

OPENING CEREMONY OF ART IMPACT 4 HEALTH AND SDGs EXHIBIT

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Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

&

Security Task Force of the Vatican Commission on Covid-19

10 minutes

Esteemed Organizers,

Revered Excellencies,

Prestigious Speakers,

Dear Friends,

I wish to convey you the most heartfelt greetings from Cardinal Turkson, Prefect of the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*. His Eminence asked me to assure you all of his deepest sentiments of esteem and gratitude.

I have been asked to provide an insight of the importance to invest in and implement integral human development, for all people, for all the dimensions of each person to reach SDGs. I am very honored by your interest in knowing the holistic vision, approaches and best strategies that our *Dicastery* fosters towards the implementation of SDGs through art and culture, and how effective multisectoral and multidisciplinary approaches can be implemented at the worldwide level. How can each human being have the possibility to participate/contribute to the common good and solidarity processes to create holistic vision and implementation of SDGs?

To reply to this question, we are forced to establish the main condition for this exploration being possible and this is dialogue. I am aware that this invocation is very often abused and I must confess that the word “dialogue” is *per sé* problematic, even scary maybe. When find the Greek syllable “διά” at the beginning of a word we have to recall that normally this indicates the maximum distance between two things. Let’s have only three examples:

- Diameter from “διάμετρος” which indicates the longest line passing from side to side through the centre of a body or figure, especially a circle or sphere;
- Devil, “Diavolo” in Italian which comes from “διάβολος” to indicate the one who divides, accuses, defames, for our purpose the greatest distance between a human beings and God; finally
- Dialogue, from “διάλογος”, a discussion more or less in agreement or that aims at an understanding but starting by different if not opposite points of view.

In Socratic philosophy, dialogue is a tool which, through interrogations between two or more interlocutors, aims at correcting an initial error in order to arrive at a shared truth, which is to be always questioned. As we know, this is quite the opposite of the sophistical dialogue aiming at misleading the others (today we would use the categories of “propaganda” or “fake news”) or any other means we can use to impose our vision upon others. An authentic dialogue

requires the exact opposite attitude to the one we normally use, that is, to start from the prejudice of being on the side of reason. The best attitude to keep when we meet someone is to start by the opposite (and unnatural kind) of prejudice, assuming the other has something more or better to say in respect to me! This is a proper expression of love, of universal fraternity, as Pope Francis says in his letter encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Indeed, love or *caritas* is the active love for one's neighbor which is expressed above all through works of altruism and mercy, especially in the *polis*, in the cities. Caritas rejoices the presence of the others, listen attentively to others, share the others' joys and sorrows.

Love is not merely eros, or interpersonal friendship. It is also social or political. Doesn't a high vision of love without charity, without SDGs implementation risk making us abstract if not hypocritical? Let me move on to describe how the perception of development understood in a holistic sense can contribute to the artistic dimension also, cross-cutting all the dimensions of love.

Allow me just an example, a short reflection on the "Canto V" and "Canto XXVI" of the "Inferno" of "La Divina Commedia", by Dante Alighieri. The poet lived in times well away from secular societies, when the presence of God and faith informed the life of every person. Many of *Inferno's* moments of spectacular imagery and symbolic power serve also to illuminate one of Dante's major themes: the perfection of God's justice. Dante's narration cannot but follow strict doctrinal Christian values. But the *polis* dimension of love is very deep, till the point of making Dante's poetry also a form of universal fraternity for example thorough the denunciation of the political laceration suffered by medieval Italy and the invocation of a homeland that is both earthly and ultra-earthly; Dante's point is that as civic beings, we are responsible not only for our actions, but also for their results. Many people he presents in hell were men and women of prestige and/or power, people in a position to influence others either directly or by example, and in one way or another they all failed. The suffering, the violence, the anarchy of hell are a result of their failure to act up to their responsibilities or their outright abuse of those responsibilities. Selfishness, greed for money, power, or pleasure, is the basis of the injustice that reigns in hell, as charity is the basis of the justice that operates in heaven. Can we can imagine Dante as a supporter of SDGs of that time?

Before that and without offering improper comparisons, in poetry love begins with the personal nuances of the encounter of the other. In the inferno, Dante builds a great deal of tension between the objective impersonality of God's justice and the character Dante's human sympathy for the souls that he sees around him.

We can see that in the famous *Canto V*: here the lustful are carried away by an incessant storm, which symbolizes the strength of sexual passion which they could not resist in life.

