we could say, as Pope in the role of *Pastor bonus* of a vast community of faithful. The work of the Commission extends its attentions to all of the communities that find in the Roman Church their head. This radical difference of “perimeter” entails a profound novelty in the definition of what is understood to be the cultural heritage of the Church; it entails several fundamental questions regarding the nature of stewardship that must be asked of it; and finally, it entails above all, reflection on the nature and function of cultural heritage in the life of the Church and, as stated in *Pastor bonus*, in the experience of the People of God.

Before attempting, from my layman’s point of view, to give some possible responses to these interrogatives, I would like to propose another question drawn from Eighteenth and Nineteenth century history which I have traced too hurriedly. The introduction and rethinking of the philosophy of stewardship as we have seen, are historically linked (especially in Rome) to moments of crisis: in the Rome of Pius II, in reaction to the excessive migrations of pieces of antiquity; in the Rome of Clement XII, to stem the sale of entire collections of art; in that of Pius VII, finally, in reaction to the depredation to which Roman collections were subjected at the hands of French armies. It is therefore licit to ask if the new set-up of stewardship implied by the establishment of this Pontifical Commission can also be the fruit of some type of crisis, more or less expressly perceived as such, in the statute of cultural heritage, and in particular that of the Church. This is a question that exceeds my strength to answer, so many are the implications not only on the cultural and legal side but more properly on the religious side. Nevertheless, I appeal to your generosity and ask you to indulge me to propose some initial reflections.

A rethinking (dated 1989, the year of *Pastor bonus*) of the role and function of the cultural heritage of the Church, seems to me historically opportune more than ever not only because, as is implicit in what I have said, the new extension of the object of stewardship corresponds to the planetary diffusion of the very idea of cultural heritage. It is not, therefore, a matter of the Church keeping in step with the logic of globalisation. Much more central and important it seems to me (and I

ask you to confirm or controvert this) is another implication of *Pastor bonus*: the reaffirmation of the historical and spiritual values of the heritage as compared to a mercantile logic which in recent years in many countries (especially in Italy, it pains me to say) has invaded the parlance, action and culture not only of merchants, antiquarians and of some politicians, but even of most professionals in the sector; it is almost as if the stewardship of the artistic or archival heritage were done because of and in proportion to its retail value. If I understand correctly, the Apostolic Constitution and the activity of the Commission born from it, presuppose on the contrary the centrality of the function of the cultural heritage of the Church (from altarpieces to paintings in museums, from archival documents to inscriptions) neither as a sort of treasure chest of precious objects, nor even as a passive depository of historical memories, but as living nourishment for the present. I would understand in this sense the recommendation that the works “whose specific use has diminished be conveniently displayed to view in museums of the Church or in other places.” I would read in this sense article 103 with maximum stress, where it is advised to *adlaborare ut Populus Dei magis magisque conscius fiat momenti et necessitatis patrimonium historiae et artis Ecclesiae conservandi*: creating an awareness of the cultural heritage of the Church by means of pastoral work; involving the faithful in the necessary widespread vigilance which is the only terrain in which the conservation of this heritage can blossom. It is therefore a general crisis of values, I would venture, or better of the hierarchy of values, the horizon in which the new statute of cultural goods of the Church has taken shape and comes to be defined ever more precisely through the work of the Commission: a crisis of values compared to which, the redefinition of the function of the heritage, eminently cultural and spiritual, is no less urgent than it was twenty years ago.

