



His Holiness Benedict XVI



Pope Benedict XVI comes from the Academy, not only because he is a well-known professor and academic, but also because he is a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences thanks to his appointment by John Paul II. On 21 November 2005 he honoured the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and its sister Academy, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, with his presence at the Casina Pio IV, where he unveiled a bronze bust of John Paul II. On that solemn occasion Benedict XVI told the Academicians that, "The Church's teaching is based on the fact that God created man and woman in his own image and likeness and granted them a superior dignity and a shared mission towards the whole of creation. According to God's design, persons cannot be separated from the physical, psychological or spiritual dimensions of human nature". He then went on to say that, "It is providential that we are discussing the subject of the person as we pay particular honour to my venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II. In a way, his undisputed contribution to Christian thought can be understood as a profound meditation on the person. He enriched and expanded the concept in his Encyclicals and other writings. These texts represent a patrimony to be received, collected and assimilated with care, particularly by the Pontifical Academies. It is, therefore, with gratitude that I avail myself of this occasion to unveil this sculpture of Pope John Paul II, flanked by two memorial inscriptions. They remind us of the Servant of God's special interest in the work of your Academies, especially the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, founded by him in 1994. They also point to his enlightened readiness to reach out in a dialogue of salvation to the world of science and culture, a desire which is entrusted in a particular way to the Pontifical Academies. It is my prayer that your activities will continue to produce a fruitful interchange between the Church's teaching on the human person and the sciences and social sciences which you represent".

During this first audience with the Academicians, the Pope was particularly pleased that the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences had chosen as the topic for its annual Plenary Session the Conceptualization of the Person in Social Sciences. "The human person is at the heart of the whole social order and consequently at the very centre of your field of study. In the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the human person 'signifies what is most perfect in nature' (*S.Th.*, I, 29, 3). Human beings are part of nature and, yet, as free subjects who have moral and spiritual values, they transcend nature. This anthropological reality is an integral part of Christian thought, and responds directly to the attempts to abolish the boundary between human sciences and natural sciences, often proposed in contemporary society". (Address of 21 November 2005). Understood correctly, this reality offers a profound answer to the questions posed today concerning the status of the human being. This is a theme which must continue to be part of the dialogue with science and the social sciences. According to the Holy Father, "The Church's teaching is based on the fact that God created man and woman in his own image and likeness and granted them a superior dignity and a shared mission towards the whole of creation (cf. *Gen* 1 and 2)". The concept of person continues to bring about a profound understanding of the unique character and social dimension of every human being. This is especially true in legal and social institutions, where the notion of "person" is fundamental. Sometimes, however, even when this is recognized in international declarations and legal statutes, certain cultures, especially when not deeply touched by the Gospel, remain strongly influenced

by group-centred ideologies or by an individualistic and secularist view of society. The social doctrine of the Catholic Church, which places the human person at the heart and source of social order, can offer much to the contemporary consideration of social themes. Benedict XI remarks that "It is providential that we are discussing the subject of the person as we pay particular honour to my venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II". Indeed, John Paul II, "enriched and expanded the concept in his Encyclicals and other writings. These texts represent a patrimony to be received, collected and assimilated with care, particularly by the Pontifical Academies. Benedict XVI thus accepted with gratitude to unveil a bust of John Paul II, flanked by two memorial inscriptions. They remind us of the Servant of God's special interest in the work of the Academies, in particular of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, founded by him in 1994. Pope Benedict XVI concluded by saying that these inscriptions also pointed to "his enlightened readiness to reach out in a dialogue of salvation to the world of science and culture, a desire which is entrusted in a particular way to the Pontifical Academies".

On the occasion of the 13th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on Charity and Justice in the Relations among Peoples and Nations, Benedict welcomed the Academicians by addressing a letter to the President (28 April 2007). The author of the Encyclical *Deus caritas est* wrote: "The Church cannot fail to be interested in this subject, inasmuch as the pursuit of justice and the promotion of the civilization of love are essential aspects of her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ". Benedict XVI has often indicated that the building of a just society is the responsibility of the political order, both of the individual States and of the international community. This requires exercising practical reason in a disciplined manner at each level and training one's will to be able to discern and meet the specific requests of justice, in full compliance with the common good and the inalienable dignity of each person. In his Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, Benedict XVI reaffirmed, right from the beginning of his Pontificate, the Church's willingness to contribute to this necessary purification of reason in order to help form consciences and stimulate a wider response to the genuine needs of justice. At the same time, the Holy Father pointed out that Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. "There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love" (*Deus caritas est*, n. 28). In the continuation of his letter to President Glendon Benedict XVI indicates that at the centre of the social order marked by justice, freedom, fraternal solidarity and peace is the principle of the universal destination of all the goods of creation and writes "According to this fundamental principle, everything that the earth produces and all that man transforms and manufactures, all his knowledge and technology, is meant to serve the material and spiritual development and fulfilment of the human family and all its members". From this integrally human perspective we can understand more fully the essential role which charity plays in the pursuit of justice. Returning to the teaching of His predecessor John Paul II, Benedict XVI maintains that "Charity not only enables justice to become more inventive and to meet new challenges; it also inspires and purifies humanity's efforts to achieve authentic justice and thus the building of a society worthy of man". At this point the Holy Father briefly called our attention to three specific challenges that the world is facing, which He believes can only be dealt with I would like briefly to direct your attention to three specific challenges facing our world, challenges which he believes can only be met through a firm commitment to that greater justice which is inspired by charity. "The first concerns the environment and sustainable development. ... Particular attention must be paid to the fact that the poorest countries are likely to pay the heaviest price for ecological deterioration". This leads us to a second challenge: "Despite the recognition of the rights of the person in international declarations and legal instruments, much progress needs to be made in bringing this recognition to bear upon such global problems as the growing gap between rich and poor countries; the unequal distribution and allocation of natural resources and of the wealth produced by human activity; the tragedy of hunger, thirst and poverty on a planet where there is an abundance of food, water and prosperity; the human suffering of refugees and displaced people; the continuing hostilities in many parts of the world; the lack of sufficient legal protection for the unborn; the exploitation of children; the international traffic in human beings, arms and drugs; and numerous other grave injustices". The third challenge, according to Benedict XVI, relates to the values of the spirit. "Pressed by economic worries, we tend to forget that, unlike material goods, those spiritual goods which are properly human expand and multiply when communicated: unlike divisible goods, spiritual goods such as knowledge and education are indivisible, and the more one shares them, the more they are possessed. Globalization has increased the interdependence of peoples, with their different traditions, religions and systems of education. This means that the peoples of the world, for all their differences, are constantly learning about one another and coming into much greater contact. All the more important, then, is the need for a dialogue which can help people to understand their own traditions vis-à-vis those of others, to develop greater self-awareness in the face of challenges to their identity, and thus to promote understanding and the acknowledgement of true human values within an intercultural perspective. To meet these challenges, a just equality of opportunity, especially in the field of education and the transmission of knowledge, is urgently needed. Regrettably, education, especially at the primary level, remains dramatically insufficient in many parts of the world".

