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Audience with participants in the International Congress on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla

At 10.00 this morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Congress on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

I thank Bernard Ardura, president of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences, for his kind words and I congratulate the Committee and the Pontifical Commission for Latin America for commemorating, with the Congress now taking place in Rome, the fortieth anniversary of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla de los Angeles.

I am happy to be able to meet, albeit briefly, with the speakers and organizers of this event. I assure you that I would have liked to have more time and to share so many experiences with you.

If you will allow me some personal memories, I was Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Argentina at that time, and I followed with much attention and interest the whole intense and passionate process of preparation for that third Conference. I was reminded of three outstanding events that were undoubtedly going to set the event on track.

The first was the decision of Saint John Paul II to make his first apostolic journey to Mexico and to pronounce the inaugural speech of the Conference, which clearly indicated the ways for its development. It was in sense the inauguration of his long, itinerant and fruitful missionary pontificate.

The second fact that seemed fundamental to me from the beginning of the preparation of the Conference was to take Saint Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* as the backdrop and source of reference for all its realization. Not infrequently I have repeated that, for me, *Evangelii nuntiandi* is a decisive document, of great richness, in the Church's post-Conciliar journey. Following in its wake and together with the Aparecida Document, came the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*.

The third important fact was to take as a starting point the intuitions and prophetic options of the Medellín Conference so that in Puebla, a step forward could be taken on the Latin American Church's path towards maturity.

I know that you are studying in detail the contents of the Conference of Puebla. I remember some of the most significant: the novelty of a historical self-awareness of the Church in Latin America; a good ecclesiology that takes up again the image and the way of the people of God in Vatican Council II; a well inculturated Mariology; the richest and most creative chapters on the evangelization of culture and popular piety in Latin America; courageous criticism of the lack of knowledge of human rights and freedoms in those times in the region, and the options for the young, the poor and the builders of society.

It may be said that Puebla laid the foundations and opened the way to Aparecida. It would suffice to affirm only this to highlight the good opportunity to commemorate its 40 years, not only looking back, but projecting it forward to our ecclesial days.
