



## 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".

Honouring our Venerated Pope during a Plenary Session that was providentially aimed at studying a key point of his Magisterium gave Benedict XVI a privileged opportunity to stress the importance of the reality of the person, the undisputed conquest of Christian thought, not just in the social sciences but also in the natural ones, above all concerning the conflicting points of biology and the so-called cognitive sciences.

The natural sciences, and evolution in particular, were present in various ways in Joseph Ratzinger's reflection even before he was elected as Pope. For example, Benedict XVI suggested a decisively metaphysical approach in his Address to the participants of the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the topic "Scientific Insights into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life". He maintained that the confusion to avoid lies in the two possible meanings of the term "origin": the physical-naturalistic one of genetic or horizontal derivation and the metaphysical one of the ontological or vertical foundation. One refers to the origin of the universe and of life in the succession of space and time starting from data which has already been originated, while the other asks questions on the appearance of the participated being starting from the Being by essence. Benedict XVI states that, "Philosophy in its early stages had proposed images to explain the origin of the cosmos on the basis of one or more elements of the material world. This genesis was not seen as a creation, but rather a mutation or transformation; it involved a somewhat horizontal interpretation of the origin of the world". The Holy Father points out that there is another meaning of origin, which is the metaphysical or vertical one: "A

decisive advance in understanding the origin of the cosmos was the consideration of being *qua* being and the concern of metaphysics with the most basic question of the first or transcendent origin of participated being". He is then able to conclude that, "In order to develop and evolve, the world must first *be*, and thus have come from nothing into being. It must be created, in other words, by the first Being who is such by essence". The creation of being from nothing is in the foundation or vertical origin of the becoming, that is, in the course of events, of history, and therefore also in the foundation of evolution. Christian philosophy has the merit of having further examined this vertical origin: "Thomas Aquinas taught that the notion of creation must transcend the horizontal origin of the unfolding of events, which is history, and consequently all our purely naturalistic ways of thinking and speaking about the evolution of the world. Thomas observed that creation is neither a movement nor a mutation. It is instead the foundational and continuing relationship that links the creature to the Creator, for he is the cause of every being and all becoming". For Benedict XVI, in a strict sense, God not only created the world originally, but continuously creates it: "Creation is at the origin of all things but it also continues and is actuated through the whole span of cosmic becoming, until the end of time". Thanks to this conception of creation, theology and philosophy can formulate the notion of continuous creation, conservation of being and providence, which are connected to the relation between God and nature in the light of modern science.

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 seventeen new members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, including the following prominent personalities of the scientific world: Aaron J. Ciechanover, Francis S. Collins, Stanislas Dehaene, Gerhard L. Ertl, José G. Funes, Takashi Gojobori, Theodor W. Hänsch, Krishnaswami Kasturirangan, Klaus von Klitzing, Yuan Tseh Lee, Cesare Pasini, Edward De Robertis, Ignacio Rodríguez-Iturbe, Govind Swarup, Edward Witten, Vanderlei S. Bagnato, Joachim von Braun and Shinya Yamanaka. Following the passing of our dear longstanding President Nicola Cabibbo, Benedict XVI, giving further proof of his strong academic sense, appointed Nobel laureate Professor Werner Arber as our new President on 20 December 2010, making him the first non-Catholic Christian to hold this position.