

**“IN DULCEDINE SOCIETATIS QUAERERE  
VERITATEM”: THE INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIETY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

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A discussion of the history and worldwide expansion of the  
*Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino*.

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*Dedicated to His Holiness John Paul II (1978-2005),  
first member of the S.I.T.A.*

1. 1974: THE RETURN TO THOMAS AQUINAS

Those who remember the International Congress celebrated in 1974, on the occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the death of St. Thomas Aquinas, cannot fail to relive the enthusiasm of those days. More than 1,500 participants congregated at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome, and later at the Faculty of Theology of Naples in Capodimonte, in order to discuss the *thought of St. Thomas and the fundamental problems of our time*. In the Aula Magna of the Angelicum, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, Pope Paul VI exclaimed: “*Inaspettato, ma formidabile.*”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cfr. PAUL VI, *Lumen Ecclesiae*, 1.

Thanks to the wise and determined Dominican effort to counter the representatives named by the Italian government, the Congress discarded a historicist focus and looked instead for the truth that Thomas the Master is able to contribute to us today. In his speech at Capodimonte, the then Cardinal Wojtyla—who was very active in the Congress—demanded a return to Thomas in order to be able to provide a foundation for the ethical life of present-day society. An urgency thus awoke, amongst those attending the congress, to rescue the study of Aquinas, and the enthusiastic Dominican Benedetto d'Amore proposed a project to create an International Thomistic Society with these words:

“Questa singolare propicia occasione ci spinge ad avanzare la proposta di un tentativo per continuare l’incontro, per consolidare legami morali tra gli studiosi che si sono riuniti in nome di San Tommaso. Opportuna perciò sembrerebbe la formazione di una associazione di tutto il mondo, che potrebbe avere il titolo di *Società Tomista Internazionale* ... La Società Tomista Internazionale si propone di riunire persone interessate all’approfondimento dell’intelligenza dei problemi umani e alla comprensione di essi per avvicinarsi alla verità, secondo lo spirito e la dottrina dell’Aquate.”<sup>2</sup>

Thomas teaches that “everything that acts, acts with an intention to achieve something ... and this is called its purpose”,<sup>3</sup> and this purpose is therefore “first in the order of intention.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the Congress of the 7<sup>th</sup> Centenary, the purpose was established

2. M. D. CHENU; A. LOBATO; ET ALII, *Il pensiero di Tommaso d'Aquino e i problemi fondamentali del nostro tempo*, Herder, Roma, 1974, pp. 434-435.

3. *De principiis naturae*, c. 3: “Et quia, ut dicit Aristoteles in secundo Metaph., omne quod agit, non agit nisi intendendo aliquid, oportet esse aliud quartum, id scilicet quod intenditur ab operante: et hoc dicitur finis.”

4. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 1 in c.: “Alio vero modo, secundum quod ipsa anima inclinatur et tendit in rem exteriorem. Et secundum hanc etiam comparationem, sunt duo genera potentiarum animae, unum quidem, scilicet appetitivum, secundum quod anima comparatur ad rem extrinsecam ut ad finem, qui est primum in intentione.”

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with a clarity that would illuminate the future International Thomistic Society: “To approach the truth according to the spirit and doctrine of Aquinas.” The applause of the Congress attendees ratified the proposal of Fr. d’Amore.

In this way the truth was made the aim of the still embryonic Society. The truth, which is nothing other than the reality of things: *verum est id quod est*.<sup>5</sup> But what better way to approach the knowledge of reality than at the hands of he who already has known it? and so it is that “the words of he who teaches —affirms Aquinas— are the closest cause of that science which concerns the sensible things that exist outside the soul, insofar as words are signs of intelligible intentions.”<sup>6</sup> For that reason it is necessary that in the life of men, we learn from those teachers who have already understood reality, and whose words are truthful: *verba doctoris*. Thomas Aquinas is one of these teachers, the *Doctor Communis Ecclesiae*, and the Congress summoned to celebrate the 7<sup>th</sup> Centenary of his death cried out for a return to his lessons.

2. 1976: IN DULCEDINE SOCIETATIS QUARERE VERITATEM

Two years later, Fr. d’Amore organized an International Congress on *Theory and Praxis* under the aegis of two institutions: *Incontri Culturali* —which he himself directed— and the Fundación Balmesiana of Barcelona —directed by the Jesuit Juan Roig Gironella. The Congress was held partly in Genoa, with the other part held in Barcelona. Several hundred attendees

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5. *De veritate* c. 1, a. 1 in c.: “Veritas sive verum tripliciter invenitur diffiniri. Uno modo secundum illud quod praecedit rationem veritatis, et in quo verum fundatur; et sic Augustinus definit in lib. Solil.: verum est id quod est.”

