



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 5 December 2014*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet with you at the start of the new quinquennium — the ninth — of the International Theological Commission. I thank the President, Cardinal Müller, for the words he addressed to me on behalf of all of you. Your Commission began shortly after the Second Vatican Council, following a proposal of the Synod of Bishops, in order that the Holy See might more directly avail itself of the reflection of theologians from various parts of the world. The mission of the Commission is therefore “to study doctrinal problems of great importance, especially those which present new points of view, and in this way to offer its help to the Magisterium of the Church” (*Statutes*, art. 1). The 27 documents published thus far are evidence of this commitment and a reference point for theological debate.

Your mission is to serve the Church, which requires not only intellectual skills, but also spiritual dispositions. Among the latter, I would like to draw your attention to the importance of listening. The Prophet Ezekiel said: “Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears” (Ez 3:10). The theologian is first and foremost a believer who listens to the Word of the living God and receives it in his/her heart and mind. But the theologian must also humbly listen to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7), through the various manifestations of the faith lived by the People of God. The Commission’s recent document on the “*Sensus fidei* in the life of the Church” recalled this. It is beautiful; I liked the document very much, my compliments! Indeed, together with the Christian people as a whole, the theologian opens his/her eyes and ears to the “signs of the times”. He/she is called to “to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word” — it is the Word of God that judges — “so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage” (Second Vatican Council Apostolic

Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 44).

In this light, within the increasingly diversified composition of the Commission, I would like to note the increased presence of women — still not too many.... They are the icing on the cake, but we need more — a presence that becomes an invitation to reflect on the role that women can and should play in the field of theology. Indeed, “the Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess.... I readily acknowledge that many women ... [offer] new contributions to theological reflection” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 103). Thus, by virtue of their feminine genius, women theologians can detect, to the benefit of all, certain unexplored aspects of the unfathomable mystery of Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). I invite you to derive the greatest benefit of this specific contribution of women to the understanding of the faith.

Another feature of your Commission is its international character, which reflects the catholicity of the Church. The diversity of viewpoints should enrich catholicity without harming unity. The unity of Catholic theologians stems from their common reference to one faith in Christ and is nourished by the diversity of the Holy Spirit’s gifts. Starting from this foundation, and in a healthy pluralism, various theological approaches, developed in different cultural contexts and using diverse methods, cannot ignore one another, but in theological dialogue should reciprocally enrich and correct one another. The work of your Commission can be a witness to this growth, and also a testimony to the Holy Spirit, since it is He who sows this charismatic variety in the Church, the diverse viewpoints, and it is He who will establish unity. He is the main actor, always.

The Immaculate Virgin, as a privileged witness of the great events of salvation history, “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19): A woman of listening, a woman of contemplation, a woman of closeness to the problems of the Church and of the people. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with all the resources of her feminine genius, she unceasingly entered ever more deeply into “all the truth” (cf. Jn 16:13). Mary is thus the icon of the Church who, eagerly awaiting her Lord, progresses day after day in her understanding of the faith, thanks also to the patient work of men and women theologians. May Our Lady, the teacher of true theology, obtain for us, through her maternal prayer, that our charity “may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Phil 1:9). I accompany you on this journey with my Blessing, and I ask you please to pray for me. Pray theologically. Thank you.