



THE PONTIFICAL  
ACADEMY  
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

WORKSHOP ON

**AQUINAS' SOCIAL ONTOLOGY  
AND NATURAL LAW IN PERSPECTIVE  
INSIGHTS FOR AND FROM  
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**



7-8 MARCH 2024 | CASINA PIO IV, VATICAN CITY



*[St Thomas Aquinas] was passionate about the Truth, a tireless seeker of the face of God. His biographer reports that even as a child he asked: "What is God?". This question accompanied Thomas and motivated him throughout his life. This search for the truth about God is moved and permeated by love. Thus, he writes: 'Driven by an ardent will to believe, man loves the truth he believes, considers it in his intelligence, and embraces it with the reasons he can find for it'. Humbly pursuing the intellectus fidei, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is not optional for the believer, but part of the very dynamism of his faith. It is necessary that the Word of God, already welcomed in the heart, reach the intellect in order to "renew our way of thinking" (cf. Rom 12:2), so that we evaluate all things in the light of eternal Wisdom. Therefore, the passionate search for God is simultaneously prayer and contemplation, so that St Thomas is a model of theology that is born and grows in the atmosphere of worship.*

*Thomism advances in a vital dual "systolic and diastolic" movement. Systolic, because there is a need to focus on the study of the work of Saint Thomas in its historical and cultural context, to identify the structural principles and to grasp their originality. Then, however, there is the diastolic movement: to address today's world in dialogue, so as to assimilate critically what is true and right in the culture of the time (...) In the wake of my predecessors, I commend you: Go to Thomas! Do not be afraid to increase and enrich the old and ever fruitful things with new things. I wish you good work and bless you from my heart.*

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in The International Thomistic Congress, Organized by The Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Clementine Hall, Thursday, 22 September 2022.

## Concept Note

On 7 March 2024, we commemorate the 750th anniversary of Saint Thomas Aquinas' "dies natalis" in Fossanova, while 2025 will mark the 800th anniversary of his birth in Rocca-secca. Throughout the centuries, Aquinas' profound philosophical and theological legacy has illuminated countless minds, guiding their quest for harmony between faith and reason – both in theoretical contemplation and practical application. His intellectual contributions have significantly shaped the social doctrine of the Church.

Notably, the first Encyclical addressing social issues, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), was authored by the same Pope who previously penned the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879). In this latter work, Aquinas' thought was prominently featured as an intellectual touchstone for grappling with the challenges of modern times. However, the significance of Aquinas' influence does not hinge on mere "modernity." Rather, it stems from his robust social ontology, rooted in the concept of natural law – a framework that influences how humans engage with the requirements of their social nature.

While the expression "social ontology" has gained currency in contemporary social theory, where it designates a systematic reflection on the ontological status of society and institutions such as language, property, law, money, culture, as well as the dynamics of social change, it has rarely been used in Aquinas' studies. Nevertheless, the Church's social teaching relies on a social ontology that owes much to Aquinas' social thought. The latter includes a clear position on the singularity of human beings – not just social animals, but rational beings created in God's image – as well as a specific position regarding the reality of "social wholes", institutions and the dynamics of social change that deserve explicit attention, in order to foster a meaningful dialogue with contemporary social thought.

This is why, in keeping with its original mission, and as a way of honoring our late Academician and President, Margaret. S. Archer, an outstanding researcher in social ontology who passed away last year,<sup>1</sup> the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences is celebrating

<sup>1</sup> <https://socialontology.org/tag/margaret-archer/>

this important anniversary of Thomas Aquinas with a workshop devoted to his social ontology. We expect it to shed light on the nature and dynamics of the common good in a modern social context, i.e. bringing it into a relationship with rights, economics and development, as well as political participation and solidarity. In doing so, the Academy also wants to commemorate the contribution of Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) to bringing Thomism in a dialogue with our times.<sup>2</sup> This academic endeavour is particularly aligned with the social Encyclicals of the two most recent Popes, *Caritas in Veritate* (Benedict XVI, 2009), *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (Francis, 2020).

