

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL OF CULTURE

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR SPORT AT THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

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“Sport is not only a form of entertainment, but also — and I would say above all — a tool to communicate values which promote the good of the human person and contribute to building a more peaceful and fraternal society.”

Pope Francis, Speech on the occasion of the opening of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil

Following upon the words of Pope Francis during the general audience of the 5th of June 2013, in which the Holy Father spoke about the great evils which plague the World of Sports, the Pontifical Council of Culture, through its Department for Culture & Sport, has committed itself to keep alive the spirit that came to be with the initiative *“100 metres race in Faith”*, inviting international guests to join in for a high profile international seminar dedicated to the discussion of the ethics and faith within sports.

Side by side with the John Paul II Foundation for Sport, the Department has organized a three-day long event to discuss the theme *“Sport at the Service of Humanity: from the «Culture of the Result» to the «Culture of Meeting»”*. The theme recalls the words of Pope Francis, which inspired the creation of the seminar itself and posed as focal point for discussing the now forgotten fundamental values of sport: education, respect and formation of the individual in body and spirit, all put aside in favor of a culture which aims to profit at all costs.

The event was attended by representatives of several international organisations which work in the sport environment: FOCUS Varsity Catholic, which works with young athletes in United States colleges; Catholic Athletes for Christ, whose commitment in giving high profile athletes an easy access to Catholic religious services and spiritual assistance within the National Football League and the Major Baseball League has made this association an institution among overseas sportsmen and sportswomen; Slovenský Orol, active in the Slovak Republic in spreading the sport practice to heal the spirit over the body. The presence of Italian associations and groups has been overwhelming as a great number of delegates from several sections of the Italian Sports Center (CSI) spread throughout the country join the seminar, alongside researchers from the Italian Society of Sport History (SISS), the Compagnia delle Opere (CDO), and Damiano Tommasi, President of the Italian Soccer Players Association (AIC). A small but significant number of religious orders closely related to the care for spiritual growth through the practice of sport were also present, as well as the National Office for Free Time, Tourism and Sport Pastoral of the Italian Episcopal

Conference, whose active participation in the organization of the event has been of cardinal importance.

The seminar started with the Interreligious Game for Peace, the 1st of September, event which was attended by all participants of the seminar. All together, they joined Pope Francis in giving their support to a sport meant to be enlightening and open to everyone.

The following day, the participants gathered at the Pontifical Council of Culture after attending the celebration of the Holy Mass within the Catacombs of Ss. Marcellinus and Peter, where they had the chance to pray before the Cubicle of the Athletes. The site hosts Christianity's most ancient representation of an athlete, a unique rock painting dated around the IV Century. The discussion has founded the basis for the regeneration of the World of Sports not only under a Catholic or Christian point of view, but under a more openly spiritual, benevolent toward the athlete as well as toward the spectator, and devoted to values such as the meeting, good entertainment, fraternity and fair play. The debate started early in the morning and was halted only late in the evening, engaging also those guests who joined the seminar only as observers.

The last day of the seminar saw the group once more gathered in prayer in the Lithuanian Chapel of St. Peter's Basilica. Later that morning, after paying their respects to the tomb of Saint John Paul II, the participants joined Pope Francis in his General Audience. The Holy Father's speech on how the Church is mother to all Christians was recognized by all as a worthy conclusion for the Seminar, even though it was only momentary.

The delegates decided to meet again the next year, in 2015, with the goal to not only organize a new conference to continue their work in renewing the World of Sports, but to gather even more participants to make the international seminar even bigger.