



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE DIPLOMATIC ACADEMIES AND  
OF INSTITUTES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS\*** Castel Gandolfo - Thursday, 18 September 1986

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to greet you on the occasion of the fourteenth meeting of Directors of the Diplomatic Academies and of Institutes of International Relations, which this year is taking place in Rome at the invitation of the Società Italiana per l'Organizzazione Internazionale. You are cordially welcome.

The growing consensus the part of Academies and Institutes of diplomacy to this undertaking, begun in 1973 by Vienna and the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown University in Washington, testifies to the usefulness of your meetings, at which you exchange information and ideas concerning teaching programmes and methods for the training of young diplomats. I am particularly pleased that the President of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy is also taking part. One of the themes to which you have directed your attention this year is "diplomacy and cultural relations". This is a theme that I would describe as particularly in harmony with the purpose of your assemblies, which themselves constitute cultural exchanges. You have rightly made this a subject of your reflection, given the fact that the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961 indicates among the functions of diplomatic missions that of developing cultural relations between the State accrediting and the one accredited. The subject of cultural relations is a theme in which the Holy See, given its universal responsibility in the Catholic Church, is particularly interested. Living in various circumstances during the course of time, the Church, too, has used in her preaching the discoveries of different cultures to spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations; she can enter into communion with various cultural modes, to her own enrichment and theirs too". These are the terms used by the Second Vatican Council, which, in its document on the Church in the Modern World, devoted a chapter filled with suggestions and incentives for the "promotion of the progress of culture". I myself have felt the need to institute as a new body of the Roman Curia the Pontifical Council for Culture, which pursues the general aim of favouring the dialogue between the Church and culture, also by collaborating with international organisations in the various fields of culture.

2. The evolution of modern civilisation, the speed of transportation and the new instruments of communication have changed and are further changing, with increasing rapidity, the shape of relations between different peoples. Information can cross frontiers in a few seconds, and public opinion in a country reacts also to events taking place in extremely distant regions. Exchanges and interdependence are increasing. In such close and intensified relations, awareness of the unity and common destiny of the human race becomes ever more acute,

but at the same time there is a clearer realisation of the importance of recognising and safeguarding, together with their political autonomy, the cultural identity of the different nations.<sup>3</sup> In this new context one clearly sees the importance of a specific role of diplomacy in cultural exchanges between different countries. Cultural exchanges indeed help people to share great experiences and spiritual aspirations, to understand the values that animate them, and thus to discover their common humanity. Where dialogue between cultures is lacking, mutual incomprehension takes its place; difference is taken to be an element of negative judgement; spiritual estrangement, and sometimes disputes which can turn into conflict, are its painful consequence. On the other hand, where the dialogue of cultures can develop freely and is encouraged, the treasures proper to each culture are shared, there is an increase of respect for the particular qualities – often full of genius – of each people; new horizons of knowledge open up, as do fresh opportunities for international collaborations; the formation of new forms of culture is fostered: and this for the benefit not only of a few privileged people but of society in general. Diplomats, as people of culture themselves, must have the ability to view with sympathetic understanding the cultural realities of the nation to which they are sent, an attitude capable of admiration but also tempered by discernment. Such an attitude will not be oblivious to the presence of religious values, or to the particular place that religion may have in the cultural background of a people. For example, how could one fail to note the sometimes decisive role that religion has played in the process of forming the national unity of certain countries? Or the influence of Churches or religious movements on public opinion in the great causes of human rights, the development of peoples, and peace? Or the effect that ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and the other Churches or Christian Communion may have on the exchange of ideas and sometimes on the social and political scene itself, both inside certain countries and also on the international scene? Diplomats today are also required to work, where necessary, in order to help prepare the country where they are guests for the arrival of cultural figures and factors from their own country, and, when the opportunity arises, to encourage and facilitate such a presence. They must be able to detect favourable chances for positive developments, and to take any opportunities which present themselves for giving to these relations an institutional framework through formal agreements for cultural co-operation; often they will feel called to give discreet diplomatic assistance, or simply lend their own presence, to ensure the success of cultural meetings and initiatives. These are new and challenging tasks, and many embassies have a special cultural attaché who assists the Ambassador in this specific area. Their role calls for the possibility of easy contacts with the cultural environment of the host country, and above all it presupposes an awareness, indeed a lively sensitivity and an enthusiasm on the part of the diplomat for human values and their cultural expression, and at the same time the possession of specific methods of operation. As those responsible for the training of future diplomats, the value of your contribution in this particular area of their future activity cannot be overestimated. With the cultural training which you give, you not only provide them with a professional technique but you also give them a precious patrimony of "humanitas", valuable for their personal lives, which will include periods of demanding service in difficult geographical areas or situations of psychological stress. For my part I wish to assure you that I look with great respect and admiration upon your task, and indeed upon your varied and challenging mission as instructors in diplomacy and as those responsible for training people of dialogue and peace. Upon your activities, as also upon yourselves and those dear to you, I cordially invoke the blessings of

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God.

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