Before closing, I would like to attempt to respond to the other two questions I brought to your attention. In what way can and must the work of safeguarding and preserving the artistic and cultural heritage of the Church be articulated? The extraordinary conceptual and geographic extension of the object of stewardship has serious implications. I will attempt to point out two of them: first, this heritage is by definition found within the territory of many nations, and thus gauges itself by their respective norms and structures of stewardship. In this sense, I consider it vital that the necessary comparison takes place with mutual respect among the spheres of competency, identifying as well as possible common lines of thought and action, all done in a way that the activity of the Church and its local structures of stewardship do not so much correct what the institutions of each place seek to do, but rather join in their action so as to lead it to a higher level, more guaranteed, because it is based on the firm guidance and, if possible, sharing of cultural and spiritual values; but also because what matters to the Church is not only the passive conservation of its own goods, but rather primarily their purpose with respect to the liturgy and practices of devotion and piety. Clearly, the variety of situations concerned here are numerous: the Church can be proprietor of goods, or only their custodian; there may exist a specific system treaties, or not; the local norms can be more or less respectful towards liturgical needs; and so forth. Second implication: the Church of Rome, thanks to her extraordinary presence in the world and in the cultural traditions which she represents, even in the field of the stewardship of the artistic heritage, is in an absolutely unique position for comparing the concepts, requests and structures of stewardship in various countries. This type of “additional mission” is in some ways analogous to that of the UNESCO, but with a quite different nature, centred on the religious experience. It is a mission, I hope, which will enhance the importance of the Commission and increase its weight, offering even outside the perimeters of ecclesiastical goods, an occasion and a cue for a more general methodological reflection on stewardship strategies.

Finally: what is (or what might be) the definition of the cultural heritage of the Church according to *Pastor Bonus*? As we have seen, the idea of cultural heritage, and of the stewardship which bequeaths it from one generation to the next, is born in history as a projection of a system of spiritual values (that take form in monuments, paintings, statues, books, epigraphy, documents, medals); but also as an intersection of legal concepts (such as that of *publica utilitas*), of identity-forming movements (civic pride in the formation of nations), of institutional needs and professional competencies. Some of these dimensions (e.g. the specific competencies of curators and restorers) can

be transferred without disruption even to the field of the Church's cultural heritage. One aspect does not transfer, however, to the ecclesial side, or rather requires a radical reformulation: an essential element, namely the one of identity. The viewpoint proposed by *Pastor Bonus* and put into practice by the Pontifical Commission certainly does not deny the civic value of heritage, even of churches and works of art with a religious purpose; rather it underscores and favours a dimension which is in no way additional, but is in fact primary insofar as it is bound up with the spiritual and religious function without which the vast majority of artworks in the western tradition would never have come to be. The emotive and affective implications of figurative works of art were never extraneous to the concern of the Church which in fact always considered them an organic part of a sole system of values, its own. With regard to this I will mention just one text, from the *Rationale divinarum officiorum* by William Durand (end of the XIII century): in it he insists on the necessity *ut populus ad ecclesiam trahatur, et magis afficiatur*, that the people be drawn into the churches and be emotively involved by what they find there. Clearly, the cultural-aesthetical dimension and the liturgical-cultural dimension form in this sense a higher unity. A more profound level is reached in this way than that of *publica utilitas*, and ecclesiastical cultural goods become by their very nature (to quote from a reflection by Msgr. Carlo Chenis) "a *bonum commune*, or rather adequate to the life of the ecclesial community and therefore suitable to the purposes the community sets for itself; for this reason, stewardship must be sweeping (context, subject, content, agent, aim, etc.)."

The long history of religious art, in the East as in the West of Europe, has always moved in two value systems which contemporary culture tends to divide or even to consider extraneous or hostile one to the other: the intellectual and aesthetic on one side, and the spiritual and religious on the other. As a layman, I have always thought that the intimate historical and aesthetical penetration of religious artworks, which is the heart of my profession as historian, could not be made without knowing how to reconcile these two dimensions from within, making the two one. As a layman, I sincerely hope that the reaffirmation of religious and spiritual values in the contemporary world which is the main line of action of the Pontifical Commission might be not only a sort of commemoration or re-staging of what the Church has done in the past, but rather a living witness of the expressive, liturgical, spiritual function of the cultural heritage of the Church in contemporary culture. Creating and nourishing in the faithful the full awareness (*ut populus Dei...consciens fiat*) of the multifaceted dimension of art and the historical heritage means making it present, rendering it contemporaneous to us, increasing therefore the depth of experience, broadening the horizon not only of scholars or the clergy, but of the faithful, of all citizens in fact, even of other faiths and observances. The close link between this Commission and the Congregation of the Clergy is to be understood, I believe, in this sense, because without the capillary participation of the clergy this diffusion of awareness could never come about.

