



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 24 November 2022

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank Cardinal Ladaria for his kind words, and I express to all of you my gratitude for the generosity, skill and passion with which you have undertaken your service in this 10th five-year term of the International Theological Commission's activity.

Thanks to the tools available to us today, you were able to start working remotely, overcoming the difficulties still caused by the pandemic. And I also rejoice at the welcome you have given to the three themes to be explored: the first is the undeniable and always fruitful relevance of the Christological faith professed by the Council of Nicaea, 1,700 years on from its celebration (325-2025); the second is the examination of some anthropological issues emerging today, of crucial significance for the journey of the human family in the light of the divine plan of salvation; and the third is the investigation — today ever more urgent and decisive — of the theology of creation from a Trinitarian perspective, listening to the cry of the poor and of the earth.

In addressing these themes, the International Theological Commission continues its service with renewed commitment. You are called to carry it following the path carved by Vatican Council II, which, 60 years after its opening, constitutes the sure compass for the journey of the Church, "in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 1).

I would like to point out three directions to take, in this historic moment: an arduous moment but

one that, through the eyes of faith, is charged with the promise and hope that spring from the Passover of the crucified and risen Lord.

The first guideline is *creative fidelity to Tradition*. It means taking on with faith and love, and expressing with rigour and openness, a commitment to exercise the ministry of theology — listening to the Word of God, the *sensus fidei* of the People of God, the Magisterium and the charisms, as well as discerning the signs of the times — for the progress of the apostolic Tradition, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as taught by *Dei Verbum* (cf. n. 8). Indeed, Benedict XVI describes Tradition as the “living river in which the origins are ever present” (*General Audience*, 26 April 2006); so that it “irrigates various lands, feeds various geographical places, germinating the best of that land, the best of that culture. In this way, the Gospel continues to be incarnated in every corner of the world, in an ever new way” (Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4d).

Tradition, the origin of faith, either grows or dies out. Because, someone used to say — I think it was a musician — that tradition is the guarantee of the future, and not a museum piece. It is what makes the Church grow from the ground upwards, like a tree: the roots. Instead, another person once said that traditionalism is the “dead faith of the living”: when you close yourself off. Tradition — I want to emphasize this — makes us move in this direction: from the ground upwards, vertically. Today, there is a great danger, of going in another direction: “going backwards”. To go backward. “It has always been done this way”: it is better to go backward, which is safer, rather than going forward with tradition. This horizontal dimension, we have seen, has caused some movements, ecclesial movements, to remain fixed in time, in a backward direction. They are backward-looking. I think — to make a historical reference — of some movements born around the end of the First Vatican Council, seeking to be faithful to tradition, and then, today, they develop in such a way as to ordain women and other things outside this vertical direction, where it grows, where moral conscience grows, the awareness of faith grows, with that good rule of Vincent de Lérins: “*ut annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*”. This is the rule of growth. Instead, “going backwards” leads you to say that “it has always been done this way, it is better to continue like this”, and it does not enable you to grow. With regards to this issue, you theologians, think a little about how to help.

The second guideline concerns the opportunity, in order to carry out the work of exploring and inculturating the Gospel with relevance and incisiveness, of prudently opening up to the *contribution of the various disciplines* through consultation with experts, including non-Catholics, as envisaged by the Commission’s Statutes (cf. n. 10). It is a matter — I called for this in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* — of treasuring the interdisciplinary approach: “even in its ‘weak’ form as a simple multidisciplinary approach that favours a better understanding from several points of view of an object of study” and “all the more so in its ‘strong’ form, as cross-disciplinary, situating and stimulating all disciplines against the backdrop of the Light and Life offered by the Wisdom streaming from God’s Revelation” (n. 4c).

The third guideline, finally, is *collegiality*. This assumes particular relevance and can offer a specific contribution in the context of the synodal path, in which the entire People of God is convoked. This is emphasized in the document on *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, drafted in this regard in the previous five-year term: “As is the case with all Christian vocations, the ministry of theologians, as well as being personal, is also both communal and collegial’. Ecclesial synodality therefore needs theologians to do theology in a synodal way, developing their capacity to listen to each other, to dialogue, to discern and to harmonise their many and varied approaches and contributions” (n. 75).

Theologians must go further, seek to go beyond. But I want to distinguish this from the catechist. The catechist must give the correct doctrine, the solid doctrine, not possible novelties, some of which are good, but rather what is solid. The catechist transmits the solid doctrine. Theologians dare to go further, and it will be the Magisterium that will stop them. But the vocation of the theologian is always to dare to go further, because he or she is searching and trying to make theology more explicit. However, never give a catechesis to children and to people with new doctrines that are not sure. This distinction is not mine, it is Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s, who I think understood some things better than I do!

Therefore, I wish you serene and fruitful work, in this spirit of mutual listening, dialogue and community discernment, in openness to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The themes entrusted to your attention and expertise are of great importance in this new phase of the proclamation of the Gospel, which the Lord calls us to live as a Church at the service of universal fraternity in Christ. Indeed, they invite us to fully embrace the gaze of the disciple, who, with ever new wonder, recognizes that Christ, “by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). And in this way, he teaches that “the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world’s transformation” (*Ibid.*, 38). And I used the word “wonder”. I think it is important, perhaps not so much for researchers, but certainly for theology teachers, to ask themselves whether theology lessons inspire wonder in those who attend them. This is a good criterion; it may help.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your valuable service, truly valuable. I offer my heartfelt blessing to every one of you, and to your collaborators. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.

I think it would perhaps be important to increase the number of women, not to follow trends, but because their way of thinking is different from that of men, and they make theology deeper and also more “flavourful”. Thank you.

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