6. *De veritate* q. 11, a. 1 ad 11: “Ipsa verba doctoris audita, vel visa in scripto, hoc modo se habent ad causandum scientiam in intellectu sicut res quae sunt extra animam, quia ex utrisque intellectus intentiones intelligibiles accipit; quamvis verba doctoris propinquius se habeant ad causandum scientiam quam sensibilia extra animam existentia, inquantum sunt signa intelligibilium intentionum.”

participated in the Genoan sessions, which were inaugurated by Cardinal Wojtyła.

During this Congress, the question was raised as to how the initiative of Capodimonte could be brought to fruition, and that meant finding suitable means for reaching this ambitious goal. And thus, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 1976, under the presidency of the Polish cardinal, the congress attendees met in Santa Maria Ligure in order to decide how to forge ahead with the project.

The suitable means found was to create a society of students, in the light of that famous phrase of Saint Albert: *In dulcedine societatis quaerere veritatem*.<sup>7</sup> The truth must not only be sought in a teacher, as we said above, but also in community. Thomas gives the reason for this: “in the acquisition of science, the company of others who study is generally beneficial, since sometimes one fails to see what another one discovers, or that which has been revealed to him.”<sup>8</sup> Years later Pope John Paul II would express this same truth in his Encyclical *Fides et ratio*:

“It should not be forgotten that reason must be supported in its search by a dialogue based on trust and on sincere friendship. A climate of distrust and suspicion, which sometimes surrounds speculative investigation, is a forgetting of the teaching of the ancient philosophers, who considered friendship to be one of the contexts best suited to practicing philosophy well.”<sup>9</sup>

The Dominican spirit, which in its original years produced the flourishing of Master Thomas, would now help to give light to this newly-formed Society. It was thus accepted that the Order of Preachers would take responsibility for bringing the Society into being, and Cardinal Wojtyła —the first member of the Society—

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7. ST. ALBERT THE GREAT, *In VIII Politicorum*, in fine.

8. *Contra impugnantes* II, c. 2 in c.: “Sed praecipue in acquisitione scientiae plurimum societas multorum simul studentium prodest; quia interdum unus ignorat quod alter invenit, aut quod ei revelatur.”

9. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, n. 33.

began in that session to propose the people who would assume leadership positions: the Master General of the Order, Vincent de Couesnongle, as President; Fr. Aniceto Fernández as Vice-president; Fr. Abelardo Lobato as Director, and Fr. d’Amore as Secretary. The assembly of members accepted these proposals, and the new *International Thomist Society* was born with a white habit: a virtuous means had been chosen for its realization.

### 3. 1978: SOCIETÀ INTERNAZIONALE TOMMASO D’AQUINO

It is good that law reflects reality, and not the other way around. The Society had already been born in Santa Maria Ligure, and it was now agreed upon to give juridical status to that reality. Thus, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1978, its President, the Master General of the Order, summoned the most outstanding representatives of the Society to the Roman convent of Santa Sabina in order to sign the foundational document and its statutes in the presence of a notary.

Once this was done, the Society as of that moment was defined as “an independent cultural association, of international character, according to the norms of current Italian law” (art. 1). Fr. de Couesnongle was formally named President, attended by two Vice-presidents: Fr. Aniceto Fernández and Professor Jean Ladrière; Fr. Lobato and Fr. d’Amore remained, respectively, as Director and Secretary, and Fr. McDonald, treasurer of the Order of Preachers, was named Administrator. The headquarters was designated as Via Panisperma 261, the office of Fr. d’Amore.

At the same time, the Society needed to receive an official name. Although it had originally been called the *International Thomist Society*, it was preferred to replace the epithet *Thomist* with that of *Thomas Aquinas*. This was intended to avoid limiting the Society to a certain school, opening its doors instead to any disciple of Aquinas. And thus, the *Society* definitively named itself

the *Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino* ["Thomas Aquinas International Society"] (S.I.T.A.)

Another aspect that was defined clearly in the statutes was the purpose of the society (art. 2), which was explained in the following way:

"The International Society of Thomas Aquinas proposes for itself the following aims:

- a) the profound and up-to-date study of the work of Aquinas,
- b) the propagation of his doctrine,
- c) and the examination of the fundamental problems of our time, especially those that bear relation to Christian thought, in the light of his teachings."

