



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION**

*Hall of Popes  
Friday, 6 December 2013*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you and I cordially greet you at the conclusion of your Plenary Session. I thank the President, Archbishop Müller, for the words which he addressed to me, also on everyone's behalf. This meeting gives me the opportunity to thank you for the work you have accomplished over the last five years, and to reaffirm the importance of theologians' ecclesial service for the life and mission of the People of God.

As you underlined in your recent document, *Theology today: perspectives, principles, criteria*, theology is science and wisdom. It is science, and as such it employs all the resources of reason illumined by faith in order to penetrate the meaning of the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. And it is especially wisdom: at the school of the Virgin Mary, who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19), the theologian seeks to bring to light the unity of God's loving plan and commits himself to showing how the truths of the faith form an organic, harmonious expressed unity. Furthermore, it is the task of theologians "to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them. In this way, revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage" (Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 44). Theologians, then, are "pioneers" — this is important: pioneers. Forward, pioneers! — in the Church's dialogue with cultures. But being pioneers is important also because sometimes we think they stay back, stay in the barracks... No, they are on the frontier! This dialogue of the Church with cultures is a dialogue at once critical and benevolent, which must foster the reception of the Word of God by people "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev 7:9).

The three issues which you are presently addressing fit into this perspective. Your reflection on the *relationship between monotheism and violence* attests that God's Revelation truly constitutes Good News for all men. God is not a threat to man! Faith in the One and Thrice Holy God is not and can never provoke violence and intolerance. On the contrary, its highly rational character confers on it a universal dimension, capable of uniting men of goodwill. Moreover, the definitive Revelation of God in Jesus Christ now renders impossible any recourse to violence "in the name of God". It is precisely through his rejection of violence, through having conquered evil with good, with the blood of his Cross, that Jesus reconciled men to God and to one another.

It is peace itself which stands at the centre of your reflection on the *Social Doctrine of the Church*. This doctrine aims at translating the love of God for mankind, revealed in Jesus Christ, into practical life in society. This is why the social doctrine must always be rooted in the Word of God which has been received, celebrated and lived out in the Church. And the Church is required first of all to live within herself the social message which she carries to the world. Fraternal relations between believers, authority as service, sharing with the poor: all of these features, which have characterized the life of the Church from her earliest days, can and must constitute a living and attractive model for the various human communities, from the family to civil society.

This witness belongs to the entire People of God, who are a People of prophets. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church possess the "*sense of the faith*". It is a kind of "spiritual instinct" which allows them to *sentire cum Ecclesia* and to discern what conforms to the Apostolic faith and to the spirit of the Gospel. Of course, it is clear that the *sensus fidelium* must not be confused with the sociological reality of majority opinion. It is something else. It is therefore important — and it is your task — to develop criteria for discerning authentic expressions of the *sensus fidelium*. For its part, the Magisterium has the duty to be attentive to what the Spirit says to the Churches through the authentic manifestations of the *sensus fidelium*. Numbers 8 and 12 of *Lumen Gentium* come to mind, which are so strong on this point. This attention is of the utmost importance for theologians. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized numerous times that the theologian must continually listen to the faith which is lived out by the humble and the little ones, to whom it has pleased the Father to reveal what he has hidden from the learned and the wise (cf. Mt 11:25-26, *Homily at Holy Mass for the Members of the International Theological Commission, 1 December 2009*).

Your mission, then, is at once fascinating and risky. Both are beneficial: the fascination with life, because life is beautiful; and also the risk, since it enables us to go forward. It is fascinating, since theological research and teaching can become a true path to holiness, as so many Fathers and Doctors of the Church attest. However, it is also risky, since it brings with it certain temptations: aridity of heart — how unpleasant it is when the heart becomes arid and believes itself capable of reflecting on God in that aridity, how many mistakes! — pride, even ambition. St Francis of Assisi once addressed a brief note to brother Anthony of Padua, in which among other things he said: "I am pleased that you are teaching sacred theology to the brothers, provided that you do not

extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion”. Drawing near to the little ones also helps us to become more intelligent and wise. And I think — and this is not an advertisement for the Jesuits — I think of St Ignatius who asked the professed to make a vow to teach the catechism to the little ones in order better to understand the wisdom of God

May the Immaculate Virgin obtain for all theologians the grace to grow in this spirit of prayer and devotion, and thus, through a profound sense of humility, to be true servants of the Church. I accompany you along this journey with my Apostolic Blessing, and I ask you to please pray for me, because I need it!