As said, Dante has an intense relationship with the dimension of sin and cannot but condemn Paolo and Francesca, the two main characters of that section of the hell, in-laws who have indulged in lustful passions. From an artistic point of view his intention is even to condemn literature that celebrates sensual and un-spiritualized love. But listen to the words which the Supreme Poet uses when Francesca describes her sin:

- *Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende prese costui de la bella persona che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende* (Love, which soon seizes on a well-born heart, seized him for that fair body's sake, whereof I was deprived; and still the way offends me).
- *Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona, mi prese del costui piacer sì forte, che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona* (love, which absolves from loving none that's loved, seized me so strongly for his love of me, that, as you see, it doesn't not leave me yet).
- *Amor condusse noi ad una morte: Caina attende chi a vita ci spense* (*love to a death in common led us on; Cain's ice awaits who quenched our life*).

While one was saying this, Dante writes, the other spirit so sorely wept, that out of sympathy he swooned away as though about to die, and fell as falls a body that is dead! Can you see the reason for that? The poet is not a repressor of sinners, he feels the full weight of his own weaknesses to the point that he could be said to have written the entire poem because of a carnal obsession, that is to meet once again Beatrice's eyes and sublimate (Freud would say) a sinful passion. Same for the sin of pride, eternally engraved in the figure of Ulysses in Canto XXVI, again in the Inferno. What do you see if not Dante himself in the formidable and astute Ulysses who, having returned to his home after a decade of war under the walls of Troy and a decade of amazing adventures for the Mediterranean Sea, persecuted by Poseidon, leaves again and abandons his family to cross the Pillars of Hercules and know the unknowable? What brings Ulysses through the unknown sea of the world without people is not perhaps the same challenge that Dante poses to God by giving birth to the most sublime art work of Christianity and maybe universal poetry? Does he not feel trembling at perceiving himself a new evangelist? Does this vibration come from the fear of divine punishment or from the tremendous pleasure of being the greatest poet of all time?

Precisely, in an holistic way, Dante Alighieri's poetry combines the many dimensions of love that we have explored supremely: the erotic attraction for Beatrice that pushes him on a journey through the three ultra-worldly realms; the friendship that he finds again in Virgilio, master and brother who guides him in hell and in purgatory, before returning him to his beloved woman; Finally, la *Divina Commedia* is also *caritas*, the supreme artistic gift that the poet gives to humanity, whose music echoes in the universe.

The beauty and the merit of art is not that it is simply an expression of human skill and creativity which brings joy and inspiration – it is also a holistic endeavor that connects body and soul, humans to each other, humanity to the divine, and earth to the universe. In the words of Clive S. Lewis, art “has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.” In the same way, integral human development is not only an exercise of economic restructuring, but it is rather a pursuit of connecting humanity to itself, to the earth, and to the universe. In building infrastructures and systems that sustain survival, integral human development also insists on “those things which give value to survival,” such as art and culture. The SDGs embody this vision for a society that both sustains and inspires its members, and the *Catholic Church* works tirelessly to pursue these aims.

In conclusion, despite the fact that the *Catholic Church* has engendered some of the most compelling art throughout the centuries, the *Church*’s commitment to creativity lies not only in its cultural and artistic output, but also in its pursuits to heal the world’s ills – particularly the virus of , injustice, indifference and racism that rage more fervently than even COVID-19. In his recent catechesis series, Pope Francis reasserted the *Church*’s commitment to the *preferential option for the poor*, which is central to the Gospel – that is, the need for all our actions to prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable. The SDGs are a prime example of an efficacious strategy for this goal. For Christians, love is what animates all activity to bring justice for the poor. Love motivates us to care for our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, our mother earth included. Love moves us forward universal fraternity, in our personal and political relationship. Love is both the origin and the destination, and creativity is the vehicle. Actually, love is creative. To this end, the Pope instituted the *COVID-19 Commission*, with the explicit hope that the pandemic would bring an exclusive opportunity to imagine new structures and creatively pursue their fulfillment. Our work, particularly in the task force on security, which I coordinate, revolves around developing unexpected partnerships and pursuing dreams of global peace, justice, and solidarity, through creativity. Pope Francis has encouraged us to use this time for inventing and creativity: «*Take care of the now, for the sake of tomorrow. Always creatively, with a simple creativity, capable of inventing something new each day*». Indeed, without creativity – without culture, without art – we cannot imagine the fulfillment of the SDGs; we would be hopelessly stuck in the lockdown of our unjust, violent systems. Again, the Pope says: «*We have to respond to our confinement with all our creativity. We can either get depressed and alienated — through media that can take us out of our reality — or we can get creative. At home we need an apostolic creativity... with a yearning to express our faith in community*». This apostolic creativity drives us towards solidarity, towards the common good, towards a new world.