



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE  
THIRD PLENARY SESSION OF THE PONTIFICAL  
ACADEMY OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS**

*To the Participants in the Third Plenary Meeting  
of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas*

1. Dear ordinary members of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas, I am happy to send you this Message on the occasion of your plenary meeting. I cordially greet you, with a special greeting for Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, who presides over the activities of the Pontifical Academies, and with a greeting for the President and Secretary of your own illustrious Academy. I also want to remember the late Mons. Antonio Piolanti, your academy's former President who for many years rendered valuable service to the Church.

With your renewed statutes and honoured by the presence of scholars of international repute, your distinguished Association continues to devote itself fruitfully to the study of the work of St Thomas Aquinas, whom the Church has always insisted on "proposing ... as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology" (*Fides et ratio*, n. 43). At this plenary assembly you have been reflecting on the theme: "*The Dialogue on the Good*", looking at it from the transcendental perspective that closely examines the relationship of the good with being, and for that reason also with God.

2. Continue on this path, beloved and esteemed researchers. Today, alongside the marvellous scientific discoveries and amazing technological breakthroughs, shadows and gaps still darken the horizon of culture and research. We are witnessing some major oversights: forgetfulness of God and of being, forgetfulness of the soul and of human dignity. This generates situations of anxiety to which we must give responses that are full of truth and hope. St Thomas exclaimed with regard to the pagan thinkers who, deprived of the superior light of revelation, were unable to find solutions to the basic problems of the human being: "*Quantam angustiam patiebantur hinc et inde illa*

*praeclara ingenia!*" (What great limitations did such outstanding geniuses suffer now and then!) (ScG, III, 48, n. 2261).

It is necessary first of all to return to metaphysics. In the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, among the present requisites and tasks of philosophy, I pointed out "the need for a philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth" (n. 83). The discourse on the good requires a metaphysical reflection. Truth has its foundation in being and the good has being as its substance. Between being, truth and goodness, Thomas discovered a real and deep circularity.

3. Through the understanding of the good, we can find the solution to the mystery of evil. Thomas dedicated his entire work to reflection on God, and it is in this context that he develops the 16 questions on evil (*De Malo*). Following Augustine, he asks himself: "*Unde malum, unde hoc monstrum?*" (Where does evil come from, where does this monster come from?) In the famous article of his *Summa Theologiae* on the five ways by which the human intelligence reaches the existence of God, Thomas recognizes as the great obstacle to arriving at the conclusion, the reality of evil in the world (cf. q. 1, 2, ob. 3).

Many of our contemporaries ask: If God exists, why does he permit evil? It is necessary to help them understand that evil is the deprivation of the good that should be present, and that sin is man's turning away from God, the source of all good.

An anthropological problem that is so central to contemporary culture can only find a solution in the light of what we might call "meta-anthropology". Hence it is the understanding of the human being as a conscious, free being, *homo viator*, who at the same is and becomes. In the human being great diversities are reconciled: the one and the many, body and soul, male and female, the person and the family, the individual and society, nature and history.

4. As well as being an outstanding philosopher and theologian, St Thomas was a master of humanity. In 1980 I defined him as *Doctor humanitatis*, on account of his characteristic understanding of the human person with his rationality and his condition of free being. In Paris, while commenting on Peter Lombard's work, *The Book of Sentences*, he discovered the role played by practical reason in man's being and becoming. While speculative reason is ordered to knowing the truth, practical reason is ordered to doing, to directing human activity.

The human person, who has received from God the gift of his existence, has the task of living it in a way that is in accord with the truth thus discovering its genuine meaning (cf. *Fides et ratio*, n. 81).

In this quest the moral question constantly emerges, formulated in the Gospel with the question: "*Teacher what good must I do?*" (Mt 19,16). The culture of our time talks so much about the

human being and knows a great deal about him, but often gives the impression of ignoring what he is. Indeed, the human person fully understands himself only in the light of God. He is the "*imago Dei*" created by love in the image of God, with whom he is destined to live in communion for eternity.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the mystery of man finds its solution only in the light of the mystery of Christ (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Following this train of thought, in the Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, I wanted to repeat that the human person is the primary and principal way that the Church must travel (cf. n. 14). As they face the tragedy of atheistic humanism, believers have the mission of proclaiming and bearing witness to the true humanism that is manifested in Christ. Only in Christ can the human person be perfectly fulfilled.

5. Distinguished members of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas, may the power of the Spirit guide your work and make your research effective.

As I invoke the constant protection of Mary, *Seat of Wisdom*, and of St Thomas Aquinas upon each of you and upon your academy, I cordially bless you all.

*From the Vatican, 21 June 2002.*

**JOHN PAUL II**