It would be possible to say that the first two clauses coincide with those of any other Thomistic association, with the third clause being most specific to the S.I.T.A.; this was an inheritance of the Congress held during the 7<sup>th</sup> Centenary, whose discussions about the *Thought of St. Thomas and the Fundamental Problems of Our Time* became the basis upon which the future S.I.T.A. was created.

There is no reason to be surprised that the truth which Master Thomas taught in university classrooms back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century can provide answers to the restlessness of contemporary man. Such is the fecundity of the truth, that "He who listens attentively to a few things, can teach many things."<sup>10</sup> The disciple of Thomas Aquinas must, therefore, provide light to the man of today, debilitated in his reason, slave to his passions, solitary in a globalized world, distressed by disease and death, with emptiness in his heart that continues yearning for God. For that reason Pope John Paul II later said of Aquinas that he was

"not only the *Doctor Communis Ecclesiae*, as Pablo VI calls him in his beautiful Letter *Ecclesiae lumen*, but also the *Doctor Humanitatis*, because always he is

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10. *Breve principium*, c. 3: "Sed fecunditas quantum ad inventionem, per quam ex paucis auditis multa bonus auditor annuntiet."

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ready and available for receiving the human values of all cultures. The Angelic Doctor can truthfully say: *Veritas in seipsa fortis est et nulla impugnatione convellitur* (CG III, c. 10). The truth, like Jesus Christ, can be denied, persecuted, fought, wounded, martyred, crucified; but it always revives and come back to life again, and it can never be removed from the human heart.”<sup>11</sup>

4. 1979: ON THE CENTENARY OF *AETERNI PATRIS*

The S.I.T.A., already constituted formally, was soon going to produce its first fruits. In 1979, the first centenary of Leo XIII's Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* was commemorated, and it was taken advantage of the occasion to organize an international congress in collaboration with the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome. And thus, in the classrooms of this university, after five years of the first mention of the S.I.T.A., the Thomas Aquinas International Society celebrated its first congress from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 1979: *Thomas Aquinas at the First Centennial of the Encyclical Aeterni Patris*.

The method of the new Society was thereby formed: to mark out its way by means of international congresses. These would provide three benefits to the S.I.T.A.: to give answers to questions of the present time in the light of Aquinas, just as was laid out in its statutes; to summon numerous disciples of Aquinas to bring into being that society which looks for the truth in “trusting dialogue and sincere friendship”; and, finally, to establish landmarks that would allow the Society to finish one stage and begin another.

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11. JOHN PAUL II, “Discurso a los participantes en el VIII congreso tomista internacional” (13 de septiembre de 1980), in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Spanish edition, January 25, 1981, p. 7.

The first landmark, which brought a close to the original stage, and gave a beginning to the second stage of consolidation of the S.I.T.A., tried to respond to the question of whether it was necessary to return to St. Thomas, as Pope Leo XIII had ordered a century before with his authoritative voice:

“We exhorted to you all, Venerable Brothers, with grave persistence, for the defense and glory of the Catholic faith, the wellbeing of society and the increase of all sciences, that you renew and propagate, wherever it is possible, the golden wisdom of St. Thomas.”<sup>12</sup>

On the occasion of this international congress, another voice, that of John Paul II, but with the same authority, argued in these terms in favor of the perennial value of the philosophy of being as taught by St. Thomas:

“The philosophy of St. Thomas is the philosophy of being, that is, of *actus essendi* ... [which] by virtue of the methodological principle according to which all the wealth of content of reality has its source in the *actus essendi*, it has, so to speak, already the full right to everything which is *true* in relation to reality. Conversely, all understanding of reality—that effectively reflects this reality—has *full rights* in the philosophy of being, independently of the philosophical school to which it belongs.”<sup>13</sup>

All reality is something true in the philosophy of being, and all true judgment concerning reality finds a place within it. How much the Pope’s text reminds us of that famous sentence frequently cited by Aquinas: “All truth, whoever it is that says it, comes from the

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12. LEO XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 21.

13. JOHN PAUL II, “Allocution to the Congress,” in PONTIFICIA ACCADEMIA ROMANA DI SAN TOMMASO D’AQUINO (ed.), *L’enciclica ‘Aeterni Patris’ nell’arco di un secolo. Atti dell’VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale (Roma, 1980)*, t. 1, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1981, p. 277.



Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, we are justified in returning to any doctrine that is true. And in this way, too, the first Congress of the S.I.T.A reaffirmed its original intention: to return to St. Thomas.

#### 5. 1986: THE SOUL IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

But after laying out its future path in the first Congress, the S.I.T.A lost two of its guides: Fr. Aniceto Fernández and Fr. Benedetto d’Amore. The loss of the first was definitive, because he passed away on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February, 1981. Fr. Lobato wrote of Fr. Fernández: “He left behind himself a pleasing memory, beloved of God and men... We bear witness that he achieved in his life the blessedness of the meek who will inherit the Earth (Mt. V, 4),”<sup>15</sup>. In November, the S.I.T.A proposed the beginning of the process of beatification. On the other hand, Fr. d’Amore fell ill and felt unable to continue working in the S.I.T.A.; Fr. Daniel Ols took charge of the Secretariat at that point, which was then located in the Roman convent of Santa Maria Minerva. In addition, the Presidency changed, by decision of the recently chosen Master General of the Dominican Order, Fr. Damian Byrne.

But the weight of the S.I.T.A fell mainly upon the shoulders of Fr. Abelardo Lobato, who decided to fan new flames from the hot coals of the Society by summoning a new International Congress. The Leonine Commission had just finished publishing

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14. AMBROSIASTER, *In 1 Cor.* 12, 3 (PL 17, 258): “Omne verum, a quocumque dicatur, a Spiritu Sancto est.” Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In 1 Sent.* d. 19, q. 5, a. 2 ad 5.

15. A. LOBATO, “St. Thomas’s Successive Discussions of the Nature of Truth,” in D. OLS (ed.), *‘Sanctus Thomas de Aquino Doctor hodiernae Humanitatis’*. *Miscellanea offerta dalla Società internazionale Tommaso d’Aquino al suo direttore prof. Abelardo Lobato, O.P. per il suo LXX gentilicio*, Pontificia Accademia di San Tommaso - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1995, p. 40.

its critical edition of the commentary of St. Thomas on Aristotle's treatise *De anima*, and it was decided that this was a good occasion to approach the subject of the soul in the anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas. The congress took place from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of January of 1986, once again in the Angelicum.

The return to Thomas took shape in a glance towards the depths of the human being. The presumed death of God had led to the death of man, and the forgetfulness of being resulted in forgetfulness of the soul. In the face of all this, the teachings of St. Thomas about man permit the memory of the soul to be given back to him, that soul which is the principle of life, created in the image of God. It is admirable the gloss by Aquinas of Psalm 8, in which David asks himself: "What is man so that you are mindful of him?" And Thomas responds:

"Only the rational nature has the capacity for God, for knowing and loving Him. For, as soon as God is made present in us by the love and the knowledge, He visits us —Job 10,12: *My spirit awaited your visit...* Man is not made subservient to any natural and corporal creature, insofar as his soul is concerned, neither in its origin, nor in its development; not in its origin, because it is not produced by the creature, and acts freely; and it does not perish with the body; and in this the honor of man consists."<sup>16</sup>

Pope John Paul II did not attend the congress on this occasion, but he received the participants in an audience in the Vatican, manifesting "the joy of belonging to your Society from its foundation";<sup>17</sup> and he developed next an authentic lesson in

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16. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Psalmo* 8, n. 4-5: "Sola natura rationalis est capax Dei, cognoscendo et amando. In quantum ergo Deus nobis praesens efficitur per amorem vel cognitionem, visitat nos: Job 10: *visitatio tua custodivit et cetera* ... Homo enim nulli creaturae naturali corporali subjicitur, quantum ad animam, nec in ingressu nec in progressu: non in ingressu, quia a creatura non producitur, et libere agit: nec perit cum corpore; et in hoc honor hominis consistit."

17. JOHN PAUL II, "Alocuzione al Congresso," in A. LOBATO (ed.), *L'anima nell'antropologia di S. Tommaso d'Aquino. Atti del Congresso della*

Thomist anthropology, of which he said that “it always closely unites the considerations of the *nature* and of the *person*, in such a way that nature provides the foundation for the objective values of the person, and this in turn gives real meaning to the universal values of nature.”<sup>18</sup>

## 6. 1991: ETHICS AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

At the end of the congress in 1986 a new president was chosen, Fr. Cornelio Fabro, one of the most prestigious Thomists, who would be the first non-Dominican president. With him, a new stage would begin which would pay particular attention to the moral question, about which the Pope had shown his preoccupation ever since the time of the origin of the S.I.T.A., and which in his latest allocution he had derived from the truth about man.

