



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL RAFFAELE FARINA,
ARCHIVIST AND LIBRARIAN OF THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE RE-OPENING OF THE VATICAN LIBRARY**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Raffaele Farina, sdb
Archivist and Librarian of Holy Roman Church*

The re-opening of the Vatican Library, after its closure for three years to allow for necessary renovations to be carried out, is being celebrated with an exhibition entitled: “Knowing the Vatican Library: a story open to the future”, and with a Congress on the theme: “The Vatican Apostolic Library as a place of research and an institution at the service of scholars”.

I am following these initiatives with special interest not only to confirm my personal closeness to the praiseworthy Institution as a man of study but also to continue the age-old and constant care that my Predecessors gave it.

One of the two epigraphs that Pope Sixtus V placed beside the entrance to the Sistine Hall recalls that it was founded (“inchoate”) by those Popes who listened to the voice of the Apostle Peter. This idea of continuity through a 2,000-year-old history contains a profound truth: the Church of Rome has been linked to books from the outset; first of all they would have been those of the Sacred Scriptures, then books on theology and concerning the discipline and governance of the Church.

In fact, although the Vatican Library came into being in the 15th century, in the heart of Humanism of which it is a splendid manifestation, it is the expression, the “modern” institutional realization of a far older reality which has always accompanied the Church on her journey. This historical awareness leads me to emphasize that the Apostolic Library, like the neighbouring Secret Archives, is an integral part of the means required to carry out the Petrine Ministry and is likewise rooted in the exigencies of the Church’s governance.

Far from being merely the result of the daily accumulation of a refined bibliophilia and the random collection of works, the [Vatican Library](#) is a valuable means — which the Bishop of Rome cannot and does not intend to give up — which enables him when considering problems in a perspective of long duration to perceive the distant roots of situations and their evolution in time. While it is an eminent place of the historical memory of the universal Church in which venerable testimonies of the manuscript tradition of the Bible are preserved, the [Vatican Library](#) nevertheless has another reason for being the object of the care and concern of the Popes. Since its origins it has preserved the unmistakable, truly “catholic” universal openness to everything that humanity has produced down the centuries that is beautiful, good, noble and worthy (*cf.* Phil 4:8); hence the breadth with which in time it has gathered the loftiest fruits of thought and of human culture, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, from the modern epoch to the 20th century. Nothing truly human is foreign to the Church. For this reason she has always sought, gathered and preserved, with a continuity rarely matched, the best results of the efforts of human beings to rise above the purely material to the conscious or unconscious search for the Truth.

It is not by chance in the iconographic sequence in the Sistine Hall that the orderly succession of depictions of the Ecumenical Councils and of the great libraries of antiquity on the right and left walls and the potraits of the inventors of the alphabets on the central pilasters, all converge towards the figure of Jesus Christ, “*celestis doctrinae auctor*”, the Alpha and the Omega, the true Book of Life (*cf.* Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27) for whom all humanity yearns and strives. The [Vatican Library](#) is therefore not a theological or predominantly religious library; faithful to its humanistic origins it is by vocation open to the human being. It thus serves culture, that is to say, as my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI said on 20 June 1975 on the occasion of this institution’s fifth centenary, “human maturation... growth from within... an exquisitely spiritual acquisition; culture is the elevation of the most noble faculties that God the Creator has bestowed on man, to make him a man, to make him more of a man, to make him like Himself! Culture and mind therefore; culture and soul; culture and God. With [her feminine gender], this institution, too, the Church re-proposes to us these essential and vital binomial aims, which touch man in his truest dimension, and, as if by an inversion of the law of gravity, incline him upwards, and urge him... to go beyond himself in accordance with the admirable Augustinian trajectory of *quaerere super se* (*cf.* St Augustine, *Confessiones*, X, 6, 9: *PL* 32, 783). With the operation of this “female” institution, the Church sets out today — as she did five centuries ago — to serve all people, including her ministry in the wider framework of her essential ministry as the Church: the Church as a community that evangelizes and saves” (*ORE*, 10 July 1975, p. 5). This openness to the human being is not only addressed to the past but also looks at the present. In the [Vatican Library](#) all seekers of the truth have always been welcomed with attention and respect without any confessional or ideological discrimination; all that is asked of them is the good faith of serious, disinterested and well-qualified research. In this research the Church and my Predecessors have always recognized and appreciated a religious motive, often unconscious, because every partial truth is part of the Supreme Truth of God and every thorough and meticulous investigation to ascertain it is a path to reach it.

Love of literature and historical and philological research are therefore interwoven with the longing for God, as I had an opportunity to say on 12 September 2008 in Paris at the [Meeting with the World of Culture at the Collège des Bernardins](#), recalling the great experience of Western monasticism.

The monks' objective was and remains that of *quaerere Deum*, seeking God.... The search for God intrinsically requires a culture of the word.... The longing for God, the *désir de Dieu*, includes *amour des lettres*, love of the word, exploration of all its dimensions. Because in the biblical Word God comes towards us and we towards him, we must learn to penetrate the secret of language, to understand it in its construction and in the manner of its expression. Thus it is through the search for God the secular sciences take on importance, sciences which show us the path towards language.

Because the search for God requires the culture of the word, it was appropriate that the monastery should have a library, pointing out pathways to the Word. It was also appropriate to have a school, in which these pathways could be opened up.... The monastery serves *eruditio*, the formation and erudition of man — a formation whose ultimate aim is that man learn how to serve God” (*ORE*, 17 September 2008, p. 5). The [Vatican Library](#) is therefore the place in which the loftiest human words are gathered and kept, the mirror and the reflection of the Word, the Word that enlightens every man (Jn 1:9). I am pleased to conclude by recalling the words that the Servant of God Paul VI spoke on his first Visit to the [Vatican Library](#) on 8 June 1964, when he recalled the “ascetic virtues” required by activity in the Library, immersed as it is in the plurality of languages, of writings and of words, but looking always at the Word, through what is temporary, ceaselessly searching for the definitive. Of this both austere and joyful ascesis of research, at the service of one's own studies and those of others, in the course of its history the [Vatican Library](#) has offered countless examples, from Guglielmo Sirleto to Franz Ehrle, from Giovanni Mercati to Eugène Tisserant. May it continue on the path marked out by these luminous figures!

With my best wishes and with heartfelt gratitude, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, Venerable Brother, to Mons. Cesare Pasini, Prefect of the [Vatican Library](#) and to all the collaborators and researchers.

From the Vatican, 9 November 2010

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