



## International Congress on "Christian Humanism in the Third Millennium: The Perspective of Thomas Aquinas"



Since the beginning of 2002, the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas and the Thomas Aquinas International Society, have been jointly preparing an International Congress which will take place in Rome, from 21 to 25 September 2003. The title of the Congress is "Christian Humanism in the Third Millennium. The Perspective of Thomas Aquinas".

Its letter of convocation was followed by three circulars providing information on the Congress' organisation and implementation. The current presentation, containing information on the two institutions that are convening it, the Congress' project, the main subject of each session and the schedule of the sessions, is aimed at those who wish to take part in or receive news of the Congress.

An International Congress on Saint Thomas Aquinas is always a cultural event that deserves the greatest attention. The theologian Juan de Santo Tomás, who can be considered the last of the classical commentators of the school, remarked that, when speaking of Saint Thomas, one always speaks of something that transcends him and that has a universal scope. This statement remains true and became evident during the Thomistic Conference held in Rome in 1974, in memory of the seventh centenary of the Saint's death, and entitled "*Saint Thomas and the Fundamental Problems of Our Time*". Over 1500 professors from all over the world took part in that Conference. Pope Paul VI gave an *Address on Saint Thomas Aquinas, master of the art of thinking*, and confessed that the event was something "*unexpected, but wonderful*", a clear cultural sign in the twentieth century. The great Thomistic Conferences bear the mark of universality and of the courage of the truth, in dealing with the main topics of today's culture. This next Congress will provide further proof of these two characteristics.

### **The Academy and the Thomistic Society**

There are many institutions devoted to the study of the doctrine of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and there are innumerable scholars who are trying to understand his teachings and bring them up to date. Saint Thomas is the *Doctor communis* of Christian thought. Of the institutions operating today, two stand out: the *Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas, P.A.S.T.*, and the *Thomas Aquinas International Society, S.I.T.A.*

The Statutes of both state that, among their activities, they must periodically hold Conferences of an international nature. Indeed, both have been doing so ever since. The PAST, founded by Pope Leo XIII as an offshoot of the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, began its activities on 8 May 1880 and, during its 123 years, has remained faithful to its origin. Among the various Pontifical Academies, it has been a favourite of all the Popes. The current Pontiff, John Paul II, in the wake of his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, in which he underlines "the perennial novelty of Thomas Aquinas' thought", wrote the "Motu Proprio" of 28 January 1999, *Inter Academiarum munera*, containing new statutes for the renewal of the Academy of Saint Thomas, now separated from the Academy of Religion and Theology. In its turn, the SITA, whose origin dates back to the

already mentioned Thomistic Conference of 1974, began its activity in 1978, and celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Both institutions are separate and complementary. If we describe Saint Thomas as an essential thinker who is open to dialogue, we can say that the Academy concentrates mainly on doctrine, while the Society mainly examines dialogue. These two institutions are joined in the study, understanding and divulging of the doctrine of Saint Thomas. The difference between them consists in the fact that PAST members meet at its headquarters in Rome and the results of PAST sessions are published in the Review *Doctor communis*, while the SITA coordinates national and local sections all over the world, prints its news in its *Annual News Bulletin*, and carries out its activities on the Internet.

Both institutions are complementary and are also currently united by their President, Father Abelardo Lobato, OP, who had been elected President of the SITA by the Assembly of Barcelona in 1997 and was then appointed President of the PAST. All this has contributed to the decision to jointly organise the International Congress.

The PAST had decided to hold its International Congress every ten years, at the end of each decade. The last one took place in 1990 on the topic of Saint Thomas *Doctor Humanitatis*. The next one should have taken place in the year 2000, but that year, owing to the Jubilee, so many conferences were held that over 50 were organised in Italy in the month of September alone. The SITA holds its Congress every six or seven years, when it reorganises its management. The International Congress of September is the PAST's tenth and the SITA's fifth. The proceedings will be joint. There are all the premises for this type of collaboration to benefit both institutions and pave the way for the future.

### **Humanism, the topic of the Congress**

An International Congress is always a major cultural event of worldwide importance. Up until now, PAST and SITA Congresses have chosen topical subjects and have examined them thoroughly in all of their aspects. If we look at the Proceedings of the previous Congresses we notice that the topics chosen correspond to current cultural concerns, especially those pertaining to Christian thought. Starting from the Second Vatican Council, the prevailing topics have been those that have man as their centre and that can find their solution in the mystery of Christ. The last PAST Congress analysed the title given to Saint Thomas by Pope John Paul II, *Doctor humanitatis*. The last SITA Congress, held in Barcelona, examined *The Problem of Man and the Mystery of Christ*. The contributions of both, which are contained in many volumes of the Proceedings, maintain their validity and respond to the cultural concerns of our time.

The circumstance of the beginning of this new millennium of Christian life has led us to choose the topic of humanism for this Congress, because man continues to be a problem. Regarding this permanent problem, Christian thought does not make a detour to avoid it but faces up to it and offers a profound solution. On his part, Saint Thomas Aquinas paved the way to the understanding and fulfilment of Christian man.

The Congress offers three themes for reflection: *humanism* as the basis and starting point of all human promotion; *Christian humanism*, which has its own unique characteristics and maintains it is the most comprehensive humanism; and finally *Thomistic humanism*, which implies a way of thinking of man and conceiving him from Saint Thomas' point of view.

These three themes are called to fuse together. Saint Thomas is the architect who draws up an anthropology, from the needs of an ontology and in the light of a theology. Man, in his profound reality, is *imago Dei*, a synthesis of the universe, and in short, God's project. The Thomistic perspective reveals itself as the whole truth about man. God's project of man is implemented in the first man and is fulfilled completely in the man Jesus of Nazareth, who is real man and real God. For Thomas all men are called to fulfil themselves completely, but are unable to reach this unless they accept Jesus Christ, of whom it is truthfully said: *Ecce homo* (Jn 19,5).

Humanism becomes a central topic, which groups together all the problems of anthropology. It is a pressing, burning topic, because contemporary man is in danger. Almost without realising it he has reached an inhuman situation, losing his soul, forgetting his identity and wandering along paths leading to nowhere. In short, the topic of humanism is Hamlet's dilemma, man's to be or not to be.

The Congress must analyse this topic thoroughly and open the doors to hope in this beginning of the third Christian millennium. This is the millennium that is called to prove the worth of Christian man. Christian humanism cannot resign itself to being considered one more among many, nor can it be satisfied with running in parallel with other forms of humanism, because it remains convinced that it is called to be the humanism that is capable of integrating all that man's humanity implies, the whole truth about man, which means humanism *tout court*.

### **Developing the topic**

It is a known fact that an International Congress is something very complex, which requires, as all human undertakings, seriousness and competence. Once the project has been conceived, planning must begin in its various theoretical and practical aspects. The Congress is a choir that must sing in perfect harmony. The conquest of the truth is always a symphony.

The Congress as a cultural event has many facets. One of these is the festive one. Human celebrations possess a social nature, coordinate the arts, working days and holidays. It is in this festive spirit that the opening and closing sessions and the meeting and departure of the participants will be held, in the magnificent Palazzo della Cancelleria, in the heart of the city of Rome, seat of the previous PAST Congresses. The Congress will begin on 21 September with greetings, news, orientation and a paper by the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski. On 25 September it will be time to gather the first fruit, the conclusions and wishes of the participants. The Prefect of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Paul Poupard, will give the closing speech. At the same time, certificates will be handed out to the members of the different categories. A highlight of the Congress is the meeting with the Holy Father, who has given us great proof of being one of the major promoters of Christian humanism and of Saint Thomas as *Doctor Humanitatis*. The Congress will follow a very intense programme spanning three days, from 22 to 24 September, and will be held at the University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. Each daily session will be eight hours long, four of which will be devoted to plenary sessions open to all participants, and four to special sections.

The programme of the plenary sessions is demanding but it is necessary in order to understand humanism: 22 September will be devoted to *the roots and characteristics of Christian humanism*; the speakers will be the following academicians: Di Noia, Elders, Mondin and McInerney. On 23 September the *foundations of Saint Thomas' Christian humanism* will be analysed; the speakers, philosophers and theologians, are well-known: López Trujillo, Sánchez Sorondo, Forment, Zimmerman and Wippel. *The challenges of contemporary culture to Christian humanism* is the topic of 24 September, which will be entrusted to the following illustrious speakers: Berti, Cottier, Jaroszynski and Caffarra. Each of the papers of these plenary sessions will be followed by a debate in the Aula Magna, the main lecture hall, now called Aula John Paul II.

The works of the various special sections are also very important for the Congress. There are ten of these and each is chaired by one or more specialised professors. The list is as follows: Historical Section: Prof. Elders, Prof. Pangallo; Theological and Biblical Section: Prof. Rodriguez, Prof. Wielockx; Christological Section: Prof. Biffi, Prof. Amato; Metaphysical Section: Prof. Mondin, Prof. Forment; Anthropological Section: Prof. Lobato, Prof. Zdybicka, Prof. Berger; Moral Section: Prof. Basso, Prof. Possenti; Political Section: Prof. Berti, Prof. Llano, Prof. Ocampo; Human Rights Section: Prof. Seidl, Prof. Kaczynski; Scientific Section: Prof. Sánchez Sorondo, Prof. Artigas; Education and Culture Section: Prof. Martínez, Prof. Luz Garcia Alonso, Prof. E. Ducci.

The Congress will be open to everyone. Registration is required in order to take part. All the participants who wish to present a paper must submit an *abstract* and the complete text of it. At the beginning of the Congress all participants will receive a folder containing a copy of the programme, a volume with the *abstracts* of each paper and the texts of the papers of the plenary sessions.

Abelardo Lobato, O.P.