The stable presence of Fr. Lobato in the Angelicum would allow a remarkable revitalization in the activity of the S.I.T.A. Each semester he organized a meeting (*convengo*), the talks from which were later published by Edizioni Studio Domenicano of Bologna, or else by the University itself: *Anthropology and Christology Yesterday and Today* (in the spring of 1987), *Homo loquens: Man and Language* (autumn of 1987), *Thought, Brain and Machine* (spring of 1988), *John of St. Thomas, on the IV<sup>th</sup> Centenary of His Birth* (autumn of 1988), *Crisis and Awakening of the Moral Conscience in Our Time* (spring of 1989), *Moral Conscience and Political Responsibility* (autumn of 1989), and *Ethics of the Medical Act* (November of 1990).

All this was preparation for a new landmark: the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of the S.I.T.A., which would be celebrated

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*Societa Internazionale S. Tommaso d'Aquino, Roma, 2-5 Gennaio 1986*, Massimo, Milano, 1987, p. 9.

18. *Ibidem*, p. 10.

from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, 1991 in Rome, and which would focus on *Ethics and Contemporary Society*. More than four hundred congress attendees invaded the classrooms of the Angelicum to show the way towards happiness to the man who lives in this secularized society of our days. And Thomas Aquinas once again goes out to encounter the man who looks to know the truth and to practice the good:

“Only the universal good can calm the will of man, but this is not found in anything created, but only in God, because every creature has a participated goodness. Therefore, only God can satisfy the will of the man.”<sup>19</sup>

In the presentation of the *Proceedings*, published a year later in three volumes by the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas, Fr. Abelardo Lobato explained what the *Doctor Humanitatis* contributes to ethical reflection:

“Thomas has left an inheritance of three valuable acquisitions to all students:

- a) the perfection of the man is measured, not on the basis of intellectual virtue or of knowledge, but by moral virtue, which makes man good;
- b) the ethical perfection to which every man is called has its measure in Jesus Christ, in virtue of the charity that comes from grace;
- c) and the assimilation of pre-Christian ethical thought, insofar as it is an expression of the ideal of the natural perfection of the man.”<sup>20</sup>

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19. *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 2, a. 8 in c.: “Nihil potest quietare voluntatem hominis, nisi bonum universale. Quod non invenitur in aliquo creato, sed solum in Deo, quia omnis creatura habet bonitatem participatam. Unde solus Deus voluntatem hominis implere potest.”

20. A. LOBATO, “Presentazione,” in IDEM (ed.), *Etica e società contemporanea. Atti del III Congresso Internazionale della Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino*, t. 1, Pontificia Accademia di San Tommaso - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1992, p. 6.

And as was habitual, the papal audience put the finishing touch on the works of the Congress, and John Paul II exclaimed humorously: “*Devo confessare che questo socio numero uno è poco attivo.*”<sup>21</sup> On another note, Fr. Fabro left the presidency, and the assembly of partners now chose Fr. Battista Mondin, a Thomist of a very productive pen.

#### 7. 1997: THE PROBLEM OF THE MAN AND THE MYSTERY OF JESUS CHRIST

If with the international congresses the S.I.T.A had advanced in depth, the stage that now was beginning would consolidate an expansion that had begun in 1989. Fr. Lobato would be not only the voice of Thomas, but also his feet, taking him throughout the diverse countries of Europe and America. Branches of the S.I.T.A thus began to be based in diverse parts of the world, and —along with the international congresses— these would constitute an essential element of the life of the Society.

These branches were born as training groups, normally around some teacher able to make the lessons of St. Thomas present and alive, and associated with some academic institution. This would provide notable benefits to the S.I.T.A.: in the first place, by giving it a reality beyond the celebration of the congresses; secondly, by putting it in contact with institutions and their educational and material resources; finally, allowing the Society to include those people who lacked the possibility of attending the congresses due to distance, or who were more given to modest but constant study in small groups.

