



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ABBOT PRIMATE OF THE BENEDICTINES
AND GRAND CHANCELLOR OF THE PONTIFICAL ATHENAEUM
OF ST ANSELMO IN ROME**

*To the Very Reverend Abbot Primate Dom Notker Wolf, O.S.B.
Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Athenaeum of St Anselmo*

1. I learned with deep pleasure that the Monastic Institute of the Pontifical Athenaeum of St Anselmo in Rome is commemorating the 50th anniversary of its foundation. On this happy occasion, I am pleased to send my cordial greetings and good wishes to you, the body of teachers, the students and all who are taking part in the Jubilee celebrations.

Conceived as a permanent institute for the systematic study of monastic life and culture, the Monastic Institute was established within the Theological Faculty of the Pontifical Athenaeum by a decree of the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries dated 21 March 1952. It was in response to the ardent desire of the Abbot Primate, Bernhard Kaelin to draw attention to the literary sources and great figures of monasticism, to encourage theological reflection and to study the institutional implications of monastic life. In fact, this drew attention to the urgent need for a systematic study of monasticism. In the letter that announced the Institute's opening, a precise task is outlined: "It is necessary that suitable monks, capable of teaching others, should cultivate a disciplined scientific methodology. It would be beneficial to give gifted young priests the possibility of specializing for two years in these studies" (26 May 1952).

2. The new Institute was entrusted to scholars of international repute so that the young monks might be suitably formed in monastic spirituality, history and doctrine. Among them I wish to remember Cipriano Vagaggini, master of "sapiential" theology, Basilius Steidle and Adalbert de Vogüé, who revealed the patristic roots of the Rule of St Benedict, Benedetto Calati and Gregorio Penco, outstanding historians of monasticism.

In these past decades the Monastic Institute has been able to translate its general aims into concrete academic courses and effective activities. For example, how can we forget the monks and nuns who were introduced, by means of appropriate instruments of inquiry, to a critical knowledge and systematic study of the sources and classical texts of monasticism? The opportunity for the comparative study of the history of Eastern and Western Christian monasticism made possible the recognition of the interaction existing between the respective schools of theology, spirituality and monastic life.

At a distance of fifty years, we give thanks to God for this Institute which has proven providential for many Benedictine monasteries. It has played an important role in weaving a fruitful relationship between the spiritual life and study, and has become an effective signpost and valuable centre of formation for the monastic world today.

3. The service rendered to the Church by the Benedictine Order through the now 50-year old Institute, which has contributed so much to the formation of many monks and those persons interested in obtaining a critical knowledge of and greater familiarity with the sources and classical texts of monasticism, finds its place within the general and appealing quest for God in which St Benedict, by establishing the "*Schola Christi*" (school of Christ), wanted to lead his disciples. I encourage the Benedictine religious and academic authorities to continue to labour on this path, following the Order's long and valuable cultural tradition.

May this happy anniversary, thanks also to the Jubilee celebrations planned, ensure that the Monastic Institute and the Athenaeum of St Anselmo be able to discern the future goals at which to aim in the task of promoting a vast spiritual renewal of the whole Benedictine family. "Put out into the deep"! May this be the task of all, in harmony with the expectations of the Church for the third millennium.

4. For this to happen, it is indispensable above all, that in each one a personal attachment to Christ, the only true source of renewed evangelical vitality, should be growing. Indeed, only on this condition is it possible to confront with courage the challenges of the present time. Today, as in the past, the monk is asked in the first place to cultivate an uninterrupted intimacy with the divine Master. In this way the *ora* of contemplation will be harmoniously joined with the *labora* of action, in a continuous perfecting of the monastic heritage, enriched through the ages, by the contribution of so many monasteries.

May the Virgin Mary and the Holy Father St Benedict protect all who are involved in the Institute and help to bring their plans to completion. Assuring you of a constant remembrance in prayer, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Fr Abbot Primate, and to every member of the spiritual family of the Monastic Institute and of St Anselmo's Athenaeum, which I willingly extend to all who share in the joy of this 50th anniversary.

From the Vatican, 27 May 2002.

JOHN PAUL II

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