



The Sacred. Phenomenology, Philosophy, Theology, Mysticism and Culture of the Sacred



V Plenary Session 24-26 June 2005 – Most Reverend Eminencies and Excellencies, and members of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas, I welcome and thank you for your presence here at this Fifth Plenary Session devoted to the sacred: phenomenology, philosophy, theology, mysticism and culture of the sacred.

Our current topic follows those on the *Fides et Ratio* of the year 2000, on Truth in 2001, on Good in 2002 and on the Personal Being last year. In 2003, the Academy and the Thomas Aquinas International Society (SITA) organised a joint conference on *Christian Humanism in the III Millennium: The Perspective of Thomas Aquinas*. All the papers of the Plenary Sessions and of the Conference have been published in the Academy's journal *Doctor Communis*.

As the new President of the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas, I feel a particular need to thank Pope John Paul II who appointed Secretary Msgr. Sánchez Sorondo and me on 29 March 2005, that is, three days before his death on 2 April. I know I am expressing not only my gratitude but that of all the members of the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas for the Pope's refounding of the Academy, providing its Statutes and for his continual interest in the Academy's works and publications.

The beginning of this fifth Session also gives me the opportunity to whole-heartedly thank, also on behalf of all the Academicians, my predecessor, the Most Reverend Father Professor Abelardo Lobato, for his dynamic commitment in promoting both the Thomistic teaching and the activity of the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas.

At the same time I would also like to thank the previous and also new Secretary of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas, H.E. Msgr. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, for his manifold undertakings for the Academy. The Academy has thus been able to continue its activity despite its almost complete lack of financial funds. In thanking you, Monsignore, I ask you to please continue to provide your generous and disinterested commitment to the development of Thomistic studies and to the activity of the Academy of Saint Thomas.

The very interesting and, in a certain sense, stimulating topic of this Fifth Plenary Session, offers much room for dialogue and debate between the analogical conception of *sacrum* (religio) in St Thomas and the more pluralistic conception of *sacrum* in phenomenology, philosophy, theology, mysticism and culture of the sacred in the contemporary world. Can a difference between the *sacrum* referred to things and the *sanctum* referred to people, including the Holy Spirit, be noted in the thought of St Thomas?

Phenomenology, in analysing the experience of the *sacrum*, accentuated the subjective part in line with the long tradition of the philosophy of the subject. The research on the *sacrum* carried out by the classical philosophy of being has shown its objective aspect. The experience of the sacred is either referred to "something" that is analysed rationally or is reduced only to its immanent dimension, as in modern and contemporary atheism. The sacred that is referred to "someone" (the saint) who transcends the world of man,

can be considered only with the help of the grace of God, that is, with Christian faith. This latter prospect is realised in Christian theology and mysticism, in which the *sacrum* is considered in conformity with the biblical Revelation and is identified with the participation in God's holiness.

Can we therefore clarify what the *sacrum* is as well as its metaphysical foundation in the philosophy of being? What is its relationship with human nature, with ethics, with art and, finally, with culture? Since there are among us renowned thinkers of different philosophical and theological specialities, I hope we will arrive at pertinent, adequate answers during this Fifth Session.

Distinguished and illustrious Academicians, I wish you all a fruitful and profitable work of reflection and further study on the *sacrum* or *sanctum*, for the good of the entire Church and for the good of all people. So I express to you my most cordial thanks for your participation in this Fifth Plenary Session. Please accept my best wishes for your work and the important results that will be obtained.

Father Edward Kaczynski, President