As Giovanni Gentile wrote in 1940, "the true ancient, or rather the ancient which has value and which man therefore takes interest in conserving and protecting, is modern, present, living." This wisely lay speech is not so far, in its cultural roots and spirit, from the lofty words of Pope Benedict XVI which I had the privilege of hearing at the audience in conclusion to the Congress for the fifth centenary of the Vatican Collections (15 December, 2006): "the Church has always supported and promoted the world of art, considering the language of art a privileged vehicle of human and spiritual progress. (...) Finally, one could say that the Vatican Museums can represent an extraordinary opportunity for evangelization because, through the various works exhibited, they offer to visitors an eloquent witness to the continual interweaving that exists between the divine and the human in the life and history of peoples."

In its two-thousand year history, the Church has been able constantly to renew from within the thought patterns that have guided the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel. It has been able to bequeath from one generation to another the gestures, ideas and values of art. By making the remembrance of the past come alive in the present, it has been able to impress upon the present (of every age) its own recognizable imprint. It has been able to re-think art and liturgy in function to each other, as stated in the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II. It has been able to inspire,

conserve and pass down works essential to the development of the mental horizon and life of modernity. It has been able (I quote from a letter of Cardinal Gasparri, 1923) “to impress upon its material dowry a reflection of its own spiritual beauty;” and it has to be able to submit this message not to the learned, not to specialists, but to the multitude of the faithful, transmitting to them an idea of art that recovers not only historical memory, but also the living experience of the human person in his integrity. This is a lofty and bold mission, and concerns not so much the stewardship of the past as the construction of the future, the necessary care of the generations to come. I wish the Pontifical Commission the ability to do this with ever greater richness and intensity: for the faithful but also for non-Christians, to give to the citizens of the world, consistent with the history of the Church and the Papacy, a lofty witness of civilisation.

Short bibliography. A good summary of pontifical legislation on cultural heritage (including the main sources) is provided by L. Wolf, *Kirche und Denkmalschutz. Die päpstliche Gesetzgebung zum Schutz der Kulturgüter bis zum Untergang des Kirchenstaates im Jahr 1870*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2003. On the beginning of the practice of collecting antiquities, see especially K. W. Christian, *Empire without End. Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350-1527*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2010. On Cardinal Neri Corsini’s role in both Florence and Rome, see E. Kieven, «*Trattandosi illustrar la patria*». *Neri Corsini, il «Museo Fiorentino» e la fondazione dei Musei Capitolini*, in “*Rivista storica del Lazio*”, VI, 1998, nr. 9. pp. 135-144. For the years around Pius VII: O. Rossi Pinelli, *Carlo Fea e il Chirografo del 1802: cronaca, giudiziaria e non, delle prime battaglie per la tutela delle Belle Arti*, in *Ricerche di storia dell’arte*, nr. 8, 1978-79, pp. 27-41; *Lo studio delle arti e il genio dell’Europa. A.C. Quatremère de Quincy, Pio VII Chiaramonti*, a cura di M. Scolaro, Bologna, Nuova Alfa, 1989; V. Curzi, *Bene culturale e pubblica utilità. Politiche di tutela a Roma tra Ancien Régime e Restaurazione*, Bologna 2004. For the context of my quotation from the *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, I take the liberty to refer to my *Iconografia dell’arte italiana, 1100-1500 : una linea*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005, pp. 49-59 (English: *The Iconography of Italian Art 1100-1500: an Approach*, in : P. Burke, ed., *History of Italian Art* , Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994, II, pp. 118-259, esp. pp. 164-178).

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