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Audience with participants in the International Thomistic Congress, organized by the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Eleventh International Thomistic Congress organized by the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the *Angelicum* Thomistic Institute on the theme “*Vetera novis augere*. The resources of the Thomist tradition in the current context”, taking place in Rome at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, from 19 to 24 September 2022.

After handing out the discourse prepared for the event, the Pope addressed some impromptu words to the attendees.

The following are the Pope’s impromptu address and the discourse prepared for the occasion and handed out to those present:

Impromptu words of the Holy Father

I like this meeting after so many years because it is about reflecting on a master. Sometimes, when reflecting on a person who was a creator of schools, philosophical or theological, there is a risk of exploiting the master to express one’s own opinion, and with Thomism this happened. There have been so many interpretations - I am thinking of one for example - casuistic, of Thomism, which has been a slave to casuistic thinking. I remember that of a Spaniard who wrote many books, a man called Losada, I think that was his name, I don’t remember well, who to explain the “metaphysical continuum” according to Saint Thomas, invented the “*puncta inflata*”. Thus, a casuistic, opportunistic type of interpretation diminishes and makes a mockery of the master’s thought.

When we want to explain the thought of a master, the first step is *contemplation*, so as to be received in that magisterial thought. The second, timidly, is *explanation*. And in the end, with great caution, *interpretation*, but with a great deal of caution. The master is a great figure, the master is one who makes a school and has created a school. The master is one who sets in motion an entire current of thought. Never use the master for things that

one thinks oneself, but to place the things one thinks in the light of the master, so that it may be the light of the master that interprets this.

Let me tell you about an experience of a Dominican. In the Synod on the Family there were points on Catholic doctrine that were not clear and also interpretations of Saint Thomas that were not clear. At that time, we were really in discussion because we could not find the way. It was a Dominican, Cardinal Schönborn, who gave us a lesson in Thomistic theology - but at the highest level! - because he understood Thomas and explained him without using him, with greatness. We had that experience of that great Dominican, who was Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. There would be others..., but I want to mention this. On the one hand so many interpretations that reduce the thought of the master, and then the experience of one who opened it up: "No, this is what Thomas says", and proved by what he said. This is wonderful, this is a very great thing.

Therefore, I ask you: before talking about Saint Thomas, before talking about Thomism, before teaching, you must contemplate: contemplate the master, understand, beyond intellectual thought, what the master lived and what the master wanted to say. The sign is when I reduce the figure of a master to the figure of a thinker, I ruin the thought; I remove its strength, I remove its life. And Saint Thomas was a light in the thought of the Church, and we must defend him from all these "intellectual reductionisms" that imprison the greatness of his magisterial thought.

This is what I wanted to say to you, beyond the discourse that each one of you will take away. But I wanted to pause to tell you this: he is a master, not an intellectual like many; no, he is different.

Thank you very much. And now I would like to give you the blessing and then greet those who wish to greet me. And if anyone does not want to greet me, there is no obligation!

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminences

Distinguished Academicians, Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am pleased to welcome all of you who have come to Rome from different parts of the world to celebrate the Eleventh International Thomistic Congress. I thank Cardinal Luis Ladaria for his kind words to me. I greet Father Serge-Thomas Bonino, president of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas, and all the Academicians present. I also express my gratitude to Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi who, as president of the Coordinating Council of the Pontifical Academies, has accompanied the life of the Academy for so many years.

Next year will mark the seventh centenary of the canonization of Saint Thomas Aquinas, which took place in Avignon in 1323. This event reminds us that this great theologian - the "Common Doctor" of the Church - is first and foremost a saint, a faithful disciple of Incarnate Wisdom. That is why, in the Collect Prayer of his memory, we ask God, "who made him great through his pursuit of holiness of life and his passion for sacred doctrine", to "grant us to understand his teachings and imitate his examples". And here we also find your spiritual programme: imitate the Saint and let yourselves be enlightened and guided by the Doctor and Master.