The Academy returned to the topic of the common good with the May 2008 Plenary Session on Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together, which focused in particular on the

correlation of four fundamental principles of the Catholic social doctrine: the dignity of the human person, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity, with special attention to the new world of information technology. In welcoming the participants, the Holy Father warmly thanked the Academicians because, "Over the last two decades, the Academy has offered a valuable contribution to the deepening and development of the Church's social doctrine and its application in the areas of law, economics, politics and the various other social sciences". The Holy Father then summarised the content of the principles to examine in the Session: "Human dignity is the intrinsic value of a person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ. The totality of social conditions allowing persons to achieve their communal and individual fulfilment is known as the common good. Solidarity refers to the virtue enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods, and subsidiarity is the coordination of society's activities in a way that supports the internal life of the local communities" (Address of 3 May 2008). However, for Benedict XVI, who is also a theologian, the unfathomable depths of the human person and mankind's marvellous capacity for spiritual communion – realities which are fully disclosed only through divine revelation – far exceed the capacity of schematic representation. In actual fact, "the solidarity that binds the human family, and the subsidiary levels reinforcing it from within, must however always be placed within the horizon of the mysterious life of the Triune God (cf. *Jn* 5:26; 6:57), in whom we perceive an ineffable love shared by equal, though nonetheless distinct, persons (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 42)". The eyes of faith permit us to see that the heavenly and earthly cities interpenetrate and are intrinsically ordered to one another, inasmuch as they both belong to God the Father. According to Benedict XVI when we examine the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity in the light of the Gospel, "we realize that they are not simply 'horizontal': they both have an essentially vertical dimension". Indeed, "Jesus commands us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (cf. *Lk* 6:31); to love our neighbour as ourselves (cf. *Mat* 22:35)". In this sense, "true solidarity – though it begins with an acknowledgment of the equal worth of the other – comes to fulfilment only when I willingly place my life at the service of the other (cf. *Eph* 6:21). Herein lies the 'vertical' dimension of solidarity: I am moved to make myself less than the other so as to minister to his or her needs (cf. *Jn* 13:14-15), just as Jesus 'humbled himself' so as to give men and women a share in his divine life with the Father and the Spirit (cf. *Phil* 2:8; *Mat* 23:12)". Similarly, for Benedict XVI "subsidiarity – insofar as it encourages men and women to enter freely into life-giving relationships with those to whom they are most closely connected and upon whom they most immediately depend, and demands of higher authorities respect for these relationships – manifests a 'vertical' dimension pointing towards the Creator of the social order (cf. *Rom* 12:16, 18). A society that honours the principle of subsidiarity liberates people from a sense of despondency and hopelessness, granting them the freedom to engage with one another in the spheres of commerce, politics and culture (cf. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 80). When those responsible for the public good attune themselves to the natural human desire for self-governance based on subsidiarity, they leave space for individual responsibility and initiative, but most importantly, they leave space for love (cf. *Rom* 13:8; *Deus Caritas Est*, 28), which always remains 'the most excellent way' (cf. *1 Cor* 12:31)". Finally, Benedict XVI ends by urging the Academicians and the participants in the Plenary Session to "strive to articulate the ways in which men and women can best promote the common good". He encourages them to "survey both the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of solidarity and subsidiarity. In this way, you will be able to propose more effective ways of resolving the manifold problems besetting mankind at the threshold of the third millennium, while also bearing witness to the primacy of love, which transcends and fulfils justice as it draws mankind into the very life of God".

The Holy Father constantly follows and supports the work of both the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Apart from the inspired Addresses that you can find here, a sign of this special benevolence is also his constant appointment of new Academicians. Since the beginning of his Pontificate he has appointed seven new members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, including the following prominent personalities of the social sciences: Hsin-Chi Kuan, Luis Ernesto Derbez Bautista, Gérard-François Dumont, Pierre Manent, Janne Haaland Matlary, Lubomír Mlcoch, Angelika Nußberger. Finally, on 26 February 2009, at the end of her first term, the Holy Father confirmed the Presidency of Mary Ann Glendon for another five-year period.