

Pope calls for new sacred art

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Catholic Church must not only preserve its treasure of ancient books, art and music; it must support the creation of new sacred art reflecting modern culture, Pope John Paul II said.

"When the church calls on art to take up its mission, it does so not only for aesthetic reasons, but to obey the logic of revelation and the incarnation," the pope said Oct. 12 during the first meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Goods of the Church.

Beauty is not a secondary attribute of God, but is part of God's identity, the pope said.

The highest mission of art is to reflect the beauty of God in painting, sculpture, architecture or music so that it is visible to the human eye and draws the human spirit closer to the invisible beauty of God, he said.

The pontifical commission was founded by Pope John Paul in 1993 to take the place of the former Pontifical Commission for the Preservation of the Artistic and Historic Patrimony of the Church.

Its responsibility extends to and its members represent the fields of art, architecture and music as well as a variety of church museums, libraries and archives.

"The unanimous dedication of such an army of workers cannot fail to give rise to a rebirth of artistic culture, illuminating the church and the world with a renewed fervor for thoughts and works which illustrate the values of beauty and truth," the pope told the commission members.

The relationship between faith and art or faith and culture has been close throughout history, the pope said. Art and literature have drawn their inspiration from religious themes or sentiments and have, in turn, passed inspiration on to others.

Pope John Paul said he changed the name of the commission because the word "preservation" implied the group was concerned only with what was produced in the past.

"If one wants to insert cultural goods in the dynamism of the new evangelization, one cannot be limited to maintaining and protecting them," he said. New artistic and cultural expressions of the faith must be produced for new generations of believers.

The church, he said, is not looking to embellish its buildings or liturgies, but to offer people "an experience of God, who draws to himself everything that is good, beautiful and true."