Thus, in Spain a national branch was formed in 1989, presided over by the Dominican Fr. Victorino Rodríguez and assisted in the secretariat by Fr. Manuel González Pola. It was followed two years

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21. Cfr. A. LOBATO, “Itinerario de la Sociedad Internacional Tomás de Aquino en sus primeros 20 años,” p. 43.

later by a local branch in Barcelona under the energetic teaching of Prof. Francisco Canals, with the direction of his disciple Prof. Eudaldo Forment and under the aegis of the Balmesiana — which has been so close to the S.I.T.A since its origins— and of its director, the Jesuit Pedro Suñer. In September of 1993 this branch of the Society held a congress on *Personal Dignity, Human Community and Legal Order*, publishing the proceedings a year later.

The S.I.T.A also wished to extend to the Americas. Chile initiated a branch in 1989 under the direction of Fernando Moreno, who soon would be welcomed in the new Universidad de Santo Tomás, founded by the entrepreneur Gerald Rocha. That same year in Peru the Salesian Alexander Saavedra organized a branch at the Catholic University, which was formally constituted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November in a solemn act presided over by the apostolic nuncio. Also, the Dominican Fr. Enrique Almeida gave birth to a branch of the S.I.T.A in Ecuador, Dr. Gonzalo Soto in Colombia, Dr. James Washburn in Costa Rica, Dr. Fernando Godínez in Mexico, Dr. Mary Rose Barral in the United States, and the Dominican Celerino Anciano in Venezuela. America, which had been educated with the *Summa Theologiae* in its universities, taking as its model the University of Salamanca, was now recovering Thomas Aquinas by means of the S.I.T.A.

And in Europe also they began to bring forth branches of the S.I.T.A., as if Friar Thomas had returned to travel the continent's byways. Thus, in 1994 a branch was created in Portugal, presided over by Dr. Maria Candida Pacheco. In August of 1996 the Catholic University of Lublin celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Christian Philosophy on the subject of *Freedom and its Meaning in the Present Culture*; Fr. Mondin and Fr. Lobato took advantage of the occasion to introduce the S.I.T.A., and two branches were born there: the Polish branch, supported by the Dominican Mieczyslaw Krapieć, and the Lithuanian, directed by Dr. Dalia Stancienne. Italy also was enriched with three new local branches: in Sardinia, in Fossanova—in the shade of the abbey in

which Aquinas passed away—, and in Naples, cradle of the S.I.T.A.

This expansion of the S.I.T.A would cause the 4<sup>th</sup> international Congress to be celebrated for the first time outside Rome, in the city of Barcelona, where the branch directed by Dr. Forment showed a remarkable vitality. The selected topic would be a culmination of the previous ones: *The Problem of Man and the Mystery of Jesus Christ*, putting at the center of attention of the attendees that phrase of *Gaudium et spes* which Pope John Paul II quoted in his message directed to the Congress: “The mystery of man is only clarified in the mystery of the Incarnated Word.”<sup>22</sup>

The Fundación Balmesiana welcomed about 400 participants from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 1997. Thirty presentations followed one another in a tightly packed schedule, along with almost 200 presented papers, which were published the following year in four volumes, thanks to the patronage of Mr. Miguel Castillejo. At the end of the Congress, the usual assembly was celebrated, which chose Fr. Abelardo Lobato as the new President of the S.I.T.A., and named Dr. Forment as Director; Fr. Mondin was named as Honorary President. The headquarters of the S.I.T.A would from that moment on pass to Barcelona.

#### 8. 2003: CHRISTIAN HUMANISM IN THE 3<sup>RD</sup> MILLENIUM

A year after the International Congress of 1997, Pope John Paul II published his Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, in which he reaffirmed the “perennial newness of the thought of Saint Thomas”:

“Profoundly convinced that ‘whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit’ (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*), Saint Thomas was impartial in his love of truth. He sought truth wherever it might be found and gave consummate

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22. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22.

demonstration of its universality. In him, the Church's Magisterium has seen and recognized the passion for truth; and, precisely because it stays consistently within the horizon of universal, objective and transcendent truth, his thought scales 'heights unthinkable to human intelligence.' Rightly, then, he may be called an 'apostle of the truth.' Looking unreservedly to truth, the realism of Thomas could recognize the objectivity of truth and produce not merely a philosophy of 'what seems to be' but a philosophy of 'what is.'"<sup>23</sup>

With this recognition of Master Thomas Aquinas, the society of his disciples began looking forward to the Jubilee of year 2000. Fr. Abelardo Lobato had also been named Director of the Faculty of Theology of Lugano; thus, with the presidency of the S.I.T.A in Switzerland, and its Direction and Secretariat in Spain, the Society would acquire a much more international character in the stage that followed the 1997 congress. New branches were founded and others consolidated. Let us look at the most outstanding events of these years, which accompanied the S.I.T.A up to the third millenium.

