



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE PLENARY SESSION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION**

Hall of Popes

Friday, 5 December 2008

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Professors,
Dear Collaborators,*

It is with true joy that I welcome you at the end of your annual Plenary Session works, which, this time, coincides also with the conclusion of the seventh quinquennial of the creation of the [International Theological Commission](#). I wish above all to express warm thanks for the words of tribute that, in the name of all, Archbishop Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer, as the General Secretary of the [International Theological Commission](#), has wished to address to me in his greeting address. My thanks then also go to all of you who, in the course of the last five years, have expended your energies in a truly precious work for the Church and for the one whom the Lord has called to carry out the ministry of Successor of Peter.

In fact, the works of this seventh "quinquennial" of the [International Theological Commission](#) has already given a real fruit, as Archbishop Ladaria Ferrer has recalled, with the publication of the document "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised", and soon you will reach another important threshold with the document: "In Search of a Universal Ethic: New Look on Natural Law", which must still be submitted according to the Norms of the Statutes of the Commission, to the last steps before its final approval. As I have already been able to affirm on previous occasions, I repeat the necessity and the urgency, in today's context, to create in culture and in civil and political society the indispensable conditions of the natural moral law. Also thanks to the study that you have undertaken on this fundamental argument, it becomes clear that the natural law constitutes the true guarantee offered to each one to live in freedom and in the respect for his dignity as a person, and to feel protected from any ideological manipulation and from all

abuse perpetrated based on the law of the strongest. We all know well that in a world formed by the natural sciences the metaphysical concept of the natural law is almost absent, incomprehensible. Moreover considering its fundamental importance for our societies, for human life, it is necessary that there be a new response and that in the context of our thought this concept is made comprehensible: being itself bears in itself a moral message and an indication for the paths of law.

Then, regarding the third theme "sense and method of theology" that has been the special object of study in this quinquennial, I am keen to underline its relevance and actuality. In a "planetary society" as that which is being formed today, theologians are asked by the public opinion above all to promote dialogue between religions and cultures, to contribute to the development of an ethic that has as its own base network peace, justice and the defence of the natural environment. And this truly concerns fundamental goods. But a theology limited to these noble objectives would lose not only its own identity, but the very foundation of these goods. The first priority of theology, as already indicated in its name, is to speak of God, to think of God. And theology speaks of God not as a hypothesis of our thought. It speaks of God because God himself speaks with us. The real work of the theologian is to enter into the Word of God, to seek to understand it for what is possible, and to make it understood to our world, and thus to find the responses to our important questions. In this work it also appears that faith is not only not contrary to reason, but it opens the eyes of reason, it expands our horizons and it permits us to find the responses necessary to the challenges of the various times.

From the objective point of view, the truth is the Revelation of God in Christ Jesus, who requires the response of the obedience of faith in communion with the Church and her Magisterium. Thus the identity of the theologian is regained, understood as a reasoned, systematic and methodical reflection on Revelation and on faith. Even the question of method is illuminated. The method in theology is not only the base of criteria and norms common to the other sciences, but must observe, above all, the principles and norms that derive from Revelation and from faith, from the fact that God has spoken.

From the subjective point of view, that is from the viewpoint of the one who does theology, the fundamental virtue of the theologian is to seek obedience to faith, the humility of faith that opens our eyes. This humility renders the theologian a collaborator of the truth. In this way it will not happen that he speaks of himself. Interiorly purified by obedience to the truth, he will reach, instead, the point that the Truth itself, that the Lord, can speak through the theologian and theology. At the same time it will happen that, by means of him, the truth can be brought to the world.

On the other hand, obedience to the truth does not mean to renounce the research and the fatigue of thought. On the contrary, the restlessness of thought, that certainly cannot be totally pacified in the life of believers, since they too are on the journey of research and deepening of Truth, it will

still be, however, an unrest that accompanies and stimulates them in the pilgrimage of thought toward God, and it will be fruitful. Therefore I hope that your reflections on these themes is able to bring to light the authentic principle and the solid significance of true theology, in order to perceive and comprehend ever better the response that the Word of God offers us and without which we cannot live in a wise and just way, because only thus will the universal, infinite horizons of truth open.

My thanks for your commitment and your work in the International Theological Commission during this quinquennial is therefore, at the same time, a cordial wish for the future work of this important organism at the service of the Apostolic See and of the entire Church. In renewing the expression of sentiments of satisfaction, of affection and of joy for today's meeting, I invoke from the Lord, by the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, copious celestial lights on your work and I impart to you a warm Apostolic Blessing, extending it to your loved ones.

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