



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION “IL LIBRO E LO SPIRITO”
 (“THE BOOK AND THE SPIRIT”)**

**AT THE VATICAN APOSTOLIC LIBRARY ON THE 750th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF
SAINT BONAVENTURE OF BAGNOREGIO AND SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS**

*To my dear Brother
Archbishop Vincenzo Zani
Librarian and Archivist of the Holy Roman Church*

On the 750th anniversary of the death of Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Vatican Apostolic Library is offering the exhibition “*The Book and the Spirit*”, dedicated to the two Doctors, whose handwritten manuscripts, codices of their works and documents relating to their lives and activities are among its treasures. I congratulate you on this timely initiative.

Pope Sixtus IV, in 1475, inaugurated the first premises of the Vatican Library to coincide with the second centenary of the death of the two Saints, not by chance depicted together, by Ghirlandaio, in the decoration of the *Bibliotheca Latina*, among the great ancient and Christian authors.

Little more than a century later, Pope Sixtus V – the Pontiff who gave the Library its current location – in a document [1] later taken up again by Pope Leo XIII, [2] associated them with the biblical image of “the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth” (*Rev* 11:4).

Indeed, they continue today to represent the sources of light and inspiration for the Church and for culture. They are “luminaries” for an approach to knowledge, and in particular to theology, in which intellectual depth and spiritual life, science and wisdom, humility and charity, interpenetrate and mutually enrich one other, in the willingness not to keep the fruits of speculation for oneself, but to share them with generous pastoral and missionary zeal. [3]

In this sense, the *Doctor Communis* and the *Doctor Seraphicus* constitute valuable “company” for

every pilgrim walking towards Christ, tracing a path described by the former as a “way” of intelligence enlightened by faith, by the second as an “itinerary” of the mind, which from contemplation of creation rises towards God. Think of the “trinitarian” view Saint Bonaventure proposes towards creatures and their relations, [4] with an integration between the “holiness of intelligence” and the “intelligence of holiness”, which emerges first of all from the example of their life.

It is precisely this unifying element that emerges from the exhibition, set up in the Vatican Library with the inclusion in the programme also of a study day on the two Doctors, to which all the Roman Universities and Pontifical Faculties are invited.

Also worthy of praise is the international collaboration that has developed around the project, with the involvement of the French Embassy to the Holy See, the *Centro San Luigi* in Rome, the Leonine Commission, the Pontifical Angelicum, Antonianum and Gregorian Universities, and the University of Paris I *Sorbonne*, where Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure were formed as Masters of Theology.

Fifty years ago, [Saint Paul VI](#), on the occasion of the analogous exhibition held for the seventh centenary of the death of the two great Saints, emphasized their importance, defining in particular the *Angelico* as “Luminary of the Church and of the entire world”. [5] More recently, Pope [Benedict XVI](#), scholar of the thought and work of the *Doctor Seraphicus*, in one of his catecheses recalled his eulogy, composed by an anonymous papal notary: “A good, affable, devout and compassionate man, full of virtue, beloved of God and human beings alike.... God in fact had bestowed upon him such grace that all who saw him were pervaded by a love that their hearts could not conceal”. [6]

This exhibition, in the same vein, is intended to contribute to finding appropriate languages and tools today, so that the thought of the two “giants” of Catholic doctrine may continue to spread, reaching everyone. [7]

In the paintings of the *Bibliotheca Latina*, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas hold scrolls in their hands, on which there appear phrases attributed to them, complementary in meaning. Saint Thomas “says”: “ *Sacrae doctrinae finis est beatitudo aeterna*”; Saint Bonaventure “replies”: “ *Fructus Scripturae est plenitudo aeternae felicitatis*”. [8] And truly the two holy masters teach us to look to eternal happiness as the supreme fruit of wisdom, science and charity, spurring us to make ourselves pilgrims in the faith, so that “the witness of believers [may] be for our world a leaven of authentic hope”, [9] a flame that illuminates by tracing a path.

Dear Brother, I express my appreciation to you for this initiative, for which I wish every success. I thank you and all those who have collaborated in preparing and organizing it, and I cordially send you my blessing.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2024

FRANCIS

[1] Cf. Sixtus V, Bull *Triumphantis Hierusalem*, 14 March 1588, 13.

[2] Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris*, 4 August 1879.

[3] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Ad theologiam promovendam*, 1 November 2023, 8.

[4] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 239-240.

[5] St. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Lumen ecclesiae*, 20 November 1974, 1.

[6] J. G. Bougerol, *Bonaventure*, in A. Vauchez (ed.), *Storia dei santi e della santità cristiana*. Vol. VI. *L'epoca del rinnovamento evangelico*, Milan 1991, p. 91; cited by Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 3 March 2010.

[7] Cf. *Letter for the Seventh Centenary of the Canonization of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 30 June 2023.

[8] Cf. Vatican Apostolic Library, *Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure in the Vatican Library. Exhibition on the occasion of the Seventh Centenary (1274-1974). Catalogue*, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vatican City, 1974, pp. 5-6.

[9] Cf. *Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 "Spes non confundit"*, 9 May 2024.

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