ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF THEOLOGY

Saturday, 16 February 2002

Your Eminence,
Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to have this meeting, that you desired in order to highlight the celebration of the first International Forum of the Pontifical Academy of Theology. I cordially greet you all, with special gratitude to Cardinal Paul Poupard who has expressed your sentiments and illustrated the Forum's approach to the significant theme: "Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. For a re-reading of Dominus Iesus".

The subject clearly falls within the purview of your Academy. The new Statutes, which I approved with the *Motu Proprio* of 28 January 1999, point out the Academy's goal: "that of providing and fostering theological studies and dialogue among the theological and philosophical disciplines" (art. II). In short, every effort the human person makes to grow in the knowledge of the truth is oriented to the discovery of a new aspect of God's mystery, the "sovereign and primary truth" (St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* 1, q. 16, a. 5) and the source of truth: In fact, "every truth", the Angelic Doctor says, "is from God" (*Quaestiones disputatae, De Veritate,* q. 1, a. 8).

If the human being can be defined "as the one who seeks the truth" (*Fides et ratio,* n. 28), he knows that in his encounter with Christ and with his divine Revelation he has found the truth about life: "In Jesus Christ, who is the truth, faith recognizes the ultimate appeal to humanity, an appeal made in order that what we experience as desire and nostalgia may come to its fulfilment" (*ibid.,* n. 33).

2. The priority task of the Pontifical Academy of Theology is meditation on the mystery of Jesus

Christ, our Master and Lord, fullness of grace and truth (cf. Jn 1,16). From this source of light originates the mandate of preaching, of witness and of involvement in dialogue, both ecumenical and interreligious.

In the Encylcical *Fides et ratio* I said: "There are many paths which lead to the truth, but since Christian truth has a salvific value, any one of these paths may be taken, as long as it leads to the final goal, that is to the Revelation of Jesus Christ" (n. 38). Academics, those who foster Christ's truth by witnessing to it in the Church and in the world, in their work of study and research, are guided by Revelation, the "true lodestar" (*ibid.,* n. 15) towards the truth to know, the good to do and the charity to live.

3. Today, two features characterize the apostolate and service of the truth: *its dynamism* and *ecclesial sense (ecclesialità).* The truth of Christian Revelation opens up new horizons in history for understanding the mystery of God and man. The inner attraction of the new does not lie in a relativism or historicism, but means a *supreme concentration on the truth,* an understanding that is a journey with and, above all, a following of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Theology thus becomes *a journey in communion with the Person-Truth who is Jesus Christ,* in a relationship of fidelity, love and self-giving, under the guidance of the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 16,13), who has the mission of recalling Jesus' words and of helping Christians understand and live them in an interior lucidity throughout the changing history of humanity.

Secondly, the description of your "Theological Academy" as "Pontifical" means that its service to Christ the Truth is characterized by its *ecclesial sense* (*ecclesialità).* In fact, the theologian takes up his free research *within the faith and communion of the Church.* In the Church, salt of the earth and light of the world (cf. Mt 5,13-14), theological reflection carries out its task to respond to the universal saving will of God, who desires "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2,4). In fact, far from being a limiting factor, ecclesial communion is *a source that breathes life into theological reflection*; it supports its creativity and appreciates its prophecy. In this way, theological knowledge, with its deeper understanding of revealed truth, becomes a service to the entire People of God, supports their hope and reinforces their communion.

4. Loyalty to Christ the Truth, manifested by theologians in obedience to the magisterium of the Church, is a powerful unifying and edifying force. Catholic theologians are aware that *the magisterium is not a reality extrinsic to the truth and to the faith,* but, on the contrary, as a basic element of the Church, it is at the service of the Word of truth and safeguards it from distortion. It also guarantees that the People of God throughout time will always live guided and sustained by Christ the Truth. The relationship between the magisterium and theological work is regulated by the *principle of harmony.* Since they are both at the service of divine Revelation, both rediscover new aspects and depths of revealed truth.

Where there is a matter of communion in the faith, the principle of *unity in the truth* prevails. On

the other hand, where there is a difference of opinion, the principle of *unity in charity* applies. These guidelines are present in the direction you have set for this *Forum*, and in the editorial policy of the new journal of the Academy, that you have called PATH, an acronym of your Latin name "Pontificia Academia Theologica". But "*path*" is also a word that in today's globalized language means "way", "track", "route" or "road". Theological research is a demanding and gratifying journey with Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life.

5. After more than three centuries of life, may the Pontifical Theological Academy continue to receive from your reflection and witness fresh zeal to announce the light of Christ in the millennium that has just begun.

With this wish, as I invoke God's help in your work I cordially impart my Blessing.

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