If we pay attention to the American continent, is to emphasize the creation in 1998 of the Argentine branch of the S.I.T.A., sponsored by the University FASTA of Mar del Plata, and whose President would be Dr. Rodolfo Mendoza; the spiritual vigor of the Brotherhood of Associations Saint Thomas Aquinas (FASTA), founded by the Dominican Fr. Aníbal Fosbery, would provide a remarkable vitality to this new branch. Mexico already had a branch in Puebla, but in the year 2000 another very vigorous branch was founded in the Distrito Federal, enriched by the teaching of Dr. Luz García Alonso and the frequent visits of the Director General, Dr. Forment. In addition, the Universidad de Santo Tomás of Chile would welcome a branch of the S.I.T.A in that country, which would find a faithful and effective leader in

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23. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et ratio*, n. 44.



Dr. Mauricio Echeverría, Director of the Center for Thomistic Studies of that university. One of the contributions of the Chilean S.I.T.A would be the novel presence of the Society on the Internet. The new millenium would also be a propitious occasion for the appearance in Uruguay, in 2001, of a branch of the S.I.T.A presided over by the Jesuit Fr. Horacio Bojorge, and which would be directed by the exemplary professor Cristina Araújo, who would unfortunately pass away at the end of 2003.

On the other hand, in Europe we must highlight the formation in 1998 of a branch in the Swiss city of Lugano, animated, of course, by Fr. Lobato and the Faculty of Theology which served as its sponsor. The S.I.T.A in Spain lamented the loss of their national President, Fr. Victorino Rodríguez, as well as the Director of the branch in Barcelona, Fr. Jordán Gallego. However, Spain was enriched with three new local branches, one in Seville, another in Valencia and a third in Murcia. And in the European East, the Polish branch was a model due to the reliability and rigor of its work. Of particular importance was the gradual publication in several volumes of the *Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

In the first years of the new millenium several new branches would arise in central Europe. In 2001, the fecund work of Fr. Lobato bore fruit in a branch in Rumania that, presided over by Dr. Alexander Baumgarten, would incorporate Catholic members of the Latin rite, as well as Greek Catholics of the Byzantine Rite. In that same year the Dominicans of Prague founded the Czech branch of the S.I.T.A., naming Fr. Stefano M. Filip as president. In 2002 Hungary's turn arrived, when a branch was formed that was presided over by Dr. Paul Richard Blum, and directed by Dr. István Cselényi. In 2003 the German branch was founded, whose president would be the Dominican Fr. Michael Dillmann; one of his more outstanding fruits would be the editing of the yearbook *Doctor Angelicus*, directed by the young Vice-president of the German S.I.T.A, Dr David Berger. And in 2004 a Dutch branch was founded, around the outstanding Thomist Fr. Leo Elders, who assumed its presidency.

We initiated our journey through this stage using the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* of Pope John Paul II as our point of reference. It is also important to remember the Apostolic Letter *Inter munera Academicarum*, published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1999 —the feast day of Saint Thomas— which gave an impulse to the Pontifical Academies of Saint Thomas and of Theology by means of the reform of their respective statutes. In this letter, the first member of the S.I.T.A expressed himself in these terms:

“In the cultural conditions of our time it seems opportune to develop more and more that part of the Thomistic doctrine which deals with humanity, since his affirmations on the dignity of the human person and on the use of reason, in perfect accord with the faith, make Saint Thomas an appropriate teacher for our time.”<sup>24</sup>

The Pope insisted on emphasizing Aquinas’s role as *Doctor Humanitatis*, which provided an excellent central theme for the upcoming international congress: *Christian Humanism in the Third millenium: The Perspective of Thomas Aquinas*. This congress, in addition, would be the first to be organized jointly by the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas and the International Society of Thomas Aquinas. This was due to the fact that on the 28th of January, 1999, shortly after signing the aforementioned apostolic letter, the Pope had named Fr. Abelardo Lobato as president of the Academy; Fr. Lobato saw an opportunity to combine efforts in a joint congress, the tenth for the Academy and the fifth for the S.I.T.A.

