Vatican
Francis, the comic strip

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Theologians must explore and debate disputed questions, at times even taking "risks" with what they propose, but those discussions should take place within the academy so as not to confuse the faithful, Pope Francis said.

"Theology must move forward," the pope told members of the International Theological Commission. "It must face things that are not clear and take risks in discussion. However, this is among theologians.

"You must give the solid food of faith to the people of God, not feed the people of God disputed questions," because that could confuse them and cause them to lose their faith, the pope told the group Nov. 29 during a meeting celebrating the commission's 50th anniversary.

St. Paul VI established the commission to continue the collaboration between theologians and the teaching authority of the church experienced at the Second Vatican Council, the pope said. And he wanted to ensure that the doctrinal congregation would benefit from the contributions of theologians reflecting on

questions of faith in different parts of the world and in different cultural contexts.

"In fact," the pope told them, "you listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches in different cultures today in order to shed light on ever-new aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Christ."

By "translating" the faith for people of different cultures, he said, theologians help people feel "closer to and embraced by the church, taken by the hand where they are and accompanied to taste the sweetness of the 'kerygma' (proclamation of Christ) and its timeless newness."

"This is theology's call," he said. "It's not an academic disquisition about life, but the incarnation of the faith in one's life."

"Good theology" is research that is born of a theologian's own active spiritual life, he said. "Theology is born and grows on one's knees!"

And, Francis added, theology develops within and contributes to the life of the church. "One does not do theology as an individual, but in community, at the service of all, to spread the good news of the Gospel to brothers and sisters of their time, always with sweetness and respect."

Francis thanked the commission members especially for their 2018 document, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church."

"You demonstrated how the practice of synodality, which is traditional but always needing renewal, is, in the history of the pilgrim people of God, the realization of the church as a mystery of communion in the image of the Trinitarian communion," the pope said.

"As you know, this theme is very close to my heart," he told the theologians.

"Synodality is a style, it is walking together and it is what the Lord wants from the church of the third millennium," he said.

The theological commission's document said synodality promotes the baptismal dignity and call of all Catholics, values the presence of different gifts given by the Holy Spirit and recognizes the specific ministry entrusted to pastors and bishops in communion with the pope for the preservation of the faith and the renewal of the church.

"I thank you for your document," the pope told members, "because today some think synodality is holding hands and going for a walk, having a party with young people or surveying opinions (like) 'What do you think about women priests?'"

In reality, he said, it is "an ecclesial way that has a soul, which is the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit there is no synodality."

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