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# Vatican Seeks Faith-Culture Dialogue With US

## Interview With Max Bonilla of the Camartis Institute

By Genevieve Pollock

ATLANTA, DEC. 10, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Pontifical Council for Culture is looking to collaborate with organizations in the United States in the promotion of initiatives aimed at furthering the dialogue between faith and culture.

ZENIT interviewed Max Bonilla, spokesman for the series, "From Sea to Shining Sea: Faith and Culture in North America," and the president of the Camartis Institute, which launched the project with the Vatican dicastery, about the scope of this series.

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the pontifical council, noted in a video interview, "The United States is a very diverse place with various cultural and social differences, which create an important perspective, one that we would like to engage on the part of the Pontifical Council for Culture, on the part of the Holy See, and, indeed, on the part of Christianity around the world."

Monsignor Melchor Sánchez de Toca y Alameda, undersecretary of the dicastery, affirmed: "The influence of cultural tendencies in the United States has a ripple effect throughout the world. That's why it's so important for the Church to begin a new dialogue with culture in the United States."

The pontifical council and the Camartis Institute have issued a call for proposals for a variety of events and projects to promote this dialogue.

In this interview with ZENIT, Bonilla explains more about the series, the first event which will take place in Hollywood next March, and the importance of engaging the culture in a dialogue with faith.

ZENIT: Why is the Vatican focusing on the United States in particular for these initiatives?

Bonilla: For two reasons, mainly. The Holy See is well aware that the cultural influence the United States exerts on the rest of the world is very significant.

To enter into a dialogue with the leaders that influence culture so as to understand them more deeply, to pose important questions that challenge assumptions and ultimately that help those cultural influences serve the purpose of improving society, these are objectives that are important to the Holy See.

Regardless of the faith or lack of faith among those who shape culture, the Holy See would hope that all those involved in shaping culture would have a desire to make the world a better place. The influence of the United States in world culture makes this initiative a very important one.

The second reason for such interest is that the Holy See has also a real concern for the well-being of the people within the United States and would like to challenge the cultural assumptions that are currently in place to help make our society a better one.

This is not to say that the Holy See believes all is bad. On the contrary, it sees many cultural initiatives that promote the good of the person and respect the world.

But it sees areas that it seeks to understand more deeply and about which it may have questions that might be appreciated by those who shape culture. The dialogues that we plan to organize will provide a forum for such conversations.

ZENIT: What kind of initiatives do you have in mind as venues for this dialogue between faith and culture?

Bonilla: The initiatives may be of many different types including conferences, film festivals, museum presentations, workshops, panel discussions, art exhibits, book fairs, scientific panels, think tanks, blog discussions, theater experiments, or any other venue that provides a suitable forum to engage the type of question that we might want to consider at that time.

It all depends on what can creatively be conceived as a good channel to engage the topic.

In them our plan is that representatives of the culture and of the faith may be able to enter into a respectful and truly honest dialogue about what is most important to them.

ZENIT: In what areas do you see the most potential for this type of dialogue?

Bonilla: We are interested in the areas that most shape society.

In this regard, the art that shapes pop culture is probably one of the most important. Other areas, of course, are greatly influential, such as other forms of art, politics, law, science, our understanding of democracy, our means of social communication, etc.

We are not ruling anything out at this point, but are inviting institutions of any type that may wish to engage in this type of initiative to visit our Web site and make a proposal. They can do this by going to [www.intelligentdialogue.org](http://www.intelligentdialogue.org).

The deadline to receive proposals is mid January.

ZENIT: Could you tell us a bit more about the first event in the series, scheduled to take place in Hollywood next March?

Bonilla: Since film is one of the most influential areas in American culture, an influence that can easily be felt around the world, we have begun conversations with a group of filmmakers in Hollywood to organize an event there next March.

The conversations are currently ongoing and while we have not finalized any of the details, we hope it will provide a welcomed forum for a discussion on topics of interest not simply to those who produce faith-based films, but rather, to those concerned about making films that help strengthen society by making this world a better place.

There are many films that beyond selling tickets also seek to leave an imprint on society, helping to shape it positively in some way. Many of those films are not of a religious nature in a traditional

sense, but tend to be philosophical more than religious. Some take exception to certain aspects of Christianity or traditional religion.

What they seem to have in common is that their directors and producers have desired to make a contribution for the good of the human person and the world in which we live.

We welcome and encourage a respectful and honest conversation with them.

After all, we believe that those who truly seek to improve society also desire for more sincere communication among peoples. The event in Hollywood is an example of such a conviction.

ZENIT: What are you hoping for as a result of this series?

Bonilla: "From Sea to Shining Sea: Faith and Culture in North America" hopes to be a forum for exchanges beyond what we have had in the past.

Moving beyond stereotypes that affect both sides of the dialogue between faith and culture, the series hopes to engage those who seriously want to discuss the question in an environment that is respectful, productive and truly honest.

If at the end of the series, a greater understanding has developed among people, we will be able to conclude that the series was a clear success.

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