The same oration highlights the passion of Brother Thomas for sacred doctrine. Indeed, he was a man passionate about the Truth, a tireless seeker of the face of God. His biographer reports that even as a child he asked: "What is God?"[1]. This question accompanied Thomas and motivated him throughout his life. This search for the truth about God is moved and permeated by love. Thus, he writes: 'Driven by an ardent will to believe, man loves the truth he believes, considers it in his intelligence, and embraces it with the reasons he can find for it'[2]. Humbly pursuing the *intellectus fidei*, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is not optional for the believer, but part of the very dynamism of his faith. It is necessary that the Word of God, already welcomed in

the heart, reach the intellect in order to “renew our way of thinking” (cf. *Rom 12:2*), so that we evaluate all things in the light of eternal Wisdom. Therefore, the passionate search for God is simultaneously prayer and contemplation, so that Saint Thomas is a model of theology that is born and grows in the atmosphere of worship.

This search for the truth on God uses the two “wings” of faith and reason. As we know, the way in which Saint Thomas was able to coordinate the two lights of faith and reason remains exemplary. Saint Paul VI wrote: “The key point and almost the kernel of the solution which, with all the brilliance of his prophetic intuition, he gave to the new encounter of faith and reason, was a reconciliation between the secularity of the world and the radicality of the Gospel, thus avoiding the unnatural tendency to negate the world and its values while at the same time keeping faith with the supreme and inexorable demands of the supernatural order” [3]. The Christian, therefore, is not afraid to engage in sincere rational dialogue with the culture of his or her time, convinced, according to the Ambrosiaster formula dear to Thomas, that “Whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit” [4].

In the Collect Prayer already mentioned, we ask the grace not only to imitate the Saint, but also the “comprehend his teachings”. In effect, Saint Thomas is the source of a tradition of thought whose “enduring originality” is acknowledged [5]. Thomism must not be a museum piece, but an ever-living source, in accordance with the theme of your Congress: “*Vetera novis augere*. The resources of the Thomas tradition in the current context”. It is necessary to promote, following Jacques Maritain’s expression, a “living Thomism”, capable of renewal in order to respond to today’s questions. In this way, Thomism advances, in a vital dual “systolic and diastolic” movement. Systolic, because there is a need to focus on the study of the work of Saint Thomas in its historical and cultural context, to identify the structural principles and to grasp their originality. Then, however, there is the diastolic movement: to address today’s world in dialogue, so as to assimilate critically what is true and right in the culture of the time.

Among Aquinas’ many illuminating doctrines, I would just like to draw attention, as I did in the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’*, to the fruitfulness of his teaching on creation. Not by chance, the English writer Chesterton called him “Thomas the Creator”. Creation is for Saint Thomas the very first manifestation of God’s stupendous generosity; or rather, his merciful gratuitousness [6]. It is the key of love, Thomas says, that opened God’s hand and keeps it open always. He then contemplates the beauty of God resplendent in the ordered diversity of creatures. The universe of creatures, visible and invisible, is neither a monolithic block, nor pure formless diversity, but rather it forms an order, a whole, in which all creatures are linked because they all come from God and go to God, and because they act on one another, thus creating a dense network of relationships. “Saint Thomas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety ‘come from the intention of the first agent’ who willed that ‘what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another’, inasmuch as God’s goodness ‘could not be represented fittingly by any one creature’. Hence we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships. We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God’s plan” [8].

For all this, dear brothers and sisters, in the wake of my predecessors, I commend you: *Go to Thomas!* Do not be afraid to increase and enrich the old and ever fruitful things with new things. I wish you good work and bless you from my heart. And I ask you to please pray for me.

Thank you!

[1] Petrus Calo, *Vita s. Thomas Aquinatis*, in *Fontes vitae s. Thomae Aquinatis*, edited by D. Prümmer and M.-H. Laurent, Toulouse, s. d., p. 19.

[2] *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 2, a. 10.

[3] Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* (20 November 1974), 8: AAS 66 (1974), 680.

[4] *Ambrosiaster*, *In I Cor 12,3: PL 17*, 258. Cf Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae, Ia-IIae*, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1.

[5] Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* (14 September 1998), 43-44.

[6] Cfr. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 46, q. 2, a. 2, q. 2, ad 1; *Summa theologiae, Ia*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 4.

[7] Cfr Saint Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, Prologus.

[8] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 86.
