



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 14th PUBLIC SESSION
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 28 January 2010*

*Dear Cardinals,
Venerated Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Presidents and Academicians,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am happy to welcome you and meet with you on the occasion of the Public Session of the Pontifical Academies, the culminating moment of their multiple activities during the year. I greet Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Coordinating Council of the [Pontifical Academies](#), and I thank him for the kind words he has addressed to me. I extend my greetings to the Presidents of the Pontifical Academies, to the Academicians and to the Associates present. Today's Public Session, during which the *Pontifical Academies' Prize* was awarded in my name, touches a theme which, in the context of the [Year for Priests](#), takes on particular significance: *The theological formation of the priest*.

Today, the memorial of St Thomas Aquinas, great Doctor of the Church, I wish to offer you various reflections on the goal and specific mission of the meritorious cultural institutions of the Holy See that you are part of, and which can claim a varied and rich tradition of research and engagement in different sectors. In fact, the years 2009-2010, for some of them, are marked by specific anniversaries which constitute yet another reason to give thanks to the Lord. In particular, the Pontifical Roman Academy of Archeology marks its foundation two centuries ago, in 1810, and its promotion to a Pontifical Academy in 1829. The [Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas](#) and the [Pontifical Academy Cultorum Martyrum](#) have celebrated their 130th anniversary, both having been

established in 1879. The International Pontifical Marian Academy has celebrated its 50th year since it was made into a Pontifical Academy. Finally, the [Pontifical Academies of St Thomas Aquinas](#) and of theology marked the 10th anniversary of their institutional renewal which took place in 1999 with the Motu Proprio [Inter munera Academicarum](#), which bears the date of 28 January.

So many occasions, then, to revisit the past, through the attentive reading of the thought and action of the Founders and all those who gave of their best for the progress of these institutions. But a retrospective look at the memory of a glorious past cannot be the only approach to these events, which recall above all the task and the responsibility of the [Pontifical Academies](#) to serve the Church and the Holy See faithfully, updating their rich and diverse commitment which has already produced so many precious results, even in the recent past. In fact, contemporary culture and believers even more continually requires the reflection and action of the Church in the various fields where new problems are emerging, and which also constitute the very sectors in which you work, such as philosophical and theological research; reflection on the figure of the Virgin Mary; the study of history, monuments, of the testimony received as a legacy from the faithful of the first Christian generations, beginning with the Martyrs; the delicate and important dialogue between the Christian faith and artistic creativity, to which I dedicated the meeting with representatives of the world of art and culture in the Sistine Chapel last 21 November. In these delicate areas of research and commitment, you are called to offer a qualified contribution that is competent and impassioned, so that the whole Church, and particularly the Holy See, can avail themselves of the opportunities, different languages and appropriate means to dialogue with contemporary culture, and respond effectively to the questions and challenges that arise in the various fields of knowledge and human experience.

As I have stated several times, today's culture is strongly influenced both by a vision dominated by relativism and subjectivism, as well as by methods and attitudes that are often superficial and even banal, to the detriment of serious research and reflection, and consequently, of dialogue, confrontation and interpersonal communications. Therefore, it seems urgent and necessary to recreate the essential conditions for a real capacity for in depth study and research, in order that we can dialogue reasonably and effectively confront each other on various problems, in the perspective of common growth and a formation that promotes the human being in his wholeness and completeness. The lack of ideal and moral reference points, which particularly penalizes civil coexistence, and above all, the formation of the younger generations, should be met with an ideal and practical proposal of values and truth, of strong reasons for life and hope, which can and should interest everyone, especially the young. Such a commitment should be especially cogent in the area of forming candidates for the ordained ministry, as the [Year for Priests](#) calls for, and as confirmed by your happy decision to dedicate your Annual Public Session to this theme.

One of the Pontifical Academies is named after St Thomas Aquinas, the *Doctor Angelicus et Communis*, an always relevant model to inspire the activity and dialogue of the Pontifical

Academies with the different cultures. In fact, he succeeded in establishing a fruitful confrontation both with the Arab and the Jewish thinking in his time, and while setting store by the Greek philosophical tradition, he produced an extraordinary theological synthesis, fully harmonizing reason and faith. He already left his contemporaries a profound and indelible memory, precisely on account of the extraordinary refinement and acuteness of his intelligence and the greatness and originality of his genius, quite apart from the luminous sanctity of his life. His first biographer, William of Tocco, emphasized the extraordinary and pervasive pedagogical originality of St Thomas, with expressions that could also inspire your activities. He wrote: "Fra Tommaso introduced new articles into his lectures, resolved questions in a new and clearer way with *new* arguments. Consequently, those who heard him teach *new* theses, treating them with *new* methods, could not doubt that God had enlightened him with a *new* light: indeed, could one ever teach or write new opinions if one had not received *new* inspiration from God?" (*Vita Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, in *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis notis historicis et criticis illustrati*, ed. D. Prümmer M.-H. Laurent, Tolosa, s.d., fasc. 2, p. 81).

St Thomas Aquinas' thought and witness suggest that we should study emerging problems with great attention in order to offer appropriate and creative responses. Confident in the possibilities of "human reason", in full fidelity to the immutable *depositum fidei*, we must as the "Doctor Communis" did always draw from the riches of Tradition, in the constant search for "the truth of things". For this, it is necessary that the Pontifical Academies, today more than ever, be vital and lively institutions, able to grasp the questions of society and of cultures, as well as the needs and expectations of the Church, to offer an adequate and valid contribution, and thus promote, with all the energy and means at their disposal, an authentic Christian humanism.

Therefore, as I thank the [Pontifical Academies](#) for their generous dedication and profound commitment, I wish that each one may enrich their individual histories and traditions with new significant projects to carry out their respective missions with new impetus. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, and in invoking upon you and your Institutions the intercession of the Mother of God, Seat of Wisdom, and of St Thomas Aquinas, I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing.