



## The Human Animal: Procreation, Education, and the Foundations of Society



**X Plenary Session 18-20 June 2010** – Appreciative of Pope John Paul II's designation of Thomas Aquinas as Doctor Humanitatis, and in obedience to his commission to 'develop further this part of Thomistic doctrine which deals with humanity' (Inter munera academiarum § 4), the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas will devote its 2010 Plenary Session to an examination of *The Human Animal: Procreation, Education, and the Foundations of Society*.

An important goal of the meeting is to explore contemporary challenges to the dignity of the human animal, and to clarify and affirm this dignity at a proper level based not only on a philosophical reflection, but also with the significant contribution of the current scientific knowledge, especially in the understanding of certain evolutionary mechanisms in relation to life (the discovery of cells and of DNA).

In 2004 the International Theological Commission issued its study on *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons in the Image of God*. The Commission affirmed that: 'The central dogmas of the Christian faith imply that the body is an intrinsic part of the human person and thus participates in his being created in the image of God'. It continues:

This truth has not always received the attention it deserves. Present-day theology is striving to overcome the influence of dualistic anthropologies that locate the *imago Dei* exclusively with reference to the spiritual aspect of human nature. Partly under the influence first of Platonic and later of Cartesian dualistic anthropologies, Christian theology itself tended to identify the *imago Dei* in human beings with what is the most specific characteristic of human nature, viz., mind or spirit. The recovery both of elements of biblical anthropology and of aspects of the Thomistic synthesis has contributed to the effort in important ways (*Communion and Stewardship*, § 27).

When we turn to Thomas's synthesis, we find an extraordinarily rich appropriation of ancient science and wisdom with Christian teaching. One of the most important, and most familiar, passages on human animality is found in his article in the *Summa theologiae* on the plurality of precepts of the natural law. Thomas writes: '...there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals; and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law "which nature has taught to all animals", such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth' (S.t. I-II, 94.2).

Thomas insists that the human person understands the goods not only of his own body but also the species. The goods of the human animal is not only something lived but something known. They fall under the general precept of law, 'the good is to be pursued and done, and evil resisted'. This unification in the dynamism towards the good that Thomas was able to do in the self-evident principle of practical reason (habitually held by the habit of *synderesis*) is quite original, putting human life in a moral order with respect to good beyond instinctual

inclination, just as, in relation to speculative reason oriented towards the truth, Aristotle had put the self-evident principle of non contradiction.

Our common animality opens a unique horizon of common goods. First, the loving and enduring communion in one flesh between males and females. Second, the love of the species in procreative acts. Third, the need for philanthropy, particularly in supplying the social resources for education of children. Fourth, the wider solidarity with other living things implied in human stewardship. As rational animals, human beings are immersed in a multifaceted diffusion of the good in living things. This makes specific demands on our vocation to be provident both for oneself and for others. (Damascene, Prol. S.t. I-II).

Comparing the imago Dei in angels and human beings, Thomas contends that we ‘observe in man a certain imitation of God, consisting in the fact that man proceeds from man, as God from God; ‘and also in the fact that the whole human soul is in the whole body’, as God from God; ‘and again, in every part, as God is in regard to the whole world. In these and the like things the image of God is more perfect in man than it is in the angels’ (S.t. I 93.3).

Clearly, Thomas’s remarks in S.t. I-II 94.2 are very brief, and, as it were, telescoped. The passage needs to be understood in the broader context of Thomas’s teaching on how the human body participates in human love and prudence. Moreover, his teaching needs to be carefully understood in view of certain crises of our times: the demographic winter in the developed world, new technologies and the prospect of the machining of the humanum, widespread confusion about the nature and ends of the matrimonial society, and the ongoing challenge of defending the dignity of the whole human being against various philosophical and scientific reductionism.

The three-day program will foster a dialogue between philosophers, historians of philosophy, scientists, and theologians. Rather than having many short remarks, we commission only nine papers. First, each can make a substantive contribution to our theme. Just as importantly, the schedule leaves much time for fruitful dialogue between academicians and invited scholars. The session on Sunday will be devoted to even broader context of S.t. I-II 94.2. These papers will help the Academy to move toward the 2011 Plenary Session, which will examine the last part of the article, where Thomas writes: ‘there is in man an inclination to good according to the nature of his reason, which is proper to him; thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society. In this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law: e.g. to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination’.

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