

The Teaching of St. Thomas and the Problems of Today

An Address of Pope John XXIII to the
Fifth International Thomistic Congress

Singulari sane

September 16, 1960

IT GIVES Us very special joy to welcome the members of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas and everyone else from around the world who is taking part in the Congress that this wonderful academy has arranged for this dear city, the seat of the Chair of Peter. And We have good reasons—the very best reasons—to be glad.

Approval of the Church

For the Academy of St. Thomas has never swerved from the clear principles that were laid down by its founder of immortal memory, Leo XIII, and ratified and confirmed by Our predecessors who have followed him; and in the international congresses it has sponsored and the study weeks it has staged, it has never failed to point up and defend and spread the philosophical teaching of Aquinas. His teaching was, more than any other, fully in keeping with the

truths that God has revealed, with the writings of the Holy Fathers, and with the principles of right reason, and therefore holy Church has adopted it as her own, and has given the name of common or universal Teacher to its author.¹

Moral training in Thomism

Because you are fully convinced, as We are Ourselves, beloved sons, that the principles and precepts and way of teaching of the Angelic Doctor, which will endure through all ages, also have to do with moral training—which is treated in the lengthiest part of the *Summa Theologica* in the most orderly, serious and penetrating fashion possible—you have discussed three very important subjects in the light of the principles of St. Thomas and with due attention to the commands of holy Church that have to do with these matters: *the foundation and supports of morality; the preservation and reconciliation of the*

rights of truth; and the concept of work.

We have no intention of treating these matters here, even in passing; in that regard, you would do well to refer to the rich and profound statements published by Our predecessor of venerated memory, Pius XII, and to Our first encyclical, entitled "*Ad Petri Cathedram*."² Learned philosophers and theologians, whose names We have seen in the program you offered Us, have thrown light on these matters and have subjected them to careful study in discussions and talks.

We hold the office of supreme teacher of the faith and always take the greatest care to see to it that the eternal salvation of souls is fostered. And in these circumstances, We are impelled to offer for your consideration two truths which We think will be especially helpful to your congress.

A guide to eternity

The first thing that We feel you should think about is this: even though the moral teaching of Aquinas seems to have one definite aim in view, namely to look into the underlying reasons of things, actually, if you look for its deeper purpose, you will find that it always aims at setting men on the safest

and surest road to perfect attainment of their supreme supernatural end, which brings eternal happiness. The chief characteristic of this moral teaching of St. Thomas, the one that enables it to transcend the things of earth and attain a supernatural end, was wisely pointed out by Our predecessor in his encyclical "*Studiorum Ducem*": "*He also produced solid theological teaching in the field of morals, that can serve to direct all human acts toward man's supernatural end in a proper fashion.*"³

An aid to unity

The other matter that We want to propose for your consideration seems more urgent and more important to Us because We are looking forward to the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, and We have been devoting a great deal of attention to making proper preparations for it: the fact that the treatment and solution of moral questions according to the imperishable principles of Aquinas is of great help in bringing about agreement and unity among those interested in truth and charity. This fact is bound to produce a great deal of the very richest fruit in the form of peace for the Catholic Church and for the whole world.

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This address was delivered to some three hundred Thomistic scholars from all over the world who had come to Rome for the Fifth International Thomistic Congress, sponsored by the Pontifical Roman Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas.

For the triumph of peace

In the encyclical "*Studiorum Ducem*," which commemorated the outstanding virtues of Aquinas on the 600th anniversary of his canonization, Pius XI set this aim for himself: to hasten the triumph "of the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ." And this is also the chief concern—We might say the lofty summit—of Our pastoral interests, as We made clear at the very beginning of Our pontificate. For in the first encyclical We issued, We let Our children all over the world know how We felt: that the triumph of peace was to be sought in a freer flow of divine charity into the bosom of human society. "*The salvation that people are looking for can be expected to come principally from a great outpouring of charity.*"⁴

Defenders and leaders

And so, if your care for the salvation of souls leads you to a careful study and a constant proposal of moral truths that rest on the natural law as their proximate basis and look to divine Revelation as their supreme norm, then you will be true defenders of the liberty of souls; and if your influence and advice lead workers and employers to respect each other's rights and carry out their duties to each other, then you will, within the limits of your own abilities, be leading them

to follow Christ Jesus, the *way*, the *truth*, the *life*,⁵ our *protector* in the mortal age in which we are now living and our *great and immeasurable reward* in blessed eternity.⁶

A growing interest

But if all these things that We desire so ardently are to come about, the first thing necessary is to study the works of St. Thomas carefully. And so We are very interested in seeing a steady growth in the number of people who find enlightenment and learning in the works of the Angelic Doctor; and not only priests or scholars but also people interested in the liberal arts. Above all we would like to see this path followed by more of the young people chosen for the work of Catholic Action and holding higher degrees. We would be very happy to see what We might term the "treasure" of the precepts of St. Thomas "unearthed" in greater measure each day, to the great benefit of Christianity, and also to see his writing reach a much wider public in a language and form perfectly suited to the spirit and temper of our times.

Valuable training

Beloved sons, there you have Our wishes for your congress. It was with hearty approval that We greeted the first announcement that it

¹ Cf. Pius XI's encyclical, "*Studiorum ducem*," AAS 15 (1923) 314.

² An English translation of "*Ad Petri Cathedram*" appears in TPS (Autumn 1959) v. 5, no. 4, 359.

³ AAS 15 (1923) 319.

⁴ AAS 51 (1959) 509.

⁵ John 14, 6.

⁶ Cf. Gen. 15, 1.

was to be held, and since then We have often directed Our attention to the preparations for it and the labors themselves; for We are fully convinced that studies of this kind are of great value to the Catholic training of men—studies, We might add, to which We Ourselves were quite attached from the early years of Our priesthood, when they were being taken up again with a new enthusiasm because of the great encouragement given to scholarship by Our predecessor Leo XIII. Besides—We say this

among friends and not too seriously—We feel that Our very name ties Us in with things Thomistic, since it comes down to Us from Our predecessor John XXII, who canonized Thomas Aquinas.

Finally, We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you publicly on all you have done so well in this matter of grave importance, and in a fatherly spirit to impart the Apostolic Blessing to each and every one of you present here and to all those dear to you, as a pledge of heavenly gifts.

Significance of the Olympics

... The sight that greeted Our eyes in St. Peter's Square on the evening of August 24th [the assembled Olympic athletes] seems to have been an invitation from Heaven to give public expression to Our heartfelt approval of this universal desire for a fuller cooperation on the part of all peoples to achieve their genuine welfare and to defend human values.

Yes! This competition in sports and the motives that serve as the inspiration for these great encounters between young people do more than proclaim to the whole world that honor is being paid to physical accomplishments and to the grace and harmony of the human body. They also point to the service that these physical values can and should render to man's higher aspirations for interior perfection and beauty, for friendly and peaceful competition, for universal brotherhood. . . .

—John XXIII. From an address to the International Olympic Committee. August 29, 1960.