

PRESENTATION OF 'DEMOCRACY IN DEBATE:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES'

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I know speak for all of our members when I say that it is with enormous pride and pleasure today that we offer to the Church and the public the volume that represents the culmination of our years of study and debate on Democracy. In a sense, this monograph is what ancient scholars called a *florilegium*, a collective work in which individual contributions are blended in a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. But we all know that our combined efforts could never have yielded such a rich harvest if were not for the brilliance, the leadership, and the generosity of time and talent provided by our dear colleague Hans Zacher. It is he who has made this project an exemplar of the very best that our young Academy has accomplished, and a model for our future work. His Final Report, published here, represents the crown jewel of the Academy's Democracy project, and I hope you will all join me in offering the author our congratulations and thanks.

Presently, I will turn over the platform to Professor Zacher, because it should really be up to him to make a formal presentation to you of the volume on which he labored so long and painstakingly. But because I am aware of his propensity for understatement, I would like to make just a few observations about the importance of his and our accomplishment.

To my mind, much of the strength of the Academy's work on democracy derives from our willingness, prodded by Professor Zacher, to face hard questions.

We have not hesitated, for example, to tackle the much-debated relationship between democracy and values, providing much support for the Church's view that 'a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism' (CA, 46).

Similarly, I believe we have helped to strengthen the case for the proposition that successful democratic institutions depend upon a public moral culture that celebrates freedom for excellence rather than freedom as license.

Nor have we failed to touch upon one of the most delicate questions for Catholics: the issue of democracy within the Church. One of the great merits of our Democracy project, I believe, is its reminder that democracy is a political principle, not a guide for all social behaviour. The democratic model does not afford a blueprint for all social institutions. Nevertheless, many values inherent in that model do have broad applicability, as emphasized by Pope John Paul II when he reminded a group of bishops in 2004 that '[A] commitment to creating better structures of participation, consultation, and shared responsibility should not be misunderstood as a concession to a secular 'democratic' model of governance, but an intrinsic requirement of the exercise of Episcopal authority and a necessary means of strengthening that authority'.¹

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the cover illustration for this volume. It was not so easy as one might think to find art work that was appropriate for the Academy's contribution to the study of democracy, especially since it would not have appropriate to privilege a particular model of democracy. So I consulted my daughter Elizabeth Lev, who teaches art history here in Rome. Among the suggestions she made, I was particularly drawn to a panel from a series of frescoes created by Lorenzetti for the council chamber of the free republic of Siena. The panel in question is titled: 'The effects of good government in the city'. After doing a little research on the painting, I discovered that it is not held in high esteem by many art critics who describe it as 'didactic art'. ('Didactic' is apparently an epithet to art critics, but not to a professor.) I was further encouraged, in any case, by a commentary which described the panel as showing that 'prosperity and activity in the areas of work, artisanry and education are the fruits of a civic life guided by the virtues in harmony among citizens'. That seemed to me to fit beautifully with professor Zacher's incisive explorations of the way in which successful democratic experiments both depend upon and foster a free, vibrant, and moral public culture. And I must confess that I found it delightful in this 14th century fresco to have a glimpse of a free republic where women as well as men appear to be flourishing as they go about their work and play.

¹ Bishops from Pennsylvania and New Jersey ad limina 2004.