



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMITTEE FOR HISTORICAL SCIENCES

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 20 April 2024*

[[Multimedia](#)]

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 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Pontifical Committee.

I greet the President, Fr Marek Inglot, 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 Secretary of the Pontifical Committee, also celebrates a 70th anniversary this year: the publication of its 70th volume.

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 closure. 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 60th 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 and, 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, opening up horizons for dialogue, where you can bring the light of hope of the Gospel, that hope which 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, recognizing 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” (cf. *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 civility of encounter*. Instead, the temptations of individualistic self-referentiality and the ideological affirmation of one’s own point of view fuel *the incivility of conflict*. The civility of encounter and the incivility of conflict. It is good that you, 70 years since 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 which the Holy Spirit shows us at Pentecost.

Seventy years ago, in that event blessed by the Spirit that was the [Second Vatican Council](#), 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: “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 middle between Christ and the human community, not withdrawn into herself, not like an opaque veil that obscures sight, not an end in herself, but on the contrary, constantly striving to be entirely of Christ, in Christ, for Christ, to be entirely of men, among men, for men, a truly humble and excellent intermediary between the Divine Saviour and humanity” (cf. *Address for the Inauguration of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, 14 September 1964, 17).

For your 70th anniversary, I hope you 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.

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