



The Holy See

CONFERRAL OF THE FIRST "RATZINGER PRIZE"

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 30 June 2011

*Your Eminences, Venerable Confreres,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like first of all to express my joy and gratitude for the public recognition the award of this theological prize the Foundation called after me gives to the life work of two great theologians and for the sign of encouragement it offers to a theologian of the younger generation to continue on the way on which he has set out.

A common path has bound me to Professor González de Cardedal for many decades. We both began with St Bonaventure and we let him indicate our direction. In his long life as a scholar, Prof. González has treated all the great topics of theology and not merely in reflecting or speaking of them in theory, but always by confronting them with the drama of our time, living and also suffering in a very personal manner the great questions of faith and with them the questions of the men and women of today. Thus the word of faith is not something of the past; in his works it becomes truly contemporary.

Prof. Simonetti has approached the world of the Fathers in a new way, showing us with accuracy and care, what the Fathers say from the historical viewpoint; they become our contemporaries who speak to us.

Fr Maximilian Heim, recently elected Abbot of the Monastery of Heiligenkreuz near Vienna, a

monastery with a rich tradition, has assumed with this office the task of bringing a great history up to date and of leading it towards the future. In this task, I hope that his work on my theology, which he has given us, may be useful to him. I also hope that the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz will further develop in our time the monastic theology that has always accompanied university theology, thereby forming Western theology as a whole.

However, it is not my duty here to present a *laudatio* of the prizewinners, which Cardinal Ruini has already done competently. Yet the conferral of the Prize can perhaps afford us an opportunity to concentrate for a moment on the fundamental question of what “theology” actually is. Tradition tells us that theology is the science of faith. Here however the question immediately arises: is this truly possible? Or is it not in itself a contradiction? Is not science perhaps the opposite of faith? Does not faith cease to be faith when it becomes science? And does not science cease to be science when it is ordered or even subordinated to faith?

These questions, which already posed a serious problem to medieval theology have become even more impelling with the modern concept of science and at first sight even seem to have no solution. We understand theology in this way because, in the modern epoch, it has withdrawn from vast sectors, primarily to the area of history, in order to demonstrate here its serious scientific character. It must be recognized with gratitude that this has led to the achievement of grandiose works and the Christian message has received a new light which is able to reveal its profound riches. Yet, if theology is totally relegated to the past, today it leaves faith in darkness.

Then, at a second stage, the focus was on practice, to show how theology, in connection with psychology and sociology, could be a useful branch of knowledge that provides concrete instructions for life. This is important too, but if faith, the foundation of theology, were not at the same time to become the object of thought, if praxis were to refer only to itself or to exist only by what it borrows from the human sciences, it would then be emptied and deprived of a foundation.

These approaches are therefore insufficient. However useful and important they may be, they would become an expedient if the true question were to remain unanswered. Briefly: is what we believe in true or not? The question about the truth is at stake in theology: its ultimate and essential foundation. Here a saying of Tertullian can help us take a step forward. He wrote: “Christ has surnamed himself Truth, not Custom” – *non consuetudo sed veritas* (*On the Veiling of Virgins*, 1, 1).

Christian Gnülka has shown that the concept of “custom” can mean the pagan religions which, in accordance with their nature, were not faith but rather “custom”: one does what one has always done. Traditional forms of worship are observed and it is hoped thereby to maintain the correct relationship with the mysterious environment of the divine. The revolutionary aspect of Christianity in antiquity was precisely its break with “custom” out of love for the truth. Here Tertullian was speaking above all on the basis of the Gospel according to St John, in which is found the other

fundamental interpretation of the Christian faith which is expressed in the designation of Christ as *Logos*.

If Christ is the *Logos*, the truth, human beings must respond to him with their own *logos*, with their reason. To arrive at Christ they must be on the path of the truth. They must open themselves to the *Logos*, to creative Reason, from which their own reason derives and to which it refers them. From this it may be understood that Christian faith, by its very nature, must bring theology into being, must question itself on the reasonableness of faith – although of course the concept of reason and that of science embrace many dimensions — and in this way the concrete nature of the connection between faith and reason must be fathomed ever anew.

Although in Christianity the fundamental connection between *Logos*, truth and faith is clearly presented, the concrete form of this connection has given rise and is giving rise to ever new questions. It is clear that today, this question which occupied and will occupy every generation, can be addressed neither in detail nor broadly. I would like to try to make one small suggestion.

In the prologue to his Commentary on the *Sentences* St Bonaventure spoke of a double use of reason. He spoke of a use that is irreconcilable with the nature of faith and a use that instead belongs to the very nature of faith. *Violentia rationis* therefore exists, the despotism of reason which makes itself the supreme and ultimate judge of all things. This kind of use of reason is certainly impossible in the context of faith. What did Bonaventure mean by this?

A sentence of Psalm 95[94]:9 can reveal its meaning to us. Here God says to his people: “In the wilderness, when your fathers tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work” (vv. 8-9). A reference is made here to a dual encounter with God: they have “seen”. Yet for them this did not suffice. They “tested” God. They wished to subject him to experimentation. He was, so to speak, subjected to an interrogatory and had to submit to an experimental procedure of testing. This use of reason in the modern age has reached the climax of its development in the context of the natural sciences.

Experimental reason largely appears today as the sole form of rationality that is declared scientific. What cannot be scientifically proven or disproven falls outside the scientific sphere. Within this framework great works have been achieved as we know; that this is right and necessary in the context of the knowledge of nature and of its laws no one would seriously question. Yet there is a limit to such a use of reason: God is not an object for human experimentation. He is the Subject and manifests himself solely in the relationship of person to person: this is part of the person’s essence.

In this perspective Bonaventure mentions a second use of reason that applies to the context of the “personal”, to the important questions implied by actually being human. Love desires to know better what it loves. Love, true love, does not make people blind but seeing. The thirst for

knowledge, for a true knowledge of the other person, is part of love. For this reason the Fathers of the Church found the precursors and forerunners of Christianity — outside the world of the revelation of Israel — not in the context of formal religion, but on the contrary in human beings in search of God, in search of the truth, in the “philosophers”: in people who were thirsting for truth and were therefore on their way towards God.

When this type of reason is not used, the great questions of humanity fall outside the context of reason and are left to irrationality. This is why an authentic theology is so important. Right faith directs reason to open itself to the divine, so that, guided by love for the truth, it may know God more closely. The initiative for this journey is with God, who has placed in human hearts the desire to seek his Face. On the one hand humility, which lets itself be “touched” by God, and on the other, the discipline bound to the order of reason that keeps love from blindness and helps to develop its visual power, are both part of theology.

I am well aware that all this has not provided an answer to the question on the possibility and duty of right theology and that light has been shed only on the greatness of the challenge inherent in the nature of theology. Yet it is this very challenge that we human beings need, because it impels us to open our reason by questioning ourselves on the truth itself, on the Face of God. We are therefore grateful to the prizewinners who have shown in their work that reason, progressing on the path marked out by faith, is not an alienated reason but a reason that corresponds with its most exalted vocation. Many thanks.