The social condition of the human being has been a central concern in philosophy since ancient times. Yet, in contrast with the Aristotelian view of humans as political beings, or the Stoics' reference to our "social nature", which dominated ancient and medieval thought, modern political philosophy replaced the ancients' reliance on our social and political nature with a renewed appraisal of conventions and institutional constructs, indirectly placing individual freedom at the core of social and political life. Along these lines, ancient notions of natural right, which persisted in Aquinas' reflections on justice, were supplanted by modern natural rights theories. The political ramifications of this transition became evident during the American and French revolutions, which heavily influenced theoretical discussions the relationship between natural law and natural rights well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At the heart of those debates was the proper way of balancing individuality and society, individual rights and the pursuit of the common good.

However, with the transition to the modern economy, the articulation of individual action and the common good was thought to depend on the functioning of the market itself: hadn't the market economy sanctioned self-interested action, thus freeing economic agents from thinking about the common good? Thus, inspired by the market econ-

<sup>2</sup> St Paul VI referred to his work in *Populorum Progressio*: Maritain, J., *L'humanisme intégral*, Paris, Aubier, 1936; Les conditions spirituelles du progrès et de la paix. In *Rencontre de cultures à l'UNESCO sous le signe du Concile oecuménique Vatican II*, Paris, Mame, 1966.



omy, liberal thought not only emphasized individual agency but also expected social order to emerge from spontaneous interactions among individuals, within the institutional framework provided by the modern state. Yet, the social unrest derived from the industrial revolution and its negative impact on communal bonds proved the insufficiency of that framework, since those problems, having a structural dimension, could not be regarded as a private matter or solved merely in terms of charity, but required the development of public policies.

For sure, there is no common good if there is no communication and community of some sort, so that each part of the community has a share in it. In the medieval social ethic, it was assumed that each estate – nobility, clergy, commoners – contributed to, and benefited from, that common good; accordingly, everyone was meant to occupy the place and function “nature” had assigned them in the social organism. Yet, in the modern context, under the conditions of social mobility required by a free market economy and a culture of freedom and rights, there cannot be any talk of a common *political* good in the absence of equal political rights and political participation. As Tocqueville rightly observed in his analysis of American democracy, in order to balance the individualistic bent implicit in the idea of rights, the language of rights has to be supplemented with the practice of political participation, thus making room for the idea of republican citizenship, which, in the context of increasing social inequalities, finds ethical guidance in the ideal of solidarity, both at the structural level and at that of the agent.

While the twentieth century development of social security systems that cared for resource redistribution represented a structural approach to solidarity, the final decades of that century witnessed the emergence of spontaneous forms of solidarity, transcending boundaries. These diverse initiatives of solidarity, motivated solely by our shared humanity, serve as a valuable indicator of the universal scope of moral reason and the pioneering spirit of individual and social agency. For several decades, this solidarity-driven action appeared to pave the way towards the update of inherited institutions, aligning them with the goal of articulating a common human good that is not oblivious to its natural pre-conditions, and, at the same time, remains open to the creativity and transcendence of human agency. Yet, whether existing institutions are

equipped for that task, or whether human agency can truly ignite structural change to foster more inclusive societies has again become an open question in our current era marked by conflicts and wars.

In this context, among other things, we may well need an additional theoretical impulse that helps us understand how to articulate the historical rootedness of our social nature in human reason’s intrinsic reference to truth, both in the theoretical and in the practical realms – where truth includes responsibility towards others. Ultimately, we need to analyse the relational dimension of human existence in all its breadth, and reflect on the way we structure responsibility, without suffocating moral creativity; the dynamics of love and friendship; the interdependence of love and justice; the ever-changing forms of human work, as well as the opportunities and threats implicit in technological progress.

Despite living 800 years ago, and thus not knowing the magnitude of social change that lay ahead, Aquinas’ social ontology, because of its reference to reason and truth, can offer precious guidance towards addressing these issues, thus sparking a fruitful exchange with contemporary social thought. Indeed, as Thomas writes in the *Summa*,

“[...] There should be a threefold order in man: one in relation to the rule of reason, in so far as all our actions and passions should be commensurate with the rule of reason: another order is in relation to the rule of the Divine Law, whereby man should be directed in all things: and if man were by nature a solitary animal, this twofold order would suffice. But since man is naturally a civic and social animal, as is proved in *Polit. i, 2*, hence a third order is necessary, whereby man is directed in relation to other men among whom he has to dwell”.<sup>3</sup>

