



The Encounter of Christianity and the Graeco-Roman Tradition – The Roots of Western Culture and Openness to the Universal



VII Plenary Session 22-24 June 2007 – The topic of the encounter of Christianity and the Greco-Roman tradition as the root of Western culture and its openness to the universal was chosen because of Benedict XVI's speech in Regensburg (12 September 2006) and its continuous references to human reason open to transcendence and to the help offered by faith against self-limited reason, that is, reason reduced to the methods of the positive sciences.

We are convinced that, by choosing this topic, the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas places itself at the core of the problems and difficulties of the current social and cultural crises. All the more so since St Thomas has offered a contribution of permanent value, that can help us face up the current situation and seek a new harmony between faith and reason, in response to contemporary problems.

How does the current Pope, Benedict XVI, consider St Thomas? Allow me, dear friends, to quote Benedict XVI's words for St Thomas' feast day last 28 January: 'Today the liturgical calendar – said Benedict XVI, on 28 January last – commemorates St Thomas Aquinas, the great Doctor of the Church. With his charisma as a philosopher and theologian, he offered an effective model of harmony between reason and faith, dimensions of the human spirit that are completely fulfilled in the encounter and dialogue with one another.

According to St Thomas' thought, human reason, as it were, "breathes": it moves within a vast open horizon in which it can express the best of itself. When, instead, man reduces himself to thinking only of material objects or those that can be proven, he closes himself to the great questions about life, himself and God and is impoverished.

The relationship between faith and reason is a serious challenge to the currently dominant culture in the Western world, and for this very reason our beloved John Paul II decided to dedicate an Encyclical to it, entitled, precisely, *Fides et Ratio* – Faith and Reason. Recently, I too returned to this topic in my Address to the University of Regensburg.

In fact, the modern development of the sciences brings innumerable positive effects, as we all see, that should always be recognized. At the same time, however, it is necessary to admit that the tendency to consider true only what can be experienced constitutes a limitation of human reason and produces a terrible schizophrenia now acclaimed, which has led to the coexistence of rationalism and materialism, hyper-technology and unbridled instinct.

It is urgent, therefore, to rediscover anew human rationality open to the light of the divine Logos and his perfect revelation which is Jesus Christ, Son of God made man.

When Christian faith is authentic, it does not diminish freedom and human reason; so, why should faith and reason fear one another if the best way for them to express themselves is by meeting and entering into

dialogue? Faith presupposes reason and perfects it, and reason, enlightened by faith, finds the strength to rise to knowledge of God and spiritual realities. Human reason loses nothing by opening itself to the content of faith, which, indeed, requires its free and conscious adherence.

St Thomas Aquinas, with farsighted wisdom, succeeded in establishing a fruitful confrontation with the Arab and Hebrew thought of his time, to the point that he was considered an ever up-to-date teacher of dialogue with other cultures and religions. He knew how to present that wonderful Christian synthesis of reason and faith which today too, for the Western civilization, is a precious patrimony to draw from for an effective dialogue with the great cultural and religious traditions of the East and South of the world.

Let us pray that Christians, especially those who work in an academic and cultural context, are able to express the reasonableness of their faith and witness to it in a dialogue inspired by love. Let us ask the Lord for this gift through the intercession of St Thomas Aquinas and above all, through Mary, Seat of Wisdom'.

This VII Plenary Session begins with the Contribution of Greek Philosophy (Prof. E. Berti); followed by Reception of the Greco-Roman Legacy in the Medieval University, above all in the Thirteenth Century (Prof. R. Wielockx); Development of Legal Institutions, from the Middle Ages to Our Time (Prof. R. Hittinger); and St. Thomas Aquinas as Example of the Importance of the Hellenistic Legacy (Prof. L. Dewan).

Only the strong reason that grasps existing reality and not the content of conscience (weak reason) oriented towards truth and being, towards metaphysical reality as a condition of sapiential anthropology – as the search for the final, integral sense of life – can be the foundation both of philosophy and of the socio-political life of human beings.

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