



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE SUPERIORS AND STAFF  
OF THE VATICAN SECRET ARCHIVES  
AND THE VATICAN APOSTOLIC LIBRARY**

*Friday, 15 January 1999*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am very pleased today to receive all of you who work each day in the Vatican Secret Archives and the Vatican Apostolic Library, and to offer you a cordial welcome, which I also gladly extend to your relatives. In particular I greet Archbishop Jorge María Mejía, Archivist and Librarian of the Holy Roman Church, and I thank him for his courteous words on your behalf. With him, I greet Fr Sergio Pagano, Prefect of the Vatican's Secret Archives, and Fr Raffaele Farina, Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library.

The title of Librarian, which was already used in the ninth century by Anastasius the Librarian (cf. PL 127- 129), is a clear indication of the venerable age of the institutions to which you belong, as well as of the close ties between them and the Apostolic See.

In fact, your work is not confined to your efforts to preserve the books and manuscripts, the Acts of the Supreme Pontiffs and of the Offices of the Roman Curia, and to handing them on down the centuries, but above all it aims to make available to the Holy See and all the world's scholars the treasures of culture and art kept in the Archives and the Library. For this very reason it is also your duty to carry out attentive and detailed studies of these treasures, often with the help of other experts, so that they can be published with scholarly precision. Proof of your valuable service are the various series which the Library and the Archives continue to publish and disseminate, and which are appreciated by the world of historians, canon lawyers, students of palaeography as well as by specialists in classical literature and ancient music. I would like to thank you for this considerable effort, as I warmly encourage you to continue it and to intensify it with constant zeal.

2. It is easy to understand the interest and care taken by my venerable Predecessors, especially in recent centuries, to

create, promote and oversee the Apostolic Library, and later, as a fullyfledged branch of it, the Papal Archives. I am thinking of Nicholas V, Sixtus IV, Sixtus V, Paul V and many other Pontiffs, down to Leo XIII, who decided to open the Archives to scholarly research, and Pius XI, who was himself personally involved in this noble field of interest as Prefect of the Apostolic Library.

The Pontiffs saw the Library and Archives not only as valuable tools of service to culture and art, but as having two other important qualities which I would like to emphasize here because they are always valid and necessary, today perhaps more than in the past.

The first is the *relationship between the texts preserved and the exercise of the governance and ministry* of the Apostolic See, and especially of the Papal Magisterium. In a certain way, these venerable texts contain and transmit the Church's own memory and therefore the continuity of her apostolic service down the centuries, with its lights and shadows, both of which must be known and made known without fear, but rather, with sincere gratitude to the Lord, who never ceases to guide his Church in the midst of world events.

Pope Leo XIII was very conscious of this years ago, when in 1880 he wished to make the Archives accessible to scholars. In addition, the wonderful decoration with which Sixtus V adorned the Sistine Hall sheds light on the relationship between the Library and the exercise of the Magisterium in two series of frescos: in one part the history of the most important libraries is depicted, and in the other are portrayed the Ecumenical Councils.

3. Attention should be drawn to a second attribute of the Library and Archives and therefore of your work in both, at whatever level. This is your service to the evangelization of culture, indeed, to the new *evangelization of culture*. You know well that this is a central and vital task for the Church in the contemporary world, to which the Servant of God Paul VI referred in the past with enlightening words in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeli nuntiandi* (cf. nn. 19-20) and which I have mentioned several times. We must find a way to see that the Gospel values communicated to us, together with those that stem from a true humanism, both of which are in fact closely connected, reach men and women of culture, and perhaps even before that, the environments and circles where our present-day culture is created and passed on.

If the Gospel teaches us the absolute primacy of God and the unique salvation in Christ the Lord, this is also the only way to appreciate, respect and truly love the human creature, made in God's image and called to share in the mystery of the Son of God made man. Now, the precious items preserved, studied and made accessible in the Library and the Archives represent in a way the living testimony of the Church's constant proclamation of evangelical values, which uphold true humanism.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, here clearly outlined are the greatness and dignity of your service, even in the apparently humble duties you are sometimes called to fulfil. Know that in fulfilling them you are rendering an important service to the Apostolic See and particularly to the Successor of Peter. You are making a significant contribution to creating the conditions for the men and women involved in the cultural realm to find the way that will lead them to their Creator and Saviour, and therefore to the true and complete fulfilment of their specific vocation in this period of transition from the second to the third millennium.

We are on the eve of the Great Jubilee, so it is appropriate to consider your various commitments and the exhibitions you are organizing or in which you are collaborating - including the one in the Sistine Hall entitled "Becoming Holy" - as opportunities for experiencing the spiritual renewal to which we are all called. Help those who come to the Library or the Archives, those who visit the exhibitions and those who consult the documentary material you preserve to grasp the message that comes from all these testimonies: it is a message that refers to the saving plan of a merciful God, who is the supreme Truth and infinite Good.

5. Finally, I also consider it my duty to make a heartfelt appeal to you all: love, respect and defend this great heritage collected over the centuries by the Roman Pontiffs. It is a question of jealously safeguarding the valuable and inalienable patrimony of the Holy See. Obviously, it is only the Supreme Pontiff who may dispose of them. Therefore everyone should consider it his duty to administer the Apostolic See's property with extreme care, in the knowledge that he is rendering a service to the Church and to the world.

With these wishes, I cordially bless each of you and your daily work.