Aquinas holds that being endowed with reason constitutes a sign that human beings are made in God’s image, which is the origin of the human being’s peculiar dignity. Such dignity, however, is to be articulated in relation to the human being’s social nature. Accordingly, Aquinas also refers to Aristotle’s *Politics* in order to reject an individualistic approach to human nature: humans are naturally civic and social animals, and that is something that needs to be considered as each one introduces order into his or her own life. To explore the structural and dy-

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<sup>3</sup> *S.th. I. II q. 72 a. 4.*

namic implications of our social nature constitutes the object of the social sciences. Yet, in the thought of Aquinas, that exploration is not just a theoretical and/or empirical endeavour; it is framed in practical terms. In his view, although the order of reason exceeds the social order, the latter, “whereby man is directed in relation to other men among whom he has to dwell”, is included in the former, precisely because human beings are not solitary beings,<sup>4</sup> but are rather meant to live in society with others, and thus are bound to discuss with those others the best way of organizing their common life.

At the same time, the fact that social life is subject to historical contingencies invites further reflection on the relationship between the order of reason and the historical social order, not merely in political terms – as Aquinas himself does when he analyses the relationship between natural law and human

law – but in existential terms. Indeed, exploring the way in which reference to reason and truth is meant to inform social life amounts to exploring the tensions between historical inertia and the realization of moral ideals, and makes us wonder how relevant truth is to the way in which we conduct our life in society; how relevant it is for the legitimacy of any given social order.

Such a reflection calls for the kind of dialogue between theology, philosophy and social theory that finds a unique platform in Aquinas’ thought. By bringing together theologians, philosophers, social theorists, economists and political scientists, the present workshop is meant to provide the room for that reflection. This is our way of commemorating the life and work of a man whose disciplined search for truth was always more powerful than any disciplinary frontier.

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<sup>4</sup> “Of these orders the second contains the first and surpasses it. For whatever things are comprised under the order of reason, are comprised under the order of God Himself. Yet some things are comprised under the order of God, which surpass the human reason, such as matters of faith, and things due to God alone. [...] In like manner, the first order includes the third and surpasses it, because in all things wherein we are directed in reference to our neighbor, we need to be directed according to the order of reason. Yet in some things we are directed according to reason, in relation to ourselves only, and not in reference to our neighbor”. *S.th* I.II q. 72 a. 4.

# Programme

## March 7 | Infermeria dei Conversi, Fossanova Abbey

7:00 Bus leaves the Domus Sanctae Marthae for Fossanova

9:00-9:45 Welcoming Remarks by the Mayor of Priverno, **Anna Maria Bilancia** followed by Introduction: **Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, Sr. Helen Alford, Prof. Ana Marta González**

### SOCIAL ONTOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL KEYS

9:45-10:15 **Bishop Robert Barron**  
*Ipsium esse in Relation to Catholic Social Thought*

10:15-10:45 **Prof. Hans Joas**  
*Organic Social Ethics and the Sacredness of the Person. Thomas Aquinas as a Challenge for Sociological Theory*

10:45-11:15 Coffee break

11:15-11:45 **Prof. Pierpaolo Donati**  
*Thomas Aquinas and the Ontology of Relationships: Actualization of a Theological and Socio-Cultural Matrix*

11:45-12:15 **Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo**  
*Partaking and Overflowing of Christ's Grace*

12:15-12:45 **Prof. Franca D'Agostini**  
*Does God Need Truth?*

12:45-13:15 Discussion

13:15 Lunch at *Il Forno del Procoio* in Borgo Fossanova

### NATURAL LAW AND THE SOCIAL WORLD

14:45-15:15 **Prof. Vittorio Hösle**  
*Aquinas' Doctrine of Natural Law in the Context of the History of the Discipline and with a Comparison with Hegel's*

15:15-15:45 **Prof. Jean Porter**  
*Natural Law, Equality, and Social Order in Aquinas' Moral and Legal Thought*

15:45-16:15 **Prof. Francesco Botturi**  
*Natural Law and Common Good*

16:15-16:45 Coffee break

16:45-17:45 Discussion

18:00 Mass with **H.Em. Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, Vatican Secretary of State

19:30 Dinner at *Il Forno del Procoio* in Borgo Fossanova and bus back to Domus Sanctae Marthae

## ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 9:00 Prof. Mary Hirschfeld**  
*The Meaning of Work in an Affluent World: What Can We Learn from St. Thomas Aquinas?*
- 9:30 Fr. Albino Barrera**  
*A Thomistic Ontology of Collective Economic Responsibility: Holding the Invisible Hand to Account*
- 10:00 Prof. Jeffrey Sachs**  
*Aquinas, the Virtues, and Global Ethics*
- 10:30-11:00** Coffee Break
- 11:00-12:00** Discussion
- 12:30** Lunch at the Casina Pio IV

## POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

- 14:00 Prof. Mary Keys**  
*Interdependence, Imago Dei, and Common Good: Aquinas on Humility, Mercy, and Charity*
- 14:30 Prof. Greg Reichberg**  
*Thomistic Resources for Contemporary Ethics of War*
- 15:00 Judge Andrew Napolitano**  
*Aquinas, Natural Law, and Modern Jurisprudence*
- 15:30-16:00** Coffee break
- 16:00-17:00** Discussion

## HUMAN NATURE, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

- 17:00-17:30 Prof. Yoshihisa Yamamoto**  
*Thomas Aquinas on the Ontology of Love: complacentia and communicatio*
- 17:30-18:00 Prof. Gyula Klima**  
*Intelligence: Human vs. Artificial*
- 18:00-18:30 Prof. Elizabeth Kirk**  
*Enfolded in Care: Challenges to Parental Rights in Contemporary Family Law*
- 18:30-19:40** Discussion and closing remarks

# List of Participants

## **Sr. Helen Alford**

*PASS President, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Angelicum, Italy*

## **Fr. Albino Barrera**

*PASS Academician, Professor of Economics and Theology, Providence College, USA*

## **Bishop Robert Barron**

*Diocese of Winona-Rochester, USA*

## **Prof. Francesco Botturi**

*Full Professor of Moral Philosophy, Cattolica University of Milan, Italy*

## **Prof. Franca D'Agostini**

*Adjunct Professor, Milan University, Italy*

## **Prof. Pierpaolo Donati**

*PASS Academician, Emeritus professor of Sociology, University of Bologna, Italy*

## **Prof. Ana Marta González**

*PASS Academician, Full Professor of Philosophy, University of Navarra, Spain*

## **Prof. Mary Hirschfeld**

*Academic Director of the Business Ethics and Society Program; John T. Ryan Jr. Associate Professor of Theology and Business Ethics*

## **Prof. Vittorio Höсле**

*PASS Academician, Paul Kimball Professor of Arts and Letters, Notre Dame University, USA*

## **Prof. Hans Joas**

*Ernst Troeltsch Professor for the Sociology of Religion, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany*

## **Prof. Mary Keys**

*Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame, USA*

## **Prof. Elizabeth Kirk**

*Director of the Center for Law & the Human Person, The Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law, USA*

## **Prof. Gyula Klima**

*Professor of Philosophy, Fordham University, USA, Director of the Research Center for the History of Ideas of the Institute of Hungarian research*

## **Judge Andrew Napolitano**

*Former Jurist and Syndicated Columnist, USA*

## **Prof. Jean Porter**

*John A. O'Brien Professor of Theology, Notre Dame, USA*

## **Prof. Gregory Reichberg**

*PASS Academician, Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Norway*

## **Prof. Jeffrey Sachs**

*PASS Academician, Professor, Columbia University, USA*

## **Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo**

*former PASS Chancellor*

## **Card. Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson**

*PASS Chancellor*

## **Msgr. Dario E. Viganò**

*PASS Vice Chancellor*

## **Prof. Yoshihisa Yamamoto**

*Professor, The University of Tokyo, Japan*

## **OBSERVERS**

### **Prof. Anthony Annett**

*Gabelli Fellow at Fordham University, USA*

### **Fr. Pierre Januard**

*Post-doc lecturer and researcher in Economics, PHARE - University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France*

### **Prof. Riccardo Pozzo**

*PASS Academician, Full Professor, History of Philosophy, Rome Tor Vergata University*

### **Dr. Sonia Ehrlich Sachs**

*Research Scholar, Center for Sustainable Development, Earth Institute, Columbia University, USA*

