



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE CONFERENCE ON THE THEME  
"THE THEOLOGY OF TENDERNESS OF POPE FRANCIS"**

*Clementine Hall  
Thursday, 13 September 2018*

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**[Multimedia]**

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

I greet you cordially and thank Cardinal Bassetti for the kind words he has addressed to me in your name, and also for your works, in which he updated me on the work you do. You have reflected in recent days on the theology of tenderness, and I wish simply to say something to you, because when I saw that this was the title, I began to study. You have made me read this book to understand what the “thing” was. A good book, you know it, the one by Rocchetta. He is good... is it him? [Applause].

I would like, simply, to propose three ideas.

The first concerns the expression “theology of tenderness”. Theology and tenderness seem to be two distant words: the first seems to recall the academic context, the second interpersonal relations. In reality our faith links them inextricably. Theology, in fact, can not be abstract – if it were abstract, it would be ideology – as it arises from an existential knowledge, born from the encounter with the Word made flesh! Theology is then called to communicate the concreteness of God’s love. And tenderness is a “concrete existential” asset, to translate in our times the affection that the Lord nourishes for us.

Today, in fact, there is less focus on the concept or practice and more on “feeling” than in the past. We may like it or not, but it is a fact: we start from what we feel. Theology can certainly not be reduced to sentiment, but neither can it ignore that in many parts of the world the approach to vital

issues no longer begins with the ultimate questions or social demands, but with what the person feels emotionally. Theology is called upon to accompany this existential quest, bringing the light that comes from the Word of God. And a good theology of tenderness can present divine charity in this sense. It is possible, because the love of God is not an abstract general principle, but personal and concrete, that the Holy Spirit communicates intimately. Indeed, He reaches and transforms the feelings and thoughts of man. What content could a theology of tenderness therefore have? Two seem important to me, and they are the other two ideas that I would like to offer you: the beauty of feeling that one is loved by God, and the beauty of feeling loved in the name of God.

*Feeling we are loved.* It is a message that has come to us more strongly in recent times: from the Sacred Heart, from Merciful Jesus, from mercy as an essential property of the Trinity and of Christian life. Today the liturgy reminds us of Jesus' word: "Be merciful, just as your Father is" (*Lk* 6: 36). Tenderness can indicate precisely our way of receiving divine mercy today. Tenderness reveals us, next to the paternal face, the maternal face of God, of a God Who loves mankind, Who loves us with a love infinitely greater than that which a mother has for her own son (cf. *Is* 49: 15). Whatever happens, whatever we do, we are certain that God is near, compassionate, ready to be moved for us. Tenderness is a beneficial word, it is the antidote to fear with regard to God, because "there is no fear in love" (1 *Jn* 4:18), because trust overcomes fear. To feel loved, therefore, means learning to trust in God, to tell Him, as He wishes: "Jesus, I trust in You".

These and other considerations can deepen research: to give the Church a "flavourful" theology; to help us live a conscious faith, burning with love and hope; to exhort us to kneel, touched and wounded by divine love. In this sense, tenderness refers to the Passion. The Cross is in fact the seal of divine tenderness, which is drawn from the wounds of the Lord. His visible wounds are the windows that open onto His invisible love. His Passion invites us to transform our heart of stone into a heart of flesh, to become passionate about God. And about man, for the love of God.

Here then is the last idea: *feeling we are able to love*. When man feels truly loved, he feels inclined to love. Besides, if God is infinite tenderness, then man too, created in His image, is capable of tenderness. Tenderness, then, far from being reduced to sentimentalism, is the first step to overcome the withdrawal into oneself, to leave behind the self-centredness that disfigures human freedom. God's tenderness leads us to understand that love is the meaning of life. Thus we understand that the root of our freedom is never self-referential. And we feel called to pour into the world the love received from the Lord, to channel it into the Church, in the family, in society, to interpret it in serving and giving ourselves. All this not out of duty, but out of love, out of love for Him, by Whom we are tenderly loved.

These brief ideas point towards a *theology on the move*: a theology that emerges from the narrow alleys to which it is sometimes confined, and that with dynamism turns to God, taking man by the hand; a non-narcissistic theology, but aimed at the service of the community; a theology that is not content to repeat the paradigms of the past, but that is the *Word incarnate*. Certainly the Word of

God does not change (cf. *Heb* 1: 1-2, 13,8), but the flesh that it is called to assume, this yes, it changes in every age. There is so much work, therefore, for theology and for its mission today: to incarnate the Word of God for the Church and for mankind in the third millennium. Today more than ever we need a revolution of tenderness. This will save us.

Let us entrust the advancement of your work to Our Lady, Mother of tenderness. I bless you and, together with you, I bless the communities you come from; and I ask you to pray and have others pray for me. Thank you.

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*\*Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 13 September 2018*

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