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Audience with members of the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences on the occasion of the Plenary Session, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear members of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences!

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your Plenary Session. I thank the president, Fr. Ardura, for his kind words, and I greet each one of you, grateful for your generous service to the Holy See. It is also a valuable contribution because of the way you carry it out: through dialogue and collaboration with historians and academic institutions, who wish to study not only the history of the Church, but more broadly the history of humanity in its relationship with Christianity over two millennia.

One hundred years ago, on 6 February 1922, Pope Pius XI, a librarian and diplomat, gave the Church and civil society a decisive orientation through a sign that was certainly surprising at the time. Immediately after his election, Pope Ratti chose to inaugurate his pontificate by facing the *external* loggia of the Vatican Basilica, instead of the *internal* one, as his three predecessors had done. They say it took almost 40 minutes to open that window, which over time had rusted through lack of use. With that gesture, Pius XI was inviting us to look out onto the world and to place ourselves at the service of the society of our time.

Adherence to firmly documented reality remains indispensable to the historian, without idealistic escapes into a supposedly consoling past. The historian of Christianity should be attentive to grasping the richness of the different situations in which, throughout the centuries, the Gospel has been incarnated and continues to be incarnated, providing masterpieces that reveal the fruitful action of the Holy Spirit in history. The history of the Church is a place of encounter and comparison in which the dialogue between God and humanity develops; and those who know how to unite thought with practical action are predisposed to this. The great historian Cesare Baronio comes to mind: on the front of his chimney hood, he left this inscription: *Baronius coquus perpetuus*. A

scholar of admirable doctrine as well as a man of great virtue, he continued to consider himself the cook of his community, the position given to him in his youth by Saint Philip Neri. Not infrequently illustrious personages, who came to him for advice, found him in his apron, busy washing dishes (cf. A. Capecelatro, Vita di S. Filippo Neri, Naples 1879, vol. I, p. 416). So, theory and practice - united - lead to truth.

Your Committee, formed at the behest of the Venerable Pius XII to be at the service of the Pope, the Holy See and the local Churches, is certainly bound to promote the study of history, which is indispensable to the laboratory of peace, as a way of dialogue and the search for practical and peaceful solutions to resolve disagreements, and to know people and societies more deeply. I hope that historians will contribute with their research, with their analyses of the dynamics that mark human events, to the courageous initiation of processes of comparison in the real history of peoples and states.

The current situation in Eastern Europe does not, for the moment, allow you to meet some of your usual interlocutors in the context of the conferences that, for decades, have seen you collaborate both with the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow and with the historians of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow. But I am sure that you will be able to seize the right opportunities to resume and intensify this common work, which will be a valuable contribution to fostering peace.

While history is often pervaded by wars and by conflicts, the study of history makes me think of the engineering of bridges, which makes fruitful relationships possible between people, between believers and non-believers, between Christians of different denominations. Your experience is rich in lessons. We need it, because it is the bearer of the historical memory needed to grasp what is at stake in the making of the history of the Church and of humanity: that of offering an opening towards the reconciliation of brothers, the healing of wounds, the reintegration of yesterday's enemies into the concert of nations, as the Founding Fathers of a united Europe were able to do after the Second World War.

Your Committee currently consists of members from fourteen countries and three continents. I am delighted that this diversity expresses a multicultural, international and multidisciplinary dynamic. Your participation, this coming August, in the 23rd Congress of the International Committee of Historical Sciences in Poznan, with a Round Table on the theme “The Holy See and the Revolutions of the 19th and 20th Centuries”, will be a further opportunity to fulfil the mission entrusted to you, as a service to the search for truth via the methodology proper to the historical sciences.

Your conference and publishing programme, your historical and historiographical studies and, for most of you, university teaching, constitute the field in which you carry out your work. I encourage you to pursue it, albeit within the scope and methodology of your work, always open to the horizon of salvation history. This horizon is like the atmosphere in which human affairs, so to speak, “breathe”, take on light, revealing a broader meaning: that which comes from Christ, “who is Lord of the Church and Lord of man’s history on account of the mystery of the Redemption” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, 4 March 1979, 22).

To you and to your loved ones I cordially impart my blessing. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.