



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 1 December 2005

*Most Reverend President,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Professors,
Dear Collaborators,*

I am pleased to greet you at this family meeting which reminds me of the prolonged and deep collaboration I have had with many of you. I was appointed a Member of the International Theological Commission in 1969 and became its President in 1982.

I would like first of all to express my heartfelt gratitude for the tribute addressed to me by Archbishop Levada, who is taking part in a meeting of the International Theological Commission for the first time as President. I offer him my prayerful good wishes that the light and power of the Holy Spirit may accompany him in the fulfilment of the task that has been entrusted to him.

With the Plenary Meeting that is taking place during these days, the work of the seventh "quinquennium" of the Commission continues. It began last year when I was still President. I gladly take this opportunity to encourage each one of you to persevere in your reflection on the themes chosen for study in the coming years.

When he received the Members on 7 October last year, the late Pope John Paul II pointed out the great importance of two themes that you are currently examining: "The fate of children who die without Baptism in the context of the universal salvific will of God, of the one mediation of Jesus Christ and of the sacramentality of the Church", and "Natural moral law".

The latter is of special importance for understanding the basis of the rights that are rooted in the

person's nature and as such, derive from the will of God the Creator.

Even before any positive law by a State, these laws are universal, inviolable and inalienable, and must therefore be recognized as such by all, and especially by the civil authorities who are called to promote them and guarantee respect for them.

Even if the concept of "human nature" seems to have been lost in contemporary culture, the fact remains that human rights cannot be understood without presupposing that values and norms, which are to be rediscovered and reaffirmed and not invented or subjectively or arbitrarily imposed, are innate in the human being.

At this point the dialogue with the secular world is of great importance: it must appear clearly that the denial of the ontological foundation of the essential values of human life inevitably ends in positivism and makes law dependent on the currents of thought that predominate in a society, thereby corrupting law and making it an instrument of power instead of subordinating power to law.

The third topic is of equal importance. It was selected at the Plenary Meeting last year: "The status and method of Catholic theology".

Theology can only result from obedience to the impulse of truth and from love that desires to be ever better acquainted with the one it loves, in this case God himself, whose goodness we recognized in the act of faith (cf. *Donum Veritatis*, n. 7).

We know God because in his infinite goodness he made himself known, through creation but especially through his Only-begotten Son, who for us became man and died and rose for our salvation.

The revelation of Christ is consequently the fundamental normative starting point for theology.

Theology must always be exercised in the Church and for the Church, the Body of Christ, the only subject with Christ, and thus also in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition. The theologian's work, therefore, must take place in communion with the living voice of the Church, that is, with the living Magisterium of the Church and under her authority.

To consider theology a private affair of the theologian is to underestimate its very nature.

It is only within the Ecclesial Community, in communion with the legitimate Pastors of the Church, that theological work has meaning; it certainly requires scientific competence but likewise, and no less, the spirit of faith and the humility of those who know that God is alive and true, the subject of their reflection, who infinitely exceeds human capacities. Only with prayer and contemplation is it possible to acquire the sense of God and the docility to the Holy Spirit's action that will make

theological research fruitful for the good of the entire Church and, I should say, of humanity.

Here one might object: but is theology thus defined still a science and in conformity with our reason and its freedom? Yes.

Not only are rationality, a scientific approach and thinking in communion with the Church not exclusive of one another but they go together. The Holy Spirit guides the Church to all truth (cf. Jn 16: 13); the Church is at the service of truth and her guidance is an education in truth.

As I express the hope that your days of study will be enlivened by fraternal communion in the search for the Truth that the Church wants to proclaim to all men and women, I implore Mary Most Holy, Seat of Wisdom, to guide your steps in Christian joy and hope. With these sentiments, as I renew to you all the expression of my esteem and trust, I warmly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

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