



The Holy See

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

Hall of the Popes

Friday, 2 December 2011

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished Professors,
Dear Collaborators,*

It is a great joy for me to be able to receive you at the close of the annual Plenary Meeting of the International Theological Commission. I would first like to express a heartfelt “thank you” for the words which Cardinal William Levada, in his capacity as President of the Commission, has addressed to me on behalf of you all.

The work of this Session coincided this year with the first week of Advent, an occasion which reminds us that every theologian is called to be a man of Advent, a witness keeping watch, who enlightens the ways of understanding the Word made Flesh. We could say that knowledge of the true God constantly tends toward, and is fed by that “hour”, which is unknown, at which the Lord will return. Thus, keeping vigilant and enlivening the hope of expectation are not secondary tasks for a correct theological thought, which finds its reason in the Person of the One who comes to meet us and illumines our understanding of salvation.

Today I would like to reflect briefly with you on the three themes which the International Theological Commission has been studying in recent years. The first, as has been said, concerns the fundamental question for all theological reflection: the question of God and in particular the understanding of monotheism. From this broad doctrinal horizon you have also delved into an ecclesial theme: the meaning of the Social Doctrine of the Church, paying special attention to a theme which is of great relevance to contemporary theological thought about God: the question of

the actual status of theology today, in its perspectives, in its principles and criteria.

Behind the profession of the Christian faith in the One God one finds the daily profession of faith of the people of Israel: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut 6:4). The unheard of fulfilment of God's unreserved love for all people is realized in the incarnation of the Son in Jesus Christ. In this Revelation of God's intimacy and the depth of his bond of love with man, the monotheism of the One God is illuminated by a completely new light: a Trinitarian light. And in the Mystery of the Trinity the brotherhood of men too is illuminated. Christian theology, along with the lives of believers, must restore the happy and crystalline evidence of the impact of the Trinitarian Revelation on our community. Although ethnic and religious conflicts in the world make it more difficult to perceive the singularity of the Christian thought about God and the humanism it inspired people can recognize in the Name of Jesus Christ the truth of God the Father to which the Holy Spirit stirs creature's every cry (cf. Rom 8). Theology, in fruitful dialogue with philosophy, can help believers to become aware of and to testify that trinitarian monotheism shows us the true Face of God, and that this monotheism does not generate violence but is a force of personal and universal peace.

The starting point of all Christian theology is the acceptance of this Divine Revelation: personal acceptance of the Word made Flesh, listening to the Word of God in Scripture. From this starting point theology helps the believing understanding of faith and its transmission. The entire history of the Church demonstrates, however, that acknowledging the starting point is not enough to reach the unity of faith. Every reading of the Bible is set in a given literary context, and the only context in which the believer can be in full communion with Christ is the Church and her living Tradition. We must live ever afresh the experience of the first disciples, who "devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). In this perspective, the Commission has studied the principles and criteria according to which a theology can be catholic, and it has also reflected on the current contribution of theology. It is important to remember that Catholic theology, ever attentive to the link between faith and reason, played an historical role in the birth of the university. A truly Catholic theology with the two movements, "*intellectus quaerens fidem et fides quaerens intellectum*", is especially necessary today in order to foster harmony among the symphony of the sciences in order to avoid the violent by products of a religiosity that opposes itself to reason and of a reason that sets itself against religion.

The Theological Commission thus studies the relationship between the Social Doctrine of the Church and the whole of Christian Doctrine. The social commitment of the Church is not just something human, nor is it reduced to a social theory. The transformation of society brought about by Christians over centuries is in answer to the coming of the Son of God into the world: the splendour of such Truth and Love illumines every culture and society. St John says: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn 3:16). Disciples of Christ the Redeemer know that without consideration for others, forgiveness and love even of our enemies, no human community can live in peace; and this begins in the first

and foundational society that is the family. In the necessary cooperation for the common good, also with those who do not share our faith, we must make the true and deep religious motives present in our social commitment — just as we expect others to express their own motivations — so that collaboration occurs with transparency. Those who have perceived the basis of Christian social action will also be able to find in it a reason to take into consideration the same faith in Christ Jesus.

Dear friends, our meeting confirms in a meaningful way how much the Church needs the competent and faithful reflection of theologians on the Mystery of the God of Jesus Christ and of his Church. Without healthy and vigorous theological reflection the Church runs the risk of not fully expressing the harmony between faith and reason. At the same time, without the faithful experience of communion with the Church and adherence to her Magisterium, which is the vital space of her existence, theology would not succeed in explaining the gift of faith adequately.

Extending, through you, my good wishes and encouragement to all our brother and sister theologians working in various ecclesial contexts, I invoke upon you the intercession of Mary, the Woman of Advent and the Mother of the Word Incarnate, who in keeping the Word in her heart, is for us a paradigm of right theology, the sublime model of true knowledge of the Son of God. May she, Star of Hope, guide and protect the precious work which you carry out for the Church and in the name of the Church. With these feelings of gratitude, I once again impart to you my Apostolic Blessing. Thank you.