



The Holy See

***VIDEO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN AN INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONGRESS
HELD AT THE PONTIFICAL CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF ARGENTINA
[BUENOS AIRES, 1-3 SEPTEMBER 2015]***

I am glad to be able to connect with you at such an important event for our Church in Argentina. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to join in this act of thanksgiving which celebrates 100 years of the faculty of theology of UCA, and coincides with 50 years of the Second Vatican Council.

You came together for three days, making this feast an occasion to remember, to recover the memory of God's passing through our ecclesial life and to make this passing a cause for thanksgiving. Memory enables us to remember where we come from and, in so doing, to unite ourselves with the many who have contributed to this history, this ecclesial life in its many vicissitudes, and those certainly have been many. Memory moves us to discover that, in the midst of the journey, the faithful People of God have not been left alone. This pilgrim people have always counted on the Spirit to guide them, to sustain them and prompt them from both within and without. This grateful memory, which becomes our reflection today, gives life to our hearts. It rekindles our hope so as to stir up today the same question that our fathers pondered yesterday: Church, what do you say about yourself?

The two events we are celebrating and reflecting upon are not minor, rather they are two moments of intense ecclesial consciousness. The 100th anniversary of the faculty of theology is a celebration of the maturing process of a particular Church. And it is a celebration of the life, the history and the faith of the People of God journeying on this earth, who have sought to "be understood" and to "express themselves" in their own location. It is a celebration of 100 years of a faith which seeks to reflect the specific features of the People of God who live, believe, hope and love in the land of Argentina. It is a faith that seeks to root itself, to take on flesh, to represent

itself, to interpret itself according to the life of her people and not according to the margins.

It seems very important to me to clearly emphasize the connection between this event and the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II. There is no such thing as an isolated particular Church, one who can call herself alone, as if she presumed to be the mistress and sole interpreter of reality and of the action of the Holy Spirit. No one community has a monopoly on interpretation or inculturation. Just as, on the contrary, there is no universal Church that would turn her back, ignore or take no interest in local situations. Catholicity demands, asks that there be a polarity between the particular and the universal, between the one and the many, between the simple and complex. To annihilate this tension would be to go against the life of the Spirit. Any attempt, any quest, to reduce communication, to break the relationship between Tradition handed down and practical reality would be to endanger the faith of the People of God. To consider either of these two instances as insignificant is to throw ourselves into a labyrinth which will not lead to life for our people. To break this communication will easily lead us to construct an ideology out of our point of view, out of our theology. I am therefore delighted that the 100th anniversary of the faculty of theology goes hand in hand with the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. The local and universal come together to nourish us, to stimulate the prophetic character which every faculty of theology bears. Let us remember the words of Pope John a month before the opening of the Council: "For the first time in history the Fathers of the Council will really belong to all peoples and nations, and each one of them will contribute his intelligence and his experience to cure and heal the scars of the two great conflicts which have profoundly changed the face of all nations" (*Discorsi-Messaggi-Colloqui*, AAS 54, 1962, 520-528).

He then points out that one of the main contributions of developing nations to the universal context should be their vision of the Church, and he continues like this: "The Church presents herself as she is, and that means, as the Church of all people, and particularly the Church of the poor".

There is an image set forth by Benedict XVI that I like very much. Referring to the tradition of the Church, he says that it "is not the transmission of things or words, a collection of dead things. Tradition is the living river that links us to the origins, the living river in which the origins are ever present" (*General Audience, 26 April 2006*). This river 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 (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 115).

All this leads us to reflect on the fact that Christians in Argentina today are not the Christians in Argentina 100 years ago. In India and in Canada people are not Christian in the same way they are in Rome. That is why it is the main task of the theologian to discern, to ponder: what does it mean to be Christian today, "in the here and now"? How does that river flow from the source to irrigate these lands today and become visible and habitable? How can we bring back to life a fitting expression used by St Vincent of Lérins: "ut annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur

aetate” [that it may be strengthened with the years, opened wider with time, and tempered with age] (*Commonitorium*, ch. 23)?

In the Argentina of today, amid the multitude of challenges and the situations that the multifaceted reality place before us, the effects of intercultural society and a leveling globalization relativize the dignity of people by making them a commodity. In the Argentina of today, we are asked to rethink how Christianity is embodied, how the living river of the Gospel continues to make itself present to sate the thirst of our people.

In order to face this challenge, we have to overcome two possible temptations: to condemn everything, to use a familiar phrase, “the past is always better”, by taking refuge in conservatism or fundamentalism; or, conversely, to consecrate everything, by negating all authority that doesn’t “taste of novelty”, making relative the wisdom that comes from the rich patrimony of the Church.

The path to overcoming these temptations is reflection, discernment, taking Church tradition very seriously and taking reality very seriously, putting the two into dialogue with one another.

In this context I think that the study of theology is of the greatest importance. It is an irreplaceable service to the life of the Church.

Not infrequently a kind of opposition is constructed between theology and pastoral care, as though they were two opposing, separate realities, which have nothing to do with one another. Not infrequently we identify doctrine with the conservative, the retrograde; and, on the contrary, we think that pastoral care is an adaptation, a reduction, an accommodation. As if they had nothing to do with one another. Thus, we create a false opposition between the so-called “pastorally-minded” and the “academics”, those on the side of the people and those on the side of doctrine. We create a false opposition between theology and pastoral care; between the believer’s reflection and the believer’s life; life, then, has no space for reflection and reflection finds no space in life. The great Fathers of the Church, Irenaeus, Augustine, Basil, Ambrose, to name a few, were great theologians because they were great pastors.

