



Remarks of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education at the Press Conference for the Pavilion of the Holy See at the Venice Biennale 2026 (27 April 2026)

“We must return to serving the rhythm of life, the harmony of creation and healing its wounds.”¹ These programmatic words of Pope Leo XIV serve as a compass for the design of the pavilion of the Holy See at the Venice Biennale, which has chosen as its protagonist a figure who could appear distant, being a mystic of the twelfth century, but who possesses a still rather contemporary voice, capable of illuminating the questions and paths of the present. This mystic figure will, in fact, come to our aid as we study our own times, if we search within her voice for a profundity capable of suggesting new, wise responses.

After all, this was itself the method of Hildegard of Bingen, who believed in the reconnection of the bonds that unite human beings and society, and who knew that the transformation of the world entails also a spiritual evolution, in which the worlds of the arts and of the sciences are active participants. For this reason, Hildegard was a nun as well as a composer and singer. For this reason, as well, she united the study of the sacred texts to the visual work of the art of painting. For this reason, finally, she was both a prophetic teacher and preacher and, at the same time, a noted healer, expert in the sciences of medicine and of biology.

Our times need new teachers, and the polyphonic profile of Hildegard can be for us an antidote to the vexations of monody, inspiring us to develop new visions. Our times need instructive prophets, capable of overcoming the blind chains of the dominant language and expressing what Hildegard called the *lingua ignota*, that is, an imaginative force that spurs on more inclusive social paradigms and that motivates communal and fraternal practices.

When he proclaimed her a Doctor of the Church, Pope Benedict XVI recalled Saint Hildegard’s contribution to civilization, affirming that the entire creation is an act of love and that “through the whole range of creatures, divine love flows as a river.”² Without this impulse of love, the world is destined to dry up or to be reduced to ashes. We therefore understand how “her message appears extraordinarily timely in today’s world.”³

I recall with delight my first conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist about the possibility of his collaborating with the Holy See in curating the pavilion. Since then, he has told me that he had often desired to work on the legacy of Hildegard, a fact that strongly encouraged us to take this direction. I thank him and Ben Vickers for their intelligence and commitment lavished upon this magnificent project, that, we are convinced, will become a potent catalyst of cultural fermentation. The brilliant team of Soundwalk Collective has been working alongside these two curators in the artistic design of the pavilion, and we express our gratitude also to them.

As we will hear shortly, there are in fact twenty-four artists participating in the project, of twelve different nationalities, and I would like to express to each one of them my heartfelt joy and honor in having this opportunity to build together an artistic proposal that is so powerful, empathetic, and necessary.

In addition, we would like to thank Sr. Maura Zátanyi O.S.B., St. Hildegard Academy, and the Benedictine nuns of the Abbey of Saint Hildegard in Eibingen for their support and for their valuable advice. We would also like to thank the Salesian University Institute of Venice (IUSVE) and Ca’ Foscari University of Venice for their collaboration.

As you might remember, the previous pavilion of the Holy See dedicated to the arts, in 2024, was located in a women’s prison on Giudecca Island. The pavilion being introduced today has instead two locations, in two distinctive neighborhoods of Venice: an outdoor garden in Cannaregio and the Complex of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice in Castello. I would therefore like to express my appreciation to the Venetian Province of the

¹ <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2026/documents/20260411-rosario-pace.html>

² https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_ildegarda-bingen.html

³ https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_ildegarda-bingen.html

Discalced Carmelites for having given us the opportunity to install a section of the pavilion of the Holy See in their marvelous, spiritual garden, which will be a beautiful discovery for all who visit. And the same to the Comune di Venezia, for their collaboration that permits us to pursue the project in Castello.

Something new about this pavilion of the arts, in fact, is that it does not replace but rather continues the 2025 open construction dedicated to architecture. In the Complex of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, visitors will find still in progress (or in its “second life,” as Hans Ulrich Obrist says) “Opera Aperta,” the project begun by Tatiana Bilbao Estudio and MAIO Architects, under the direction of Marina Otero Verzier and Giovanna Zabotti. A heartfelt thanks, therefore, to the international production team involved in this initiative, including those led by the Soundwalk Collective, represented by Elena Origliasso and Tessa Nijdam, and the executive production of Nicola Picco, Raul Betti, and Mattia Marzaro. We are also immensely honored by the graphical work of the Studio Irma Boom and the communications work of the agency Bolton & Quinn.

Finally, a special thanks to the two Foundations, Casa dello Spirito e delle Arti and Gravissimum Educationis, which have formed the 2026 Committee that promotes this production, specifically, Mons. Lech Piechota, Dr. Cristiano Grisogoni, and Mons. Davide Milani. A heartfelt thanks to the Patriarchate of Venice and the Patriarch himself, His Excellency Mons. Francesco Moraglia. Finally, and with particular emphasis, I would like to thank the sponsors who generously sustain this initiative. We are in debt to their vision as well. I gladly highlight the main partner Intesa Sanpaolo, represented here by its Executive Director Art, Culture and Historic Heritage, Mr. Michele Coppola. I would like to name also the Grupo DST, particularly Mr. José Teixeira, who is represented here by Ms. Teresa Teixeira; and the Heni group, particularly Mr. Joseph Hage.

I would like to recall that the theme of the pavilion, “The Ear is the Eye of the Soul,” is inspired by Hildegard of Bingen but was formulated by Alexander Kluge, who worked passionately on this project until his sudden passing this past March 25. We therefore gratefully dedicate the joy and the dream of this project to his memory and to that of the General Curator Koyo Kouoh, who passed away last year.

The Dicastery for Culture and Education is the organizer of the pavilion that represents the Holy See, and I would like to thank the entire team: the Secretaries, their Excellencies Mons. Paul Tighe and Mons. Carlo Maria Polvani; and all the internal working groups, especially Angélica Ferreira, Chiara Adinolfi, Caterina Sansone, Asia Fiorentino e Manuel Rainha.

Our most earnest hope is that this project might serve, as desired by Pope Leo XIV, to unite the moral and spiritual energies of our times around the act of listening, precisely because “The Ear is the Eye of the Soul.”
José Tolentino Card. de Mendonça