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Audience with a delegation from the “International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology” (INSeCT)

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT).

The following are the Pope’s words of greeting to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to meet with you, the theologians belonging to the “International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology”. Thank you for the interdisciplinary work that you carry out through research projects and congresses, and by your encouragement of ecumenism and dialogue with other religions and worldviews.

Theology is indeed a significant and necessary ecclesial ministry. In the first place, because it is part of our Catholic faith to explain the reason for our hope to all those who ask (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). And we know that hope is not an emotion or a feeling, but the very person of Jesus, who is himself “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Theology is also important because of the epochal changes that we are experiencing in our increasingly multi-ethnic and mobile societies marked by the interconnectedness of different peoples, languages and cultural backgrounds. These changes need to be critically assessed in an effort to help build a future of peace, solidarity and universal brotherhood (cf. Fratelli Tutti), to say nothing of care for our common home (cf. Laudato si’).

We also need theology because the challenges posed by progress in science and technology – we need think only of artificial intelligence – are presently forcing us to work towards a common understanding of what it means

to be human, what is worthy of our nature as human beings, what aspect of our humanity is irreducible because it is divine, that is, made in the image and likeness of God in Christ. Here, theology must be able to serve as a companion to the sciences and other critical disciplines, offering its specific sapiential contribution to ensuring that different cultures do not clash but become, in dialogue, symphonic.

In this light, dear friends, I would like to point to three guidelines for theology: creative fidelity to tradition, a cross-disciplinary approach and collegiality (cf. Address to the International Theological Commission, 4 November 2022). These are the essential “ingredients” of the vocation of Catholic theologians in the heart of the Church. For theologians, are like the scouting party sent by Joshua to explore the land of Canaan: they are charged with finding the right paths towards the inculturation of the faith.

As we all know, Tradition is living. Consequently, it must increase and incarnate the Gospel in every land and in all cultures. The Gospel proclaims the event of Jesus, who died and rose again, and is wisdom for the life of all peoples. Theology is the discipline that deals with human existence; its light must enter the fabric of every reality investigated by the sciences. A cross-disciplinary approach is not, therefore, a fad of the moment, but an intrinsic demand of theological science, which is called to “listen” to discoveries made in other fields of knowledge in order to deepen our understanding of the doctrines of faith, while at the same time offering Christian wisdom for a human development of the sciences. The responsibility for this arduous task necessarily calls for collegiality and synodality in the work of research.

In a particular way, this service cannot be carried out without a recovery of the sapiential character of theology, as I noted in the Apostolic Letter *Ad Theologiam Promovendam*. Benedict XVI rightly asked all sciences to widen the boundaries of scientific rationality in a sapiential sense. This widening also needs to take place in theology, so that it can be a discipline critical for the life of every human being and the entire People of God, uniting science and virtue, critical reasoning and love. Catholic faith is a faith that works through charity: otherwise it is a dead faith (cf. Jas 2:26). A sapiential theology is thus a theology of love, because “whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your visit and I offer my prayerful good wishes for your work. I give you my blessing and I ask you, please, to remember me in your prayers.
