



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION**

Thursday, 7 October 2004

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Reverend and Distinguished Professors,*

1. With the Plenary Meeting that is taking place in these days you are embarking on the work of a new "quinquennium", the seventh since the International Theological Commission was founded. I am pleased to receive you on this occasion, at a time when you are beginning a period of theological reflection that I hope will be fruitful for the good of the entire Church. I greet in particular Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, President of the Commission, whom I warmly thank for the sentiments he has expressed in his tribute.

2. The themes chosen for examination by the Commission during the coming years are of the greatest interest. First of all is the question of the fate of children who die without Baptism. This is not merely an isolated theological problem. A great many other fundamental topics are closely interwoven with it: the universal salvific will of God, the one universal mediation of Jesus Christ, the role of the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, the theology of the sacraments, the meaning of the doctrine on original sin.... It will be up to you to explore the "nexus" between all these mysteries with a view to offering a theological synthesis that will help to encourage consistent and enlightened pastoral practice.

3. The second theme, natural moral law, is equally important. As you know, I have already treated this subject in my Encyclical Letters *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio*.

The Church has always been convinced that with the light of reason God has endowed man with the ability to attain knowledge of the fundamental truths about his life and destiny, and indeed about the norms of right conduct. For dialogue with all people of good will and for coexistence in

the most varied forms founded on a common ethical basis, this possibility must be brought to the attention of our contemporaries. The Christian revelation does not make this research pointless; on the contrary, it spurs us to carry it out with the light of Christ, in whom all things hold together (cf. Col 1: 17).

Your experience in the various countries of the earth and your knowledge of theological problems will help you make your reflection both practical and consistent.

4. I entrust your work to the intercession of Mary Most Holy, asking the Lord to enliven your Plenary Session with an intense spirit of prayer and fraternal communion and to shine upon it the light of the Wisdom that comes from on high.

As I express my confidence in your work, I urge you to persevere in your enquiry into the subjects chosen, and I accompany you with my Blessing.