



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 3 December 2010

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers of the Episcopate,
Distinguished Professors and Collaborators,*

I receive you with joy at the end of your annual Plenary Session. First of all, Your Eminence, I wish to express my warm thanks to you for the words of tribute that you have addressed to me, on behalf of all, in your capacity as President of the International Theological Commission. The work of this eighth *quinquennium* of the Commission, as you recalled, confronts the following weighty topics: theology and its methodology; the question of the one God in relation to the three monotheistic religions; the integration of the Church's social doctrine in the broader context of Christian doctrine.

“The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5: 14-15). How can we fail to feel that this beautiful reaction of Paul's to the encounter with Christ is not also our own. This very experience is at the root of the three themes into which you have delved during the Plenary Session just concluded.

Whoever has discovered in Christ the love of God, instilled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, wishes to know better the One who loves him and whom he loves. Knowledge and love sustain one another in turn. As the Fathers of the Church said, whoever loves God is impelled to become, in a certain sense, a theologian, one who speaks with God, who thinks of God and seeks to think with God; whereas the professional work of a theologian is, for some, a vocation of great responsibility before Christ, before the Church. To be able to study God himself professionally and to be able to speak of him – *contemplari et contemplata docere* (St Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 35,

q. 1, art. 3, qc. 1, arg. 3) – is a great privilege.

Your reflection on the Christian vision of God will be a precious contribution both to the life of the faithful and to our dialogue with believers of other religions and with non-believers. In fact, the word “theo-logy” itself reveals the communicative aspect of your work – in theology we seek – through the “logos”, to communicate what “we have seen and heard” (1 Jn 1:3). But we know well that the word “logos” has a very broad meaning that also comprehends the sense of “ratio”, “reason”. And this leads us to a second point of great importance. We can think of God and communicate what we have thought because he has endowed us with a reason in harmony with his nature. It is not by chance that John begins with the affirmation, “In the beginning there was the *Logos*... and the *Logos* was God” (cf. Jn 1:1). To accept the *Logos* – this Divine thought – is ultimately to contribute to peace on earth. Indeed, to know God in his true nature is also the certain way to secure peace. A god that is not seen as the font of forgiveness, of justice and of love, cannot be a light on the path of peace.

Since man always strives to connect the different branches of his knowledge, the knowledge of God is also organized in a systematic way. Yet no theological system can subsist unless it is permeated by love of the divine “Object”, which in theology must necessarily be the “Subject” that speaks to us and with whom we are in a relationship of love. Thus, theology must always be fed by dialogue with the divine *Logos*, Creator and Redeemer. Moreover, theology is not theology unless it is integrated into the life and reflection of the Church through time and space. Yes, it is true that in order to be scientific theology must argue rationally, but it must also be faithful to the nature of ecclesial faith: centred on God, rooted in prayer, in a communion with the other disciples of the Lord guaranteed by communion with the Successor of Peter and with the whole Episcopal College.

The consequence of this acceptance and transmission of the *Logos* is also the fact that the very rationality of theology helps to purify human reason, liberating it from certain prejudices and ideas that can exercise a strong influence on the thought of every age. It should, moreover, be pointed out that theology always lives in a continuity and in a dialogue with the believers and theologians who came before us; since ecclesial communion is diachronic, so also is theology. The theologian never begins from zero, but considers as teachers the Fathers and theologians of the whole Christian tradition. Rooted in Sacred Scripture, read with the Fathers and Doctors, theology can be the school of sanctity, as witnessed by Bl. John Henry Newman. To discover the permanent value of the riches passed down from the past is no small contribution of theology to the symphony of the sciences.

Christ died for us all, though we do not not all know and accept it. Having received the love of God, how can we not love those for whom Christ gave his own life? “[H]e laid down his life for us; we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn 3:16).

All this leads us to serve others in the name of Christ; in other words the social commitment of Christians derives necessarily from the manifestation of divine love. Contemplation of the revealed God and charity for our neighbour cannot be separated, even if they live according to different charisms. In a world that often values the many gifts of Christianity – such as, for example, the idea of democratic equality – without understanding the root of its own ideals, it is particularly important to show that the fruits die if the roots are severed from the tree. Indeed, there is no justice without truth, and justice does not develop fully if its horizon is limited to the material world. For us Christians, social solidarity always has a prospect of eternity.

Dear theologian friends, our meeting today shows in a precious and special way the indispensable unity that must reign between theologians and Pastors. It is impossible to be theologians in solitude: theologians need the ministry of the Church's Pastors, just as the Magisterium needs theologians who fulfil their service totally, with all the asceticism that this implies. Through your Commission, therefore, I wish to thank all theologians and encourage them to have faith in the great value of their commitment. In offering you my best wishes for your work, I impart my Blessing to you with affection.

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