



Democracy – Some Acute Questions



Plenary Session 22-25 April 1998 – The first plenary session dealing with democracy as its scientific programme is currently under way. Our preparations began with a workshop held in December 1996 by the committee entrusted with the task of organising the work on democracy, in cooperation with Council members and two external experts. In the proceedings of the workshop to be published shortly, Professor Hans Zacher, the chairman of the committee, offers his conclusions as to which topics should be addressed by the Academy. Since December 1996 our studies have been conducted with reference to the teaching of the Pontifical Magisterium. Our colleague, Father Michel Schooyans, has described developments in that teaching in a text which will accompany our present and future work on democracy. The initial workshop made it clear to us that the list of questions to study will indeed be long. Our committee then decided to select for the present session topics which form a coherent and important corpus of study. Our programme this year is thus organised into three sections under the general title of “democracy – certain relevant questions”. The first section, entitled “the value of democracy – democracy and values”, seeks to determine the justification for democracy – is it an end or a means? This section also asks whether there are prerequisites for democracy to actually work, and if so what they might be. It also includes a study of the relationship between the development of values and political regimes. It concludes by examining the conflicts between values and the democratic structures which seek to cope with these conflicts. The second section is concerned with “civil society” as the essence of democratic society. We intend to analyse in depth the role of civil society, the effects of its history, as well as those contemporary developments which influence it. We will also look at the role of the mass media. The third section examines the supranational and international aspects of the question in Europe and other continents, as well as at a global level. It also deals with those tensions which exist between national democracies and numerous international institutions and activities.

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