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Audience with members of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of its establishment.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, and welcome!

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your plenary meeting, in which you are celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the Pontifical Committee.

I greet the president, Fr. Marek Ingot, and I greet each one of you, grateful for your meeting and for your service. You come from various countries and from three continents, each with your own valued expertise. In this way, you guarantee the international dimension and multidisciplinary nature of the Committee, whose research, conference and publishing activities form part of a fruitful and purposeful multicultural dynamic. The beautiful series "Acts and Documents", directed by the secretariat of the Pontifical Committee, also celebrates the publication of its seventieth volume this year.

This bears witness to a commitment to the search for historical truth on a global scale, in a spirit of dialogue with different historiographical sensibilities and multiple study traditions. It is good that you collaborate with others, expanding your scientific and human relations, and avoiding forms of mental and institutional isolation. I encourage you to maintain this enriching approach, based on constant and attentive listening, free from any ideology – ideologies kill – and respecting the truth. I reiterate what I said to you on the occasion of your sixtieth anniversary: "In meeting and working together with researchers from every culture and religion, you can offer a specific contribution to dialogue between the Church and the modern world" (*Address*, 12 April 2014).

This style contributes to developing what I would call “cultural diplomacy”: it is very timely. Today, more necessary than ever in the context of the dangerous ongoing piecemeal global conflict, which we cannot watch passively. I therefore invite you to continue your work of historical research by opening up horizons for dialogue, where you can bring the light of hope of the Gospel, that hope that hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rm 5:5*).

I like to think of the relationship between the Church and historians in terms of *proximity*. Indeed, there is a vital relationship between the Church and history. Saint Paul VI developed an intense reflection on this aspect, seeing the special meeting point between the Church and historians in the common search for truth and in the common service to truth. Research and service. These are the words he addressed to historians in 1967: “It may be here that the main point of encounter between you and us is to be found [...], between the religious truth of which the Church is the depositary and the historical truth, of which you are the good and devoted servants: the whole edifice of Christianity, of its doctrine, its morals and its worship, all rests ultimately on witness. The Apostles of Christ bore witness to what they saw and heard. [...] This shows how much an entity of a spiritual and religious nature such as the Catholic Church is interested in the search for and affirmation of historical truth [...] She also has a history, and the historical character of her origins is of decisive importance for her” (*Address to the participants at the General Assembly of the International Committee for Historical Sciences*, 3 June 1967).

The Church journeys through history, alongside the women and men of every time, and does not belong to any particular culture, but rather wishes to enliven, with the meek and courageous testimony of the Gospel, the heart of every culture, so as to build together the *civilization of encounter*. Instead, the temptations of self-absorbed individualism and the ideological affirmation of one’s own point of view fuel the *incivility of confrontation*. It is good that you, seventy years after your establishment, bear witness to being able to resist such temptations, living with passion, through study, the regenerative experience of service to unity, that composite and harmonious unity that the Holy Spirit shows us at Pentecost.

Seventy years ago, in that event blessed by the Spirit that was Vatican Council II, Saint Paul VI uttered words that resonate as a warning against any flattery of complacent ecclesial self-referentiality, from which your service must be protected, and said: “Let no one [...] think that the Church [...] dwells on herself in order to be self-satisfied, and forgets both Christ, from whom she receives everything, to whom she owes everything, and the human race, to whose service she was born. The Church stands in the midst between Christ and the human community, not withdrawn into herself, not like an opaque veil that obscures sight, not an end in itself, but on the contrary constantly striving to be all of Christ, in Christ, for Christ, to be all of men, among men, for men, a truly humble and excellent intermediary between the Divine Saviour and humanity” (*Address for the Inauguration of the Third Session of Vatican Ecumenical Council II*, 14 September 1964, 17).

For your seventieth anniversary, I wish for you to align your work with these words: may your historical studies make you masters in humanity and servants of humanity. To you and your loved ones I cordially impart my blessing, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