One of the main contributions of the Second Vatican Council was precisely seeking a way to overcome this divorce between theology and pastoral care, between faith and life. I dare say that the Council has revolutionized to some extent the status of theology — the believer’s way of doing and thinking .

I cannot forget the words of John XXIII who said in his opening address at the Council: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another”.

We must take on the work, the arduous work of distinguishing the message of Life from its forms

of transmission, from its cultural elements that have a time encoded within. A theology “responds to the questions of a time and it does so in no way but in the very terms of that the people of a society live and speak” (Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire*, 51).

Avoiding this exercise in discernment leads in one way or another to a betrayal of the content of the message. It causes the Good News to cease being new and above all good; it becomes sterile, emptied of all its creative strength, its healing and resurrecting strength. And thus the faith of people today is endangered. The lack of this theological and ecclesial exercise radically alters the mission that we are called to fulfil. Doctrine is not a closed system, void of the dynamic capacity to pose questions, doubts, inquiries. On the contrary, Christian doctrine has a face, a body, flesh; it's called Jesus Christ and it is his Life offered to all men and women in all places. To guard doctrine requires fidelity to what has been received and — at the same time — it requires taking into account the one speaking, the one receiving, who is known and loved.

This meeting of doctrine and pastoral concern is not optional, it is constitutive of a theology that intends to be ecclesial.

The questions of our people, their suffering, their battles, their dreams, their trials, their worries possess an interpretational value that we cannot ignore if we want to take the principle of the Incarnation seriously. Their wondering helps us to wonder ourselves, their questions question us. All of this helps us to delve into the mystery of the Word of God, the Word which requires and asks that we dialogue, that we enter into communion. We cannot therefore ignore our people while engaging in theology. Our God chose this path. He was incarnated in this world, he experienced conflict, injustice, violence; he experienced hopes and dreams. That is why there is no other place to look for him but in the real world, the real Argentina, on her streets, in her neighbourhoods, in her people. He is there already saving them.

Our formulations of the faith are born in dialogue, in encounter, in debate, in contact with different cultures, communities, nations, situations that require a greater reflection on what was not explicit before. Thus, pastoral events have considerable value. And our formulations of the faith are expressions of a life lived and pondered as a Church.

A Christian is somewhat suspicious when he stops admitting his need of criticism from other parties. People and their unrest, their peripheries, are not optional, rather they are necessary for a greater understanding of the faith. Thus it's important to ask ourselves: who are we thinking of when we engage in theology? What people do we have before us? Without this encounter with the family, with the People of God, theology runs the grave risk of becoming ideology. Let us not forget, the Holy Spirit in the praying faithful is the subject who engages in theology. A theology that is not born in the womb has the odour of a proposal that may be beautiful but never real.

This reveals the challenge inherent in the vocation of the theologian, how stimulating the study of

theology is and how great the responsibility that he or she has in engaging in it. In this regard allow me to clarify three traits in the identity of the theologian:

1. *The theologian is first a son of his people.* He cannot and does not want to lose interest in his own. He knows his people, its language, its roots, its history, its traditions. He is a man who learns to appreciate what he has received as a sign of the presence of God, because he knows that the faith does not belong to him. He received it freely from the Tradition of the Church, thanks to the witness, the catecheses and the generosity of so many. This leads him to acknowledge that the believing People in whom he was born has a theological meaning that he cannot ignore. He knows he is “plugged” into an ecclesial awareness and immerses himself in those waters.

2. *The theologian is a believer.* The theologian is someone who has experienced Jesus Christ and has discovered that without Him he cannot live. He knows that God makes himself present, as a word, as silence, as a wound, as healing, as death and as the resurrection. The theologian is one who knows that his life is marked by this imprint, by this seal, which has left open his thirst, his anxiety, his curiosity, his existence. The theologian is one who knows he cannot live without the subject/object of his love and consecrates his life to being able to share that with his brothers and sisters. He is not a theologian unless he can say, “I cannot live without Christ”, and unless he seeks to develop within himself the very sentiments of the Son.

3. *The theologian is a prophet.* One of the great challenges posed by the contemporary world is not just the ease with which one can prescind from God, but even going one step further in society. The current crisis is centred on people’s incapacity to believe in anything other than themselves. The individual conscience has become the measure of all things. This causes a crack in personal and social identities. This new situation provokes a whole process of alienation due to the lack of a past and therefore a future. That is why the theologian is a prophet, because he keeps alive awareness of the past and the invitation that comes from the future. He is a man capable of denouncing every form of alienation because he intuitively reflects on the river of Tradition that he received from the Church, the hope to which we are all called. And beginning from this view, he invites a reawakening of the slumbering conscience. He is not a man who conforms, who gets used to things. On the contrary, he is attentive to all that can harm and destroy his own.

Thus, there is only one way of doing theology: on your knees. It is not just a pious act of prayer, after which you think about theology. It is a dynamism between thought and prayer. Doing theology on your knees is daring to think while praying and pray while thinking. It entails a play between present and future, between the already and the not yet. It is a reciprocity between the Pascal Mystery and the many lives not yet realized who wonder: Where is God?

It is holiness of thought and prayerful lucidity. It is, above all, humility that allows us to put our heart, our mind in harmony with the concept: “*Deus semper maior*” [God is always greater].

We must not be afraid to get down on our knees before the altar of reflection and to do so with “the joy and the hope, the grief and the anguish of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1), before the gaze of the One who makes all things new (cf. Rev 21:5).

Then we will insert ourselves ever more deeply into that believing people who proclaim the beauty of the Gospel, a believing people who “do not curse, but rather welcome and know how to live a blessed life. In this way they seek a creative correspondence with the problems of our time” (cf. Olivier Clement, *Un ensayo de lectura ortodoxa de la Constitución*, 651).