This happy convergence also brought the congress back to Rome, where it was held between the 21st and the 25th of September of 2003. More than 400 participants, many from them from America and the new Central European branches, congregated in the classrooms of the *Angelicum* for the ordinary sessions and in the *Palazzo della Cancelleria* for the keynote sessions. A novel addition during this congress was its preparation

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24. JUAN PABLO II, *Inter munera Academicarum*, n. 4.

and presentation on the Internet, at the portal *e-aquinas*,<sup>25</sup> which, upon the conclusion of the congress, published the videos of the plenary sessions as well as texts of the communications and presented papers.

The truth which was sought by the attendees of the congress was elegantly summarized in this Christological sentence of Aquinas, well-rooted in the patristic tradition:

“By the incarnation of Christ we are taught about the great dignity of the human nature, so that we do not stain it via sinning. For that reason, Augustine, in his book *De vera religione*, says: ‘God showed what an excellent place human nature occupies amongst creatures when He manifested Himself among men bearing the nature of a true man.’ And Pope Leo says in the sermon *De Nativitate*: ‘Recognize, oh Christian, your dignity; and, since you have been made a participant in the divine nature, do not to return to your old vileness by behavior which is unworthy.’”<sup>26</sup>

Saint Thomas cited that great Pope, and now another great Pope has cited Saint Thomas. The poor health of John Paul II did not allow him to receive to his esteemed Thomist society in an audience, but he sent a rich message in which, when referring to Aquinas, he affirmed that “his doctrine and his example constitute a propitious call to attend to the immutable and perennial truths which are indispensable for promoting a truly worthy existence for man”; and as though he were writing a farewell, he said next: “I exhort to you to persevere in reflection on the wealth of Thomist

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25. The portal *e-aquinas* [<http://e-aquinas.net>] is the work of the Instituto Santo Tomás of the Fundación Balmesiana.

26. *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 1, a. 2 in c.: “Per hoc instruimur quanta sit dignitas humanae naturae, ne eam inquinemus peccando. Unde dicit Augustinus, in libro *De vera religione*: *demonstravit nobis Deus quam excelsum locum inter creaturas habeat humana natura, in hoc quod hominibus in vero homine apparuit*. Et Leo Papa dicit, in sermone *De Nativitate*, *agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam, et divinae consors factus naturae, noli in veterem vilitatem degeneri conversatione redire*.”

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teaching, drawing from it, as did the 'scribe' of the Gospels, 'both new and old things' (Mt. 13, 52)."<sup>27</sup>

#### 9. FR. ABELARDO LOBATO, SOUL OF THE S.I.T.A.

The assembly of the S.I.T.A which was celebrated at the end of the 2003 congress considered it advisable to return the administration to Rome, with the purpose of fostering unity within a society that was growing in members every day, and also to take advantage of the doctrinal wealth provided by the pontifical universities. For this purpose, Dr. Lorella Congiunti was named as Director, who from that moment forward has done remarkable work in revitalizing the S.I.T.A in Rome, with celebration of periodic round tables in different universities. The Secretariat, which is provisionally staying in Barcelona, will also return to Rome, once they are finished preparing the premises which are being provided for that purpose by the Pontificia Università San Tommaso d'Aquino.

In this assembly, Fr. Lobato was reelected to the presidency of the S.I.T.A., although he made known his desire to leave this position in 2006, after turning eighty years old. That moment approaches, and hopefully he has changed his mind, but he has assured me that this is not the case. For that reason I have decided to conclude this communication with sincere and affectionate words of gratitude, which will be even more appropriate next November, during the ceremony of recognition that the S.I.T.A and the Academy will dedicate to him in the Angelicum. And my gratefulness is due to three benefits that Fr. Lobato has provided us.

In the first place, he has created a Thomistic society of great vitality and with a presence in numerous countries, thanks to his persevering and untiring activity. Secondly, for his teaching, which

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27. JOHN PAUL II, *Inter munera Academicarum*, n. 7.

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has focused on reminding us of the anthropological principles of the doctrine of Saint Thomas Aquinas. And thirdly, for the friendship and affection he has shown for the Society and for us, for Fr. Lobato has known how to put his heart behind his teaching and activity.

But gratefulness cannot be only expressed in words, and so it is necessary to know how to repay these benefits. First, we promise to continue carrying the S.I.T.A forward: *Duc in altum*. Secondly, we will deepen our knowledge through the study of *Doctor Humanitatis*, so that we may be able to illuminate the way of man, as he initiates the third millenium. And thirdly, by offering Fr. Lobato our warm affection.

Thank you very much, Fr. Lobato.

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