



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE  
OF THE VATICAN APOSTOLIC LIBRARY  
“CONSERVATA ET PERLECTA ALIIS TRADERE. LIBRARIES IN DIALOGUE”**

*Clementine Hall  
Saturday, 16 November 2024*

**[[Multimedia](#)]**

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*Archbishop Zani, Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!*

I was very pleased to learn about this Meeting, “*Conservata et perlecta aliis tradere*, Libraries in Dialogue”, which is a sign of the Vatican Library’s openness to the world. That is exactly what I asked of Archbishop Zani when I appointed him. I told him, “Go, open it up!” I greet the Librarians and the benefactors who contribute generously to the needs of this Institution. With deep gratitude, I also welcome the representatives of twenty-three prestigious Libraries worldwide who have taken part in the Meeting. The Vatican Library seek to dialogue with related institutions on a number of key issues, and has initiated study groups that I trust will continue and bear fruit for your mutual enrichment.

Such practical dialogue on well-defined topics will surely contribute to enhancing the educational and cultural outreach of your Libraries in these changing times. Your institutions are called to pass on the legacy of the past in ways meaningful to new generations immersed in a liquid culture and thus in need of solid, formative, welcoming and inclusive environments in which they can create new syntheses capable of insight into the present and hope for the future. Yours is indeed an exciting mission.

In this regard, I would like to evoke the figure of [Pope Pius XI](#), Achille Ratti, whom some scholars call “the librarian Pope”. He was also a mountain climber. Pope Pius was the Librarian of the Venerable Ambrosian Library in Milan and later, of the Vatican Library. A man of action, interested in science and mass communications, he was conscious of the great importance of libraries at an extremely troubled time in history, between two world wars. As European culture was degenerating into a conflict of ideologies, the Pope expanded the quarters of the Vatican Library, promoted systematic cataloguing and opened a school for the training of librarians. Under his protection, the Vatican Library became a safe refuge for many scholars, including those persecuted by the totalitarian regimes that the Pope firmly opposed. It was a time of totalitarian regimes.

The approach of this “librarian Pope”, resourceful, courageous and decisive, can serve as an inspiration as we, in today’s world, find ourselves likewise faced with significant cultural and social challenges calling for timely and appropriate responses.

Technology has notably changed the way librarians work, making it more varied and less time-consuming. The communications media and information technology have opened up possibilities unthinkable just a few years ago. Systems for studying, cataloguing and using library resources have multiplied. All this has brought many benefits, but also a number of risks: large databases are rich resources to mine, but their quality has proved difficult to control.

Due to the high cost of managing print collections, especially older ones, only a few countries in the world can offer certain consultation and research services. As a result, less advantaged nations can experience not only material poverty, but also intellectual and cultural poverty. There is a great risk that the world war being fought piecemeal that we are currently experiencing will slow down the progress already made. A risk that costly weapon systems can impede the growth of culture and the means it needs to develop. Or that conflicts which destroy schools, universities and educational projects can prevent students from learning and doing research. War destroys everything!

Many cultural institutions find themselves defenceless in the face of war, violence and looting. How often has this been the case in the past! Let us work to ensure that it never happens again. Let us respond to the clash of civilizations, ideological colonialism and the cancel culture, by cultivating culture. It would be terrible if, in addition to the many physical walls dividing states, virtual walls were also to be erected. You, as Librarians, have an important role to play in this respect, not only in the defence of our historical patrimony, but also in the advancement of knowledge. I encourage you to continue to ensure that your institutions are places of peace, oases of encounter and platforms for open discussion.

As a contribution to this endeavour, I would like to propose for your reflection four principles that I set forth in my Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelii Gaudium](#) (cf. 222-237).

The first principle, *time is greater than space*. You are the guardians of vast treasures of knowledge and learning. May these become places where time is set aside for reflecting and openness to the spiritual and transcendent dimension of our existence. In this way, you can favour long-term studies without being obsessed with immediate results and thus, by fostering silence and meditation, encourage the development of a new humanism.

Second principle, *unity prevails over conflict*. Academic research inevitably gives rise at times to controversy, which should be the object of serious, honest and respectful discussion. Libraries must be open to all fields of knowledge and bear witness to a common purpose amid varying approaches.

Third principle, *realities are more important than ideas*. It is important to make concrete and realistic decisions while also maintaining a critical and speculative approach, in order to avoid any false conflict between thought and experience, facts and principles, practice and theory. If we sincerely seek the truth, our reflection should always respect the primacy of reality.

And the fourth principle, *the whole is greater than the part*. Our work calls us to reconcile the tension between local and global interests, in the realization that no one is an isolated individual. Our lives are grounded in social relationships and networks that call for our responsible participation.

Let me repeat the four principles: time is greater than space, unity prevails over conflict, realities are more important than ideas, the whole is greater than the part. Let us not forget these four principles.

Dear friends, may you never find yourselves daunted by the complexity of the world in which we are called to work! May everything that you have shared in these days help you and your associates become like the wise “scribe” praised by the Lord Jesus, who was capable of drawing from his stores treasures both new and old, for the benefit of all (cf. *Mt* 13:52). I will now bless all of you in silence. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Do not lose your sense of humour. Thank you!