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Friday 31.03.2017

Holy Father's Greeting to participants in the Meeting promoted by the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences: "Luther: 500 Years Later"

At 11.50 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Study Convention organized by the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences, on the occasion of the fifth centenary of the Lutheran Reformation (1517-2017) on the theme: *Luther 500 years later. A rereading of the Lutheran Reformation in its historic ecclesial context*, which took place in Rome from 29 to 31 March 2017.

The following is the full text of the Pope's greetings to those present at the Audience.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am pleased to greet all of you and to offer you a warm welcome. I thank Father Bernard Ardura for his introduction, which summarizes the purpose of your meeting on Luther and his reform.

I confess that my first response to this praiseworthy initiative of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences was one of gratitude to God, together with a certain surprise, since not long ago a meeting like this would have been unthinkable. Catholics and Lutherans together, discussing Luther, at a meeting organized by an Office of the Holy See: truly we are experiencing the results of the working of the Holy Spirit, Who overcomes every obstacle and turns conflicts into occasions for growth in communion. From Conflict to Communion is precisely the title of the document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission prepared for our joint commemoration of the fifth centenary of the beginning of Luther's reform.

I am particularly happy to know that this commemoration has offered scholars from various institutions an occasion to study those events together. Serious research into the figure of Luther and his critique of the Church

of his time and the papacy certainly contributes to overcoming the atmosphere of mutual distrust and rivalry that for all too long marked relations between Catholics and Protestants. An attentive and rigorous study, free of prejudice and polemics, enables the churches, now in dialogue, to discern and receive all that was positive and legitimate in the Reformation, while distancing themselves from errors, extremes and failures, and acknowledging the sins that led to the division.

All of us are well aware that the past cannot be changed. Yet today, after fifty years of ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, it is possible to engage in a purification of memory. This is not to undertake an impracticable correction of all that happened five hundred years ago, but rather “to tell that history differently” (Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion*, 17 June 2013, 16), free of any lingering trace of the resentment over past injuries that has distorted our view of one another. Today, as Christians, we are all called to put behind us all prejudice towards the faith that others profess with a different emphasis or language, to offer one another forgiveness for the sin committed by those who have gone before us, and together to implore from God the gift of reconciliation and unity.

I assure you of my prayers for your important historical research and I invoke upon all of you the blessing of God, who is almighty and rich in mercy. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. God bless us all. Thank you.