### **Mr. Luděk Sekyra**

*Chairperson of The Sekyra Foundation, Czech Republic*



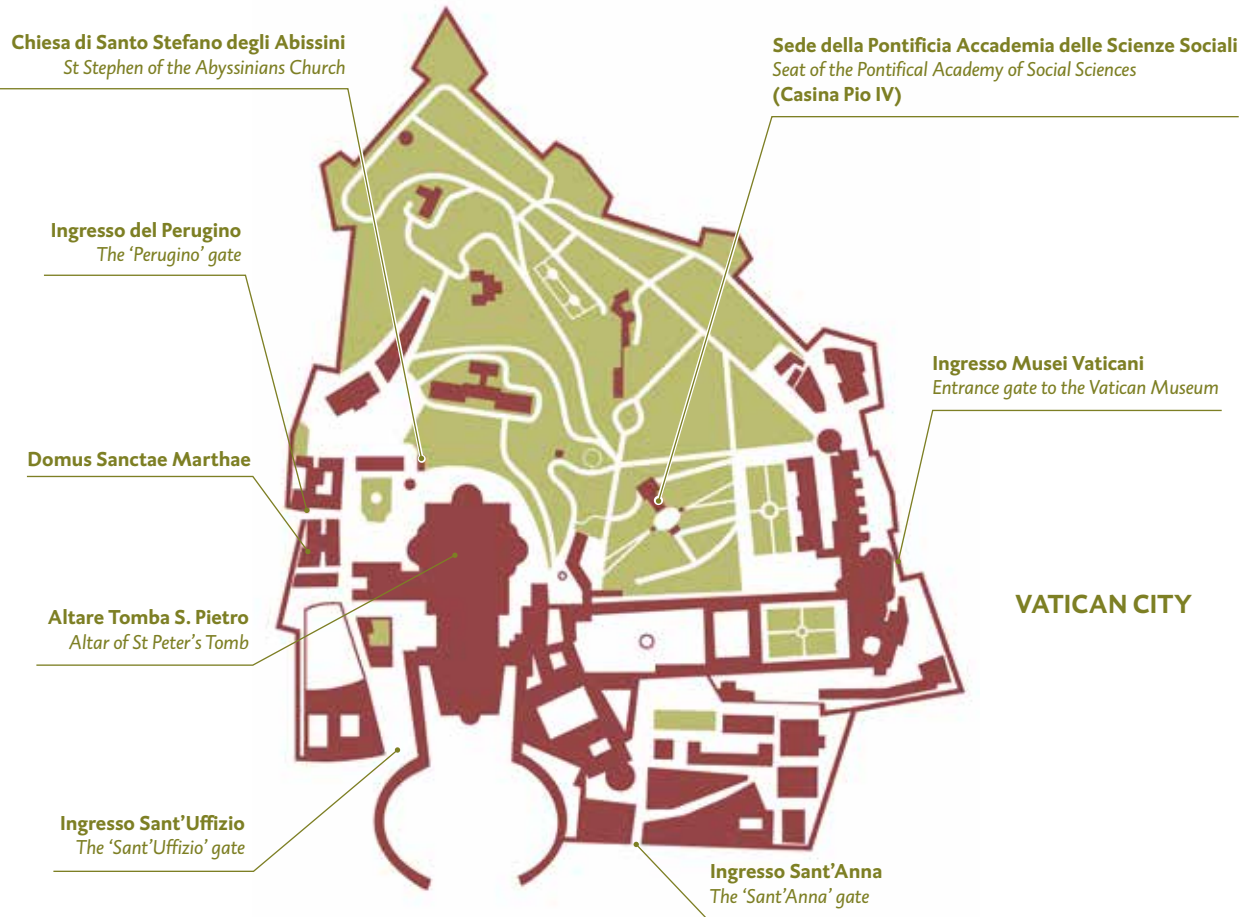
# Memorandum

- Dress code is business casual.
- On 7 March a Vatican bus (SCV-plated) will take participants to Fossanova (70 miles away). Please meet in the Domus lobby at 6:55AM for a 7:00AM departure. The same bus will bring participants back to the Domus after dinner, with an estimated arrival time of 10:30PM.
- On 8 March there will be a minibus leaving the Domus Sanctae Marthae at 8:40AM to bring participants to the headquarters of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, the Casina Pio IV in the Vatican Gardens.
- On 7 March lunch and dinner will be provided at a local restaurant in Fossanova. On 8 March, lunch will be provided at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Participants are free to make their own arrangements for dinner. For those wishing to have dinner that evening at the Domus between 7:15PM and 8:45PM, please inform reception at breakfast time.
- Wifi is available at the Casina Pio IV. Please note that wifi is not available on the bus or in Fossanova.









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