



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER ON THE OCCASION OF THE 23rd PUBLIC SESSION OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal GIANFRANCO RAVASI
President of the Pontifical Council for Culture
and of the Coordination Council of the Pontifical Academies*

I address you on the occasion of the 23rd Solemn Public Session of the Pontifical Academies, an initiative, begun in 1995 following the reform of the Pontifical Academies, willed by Saint [John Paul II](#). It is now an important and customary step on the journey of the seven Academies brought together in the Coordination Council, over which you preside. Coinciding with the Annual Assembly, the conferral of the Award is organized in turn by one of the Academies, according to the sector of competence. An Award I am pleased to present in order to encourage and support the efforts of those, particularly young people or institutions that work with young people, who have distinguished themselves in their respective fields by their contribution to the promotion of a new Christian humanism. Thus, I extend my cordial greeting to all those present, Cardinals, Bishops, Ambassadors, Academicians and friends who are attending the Solemn Public Session, with the profound hope that this now customary moment of encounter may represent for all, beginning with the Award winners, an encouragement to research and to deepen the fundamental themes for a humanistic Christian vision.

The 23rd session was organized by the [Pontifical Academy of Theology](#) and the [Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas](#). I offer a particular greeting to the President of these two Academies, the Rev. Fr Réal Tremblay, CSsR, and the Rev. Fr Serge-Thomas Bonino, OP, and to the respective Academicians, thanking them first and foremost for their commitment, attested to above all by *Path*, the journal published by the Academy of Theology, which serves to suggest to readers, in keeping with the title, an itinerary, a path of research and in-depth theological study.

I congratulate you on the choice of the theme of this Public Session: “Eternity, the other face of

life”, which inspires us to reflect anew and more deeply on an area that is not only theological and that, despite being essential and central in the Christian experience, tends to be rather neglected, both in the theological research of recent years and, above all, in proclamation and in the formation of believers.

“We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come”, we profess every Sunday, reciting the last article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. And the *Symbolum Apostolorum* concludes with these words: “I believe in ... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting”. Thus, it is the essential core of the Christian faith, of a reality closely linked to the profession of faith in Christ dead and Risen. Nevertheless, eschatological reflection on eternal life and on the resurrection, in the Catechesis and in the celebration, is given neither the space nor the attention it deserves. At times one has the impression that this theme is deliberately forgotten and overlooked because it is seemingly remote, extraneous to daily life and to contemporary sensitivity.

This is not very surprising: one phenomenon that characterizes the present culture, in fact, is precisely closure to transcendental horizons, the withdrawal into self, the almost exclusive attachment to the present, forgetting or censoring the dimensions of the past and especially of the future, perceived, particularly by young people, as dark and full of uncertainty. The future beyond death seems, in this context, inevitably even more remote, unfathomable or completely nonexistent.

But the scant attention given to the theme of eternity, to the Christian hope that proclaims the resurrection and eternal life in God and with God, can also depend on other factors: for example, the traditional language used in preaching or in the catechesis to proclaim this truth of faith, can appear today almost incomprehensible and at times hardly conveys a positive and ‘attractive’ image of Eternal Life. Thus, the other face of life may be perceived as monotonous and repetitive, tedious, even sad or completely insignificant and irrelevant to the present.

This is not how the great Father of the Church, Gregory of Nyssa thought; the one who, in a Homily on the Canticle of Canticles (VIII) — which appropriately will be re-proposed during the Session — offered quite a different vision of eternity. Eternal life was, in fact, understood by him as an existential condition, not static but dynamic and lively. The human desire for life and happiness, closely connected to the desire to see and know God, constantly grows and is renewed by passing from one stage to the next without ever reaching its end or fulfillment. The experience of the encounter with God in fact transcends any and every human achievement and constitutes the infinite and ever new aim.

Saint Thomas Aquinas also emphasized this aspect, affirming that in eternal life man’s union with God is fulfilled, that “God Himself is the reward and the end of all our labours”, and this union consists in a “perfect vision” of Him. In this state, Saint Thomas continues, “every blessed soul will

have to overflowing what he hoped for and desired” and God alone “satisfies and infinitely exceeds man’s desires”. Moreover, he continues, eternal life consists in “the happy society of all the blessed”. Quoting Saint Augustine, Thomas states: “Complete joy will not enter into those who rejoice, but all those who rejoice will enter into joy”, and in contemplating your Face, “I shall be satisfied when your glory shall appear” eternally renewed in youthfulness (*On the Apostles’ Creed*, 12).

Therefore, the reflection of the Fathers of the Church and of great theologians should help us and encourage us to propose anew, effectively and zealously, both with a language suited to our daily life and with the appropriate depth, the heart of our faith, the hope that animates us and that gives strength to Christian testimony in the world: the beauty of Eternity.

I hope that, both at the theological level and at the level of proclamation, of catechesis and of Christian formation, there may be renewed interest and reflection on eternity, without which the dimension of the present becomes devoid of its ultimate significance, of the capacity for renewal, of hope in the future.

Therefore, wishing to promote and encourage theological research, and particularly that research aimed at deepening eschatological themes, I am pleased to present the Award of the Pontifical Academies, *ex aequo*, to two young scholars: Dr Stefano Abbate, for his doctoral thesis entitled *La secularización de la esperanza cristiana a través de la gnosis y el ebionismo. Estudio sobre el mesianismo moderno*; and Dr Francisco Javier Pueyo Velasco, for his work *La plenitud terrena del Reino de Dios en la historia de la teología*.

In addition, I am happy to confer the Medal of the Pontificate to Dr Guillermo Contín Aylón, for his thesis “Vado ad Patrem. *La Ascension de Cristo en el Comentario a Juan de santo Tomas de Aquino*”.

Lastly, I wish the Academicians and all those participating in the event an ever fruitful commitment in your respective fields of research, and I entrust each and every one of you to the Virgin Mary, who already enjoys the joyful vision of God in eternal life and intercedes for us, pilgrims in history, on the journey toward eternity.

I wholeheartedly impart to all of you and your families a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 4 December 2018

Francis
