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**Formal address by Prof. Adriano la Regina  
Recipient of an Honorary Degree  
At the Commencement Exercises of The American University of Rome 2006  
to the Graduating Class, Faculty, Staff and guests at the ceremony.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to greet:

the President Dr. Robert Marino, Members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished Guests, Members of the Advisory Council, Professors, Staff, and most of all the Graduating Class of 2006.

It is a great honor for me to receive from The American University of Rome this honorary degree and I thank the President, the Board of Trustees and the professors for this sign of recognition for my work.

It is also an honor for me to be asked to give the formal address at the graduation ceremony and I will begin by speaking directly to the graduating students.

This is an important moment of your life. You graduate from your university and go out into the world, either to work or to pursue further studies in your field.

Most of you will wonder what is going to happen to you and your future. What kind of world will you find when you begin to be a protagonist in it. Will it be difficult to create a future. What are the characteristics necessary to create this future. What should you try to be and what should you try to avoid being.

To begin with the basics. What is undoubtedly necessary is a good scholastic formation. Your education is absolutely critical to how you see the world and how you can build a life and a career which is a reflection of the great ideals fundamental to creating a civilized world.

As progress can be seen to be moving ahead too quickly, especially in the last thirty or forty years, this can sometimes create fear of the future and a fear that one will not be able to rise to all the occasions presented by life.

When you graduate you will begin to feel the responsibility which pertains to a person starting off in a new life - a person who has to stand on his own feet, make his own decisions, and answer for his own actions.

A young graduate must try to mature that wonderful sense of curiosity which serious study stimulates. And he has a whole lifetime to continue this great journey. You must nurture your curiosity by continually searching for solutions and answers - knowing

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that you will not find the answers to all of them in a single lifetime. And this is what makes the journey exciting.

Remember those ideals. Do not spend your life making compromises. Stand up for your ideals and principles. Even risk is an important part of doing great things in life, if directed towards the defence of one's own ideals. It is better to risk, even if you lose, than to remain passive and full of regrets.

To give an example from history. After having defeated the Persian Empire Alexander The Great had a great ambition and dream. It was to merge the Oriental and Western Traditions. He tried to do this by encouraging his soldiers to marry Persian women. He felt that in this way the cultures could be merged in a natural way, with the children having roots of these two cultures in their genetic makeup.

He did not succeed in this endeavor, but this attempt was absolutely necessary, even if it did not succeed.

Alexander was great also for the fact that he aimed at such an almost unrealizable dream - a dream he knew was worth pursuing even if it did not succeed and if we reflect, this is a dream which is still current in our days and still very valid to aim for ( I mean the merging of Oriental and Western traditions).

Comprehension between cultures and nations is fundamental for the future of mankind and also for world peace.

Loyalty is another important factor. You must aim to be loyal to your ideals, your family, your friends and your colleagues. Even if you see others not living in this way it is not a good reason for you to join the ranks.

If you are afraid remember that you will find many good people on your road who will be happy to give you advice, and do not be afraid to ask. You will already have experienced this during your studies when your professors have encouraged you and helped you to overcome difficulties.

My own life experience is a continuing and ongoing road which has been made possible by my early education and my continuing scholarship. This scholarship leads me day by day to fascinating discoveries and solutions to the various problems which enter my professional field.

My career has been intimately involved in the superintendencies for cultural protection in Italy

The conservation of cultural and natural patrimony is a form of identification with your ambient and your environment. I have dedicated my entire professional life to this end.

What can I say about culture.

Culture could be interpreted as the capacity to understand ourselves. This comes from the ability to interpret our history, that is to explain the processes which have determined our way of being and living, which consequently helps to determine our vocation and aspirations for the future.

People are increasingly aware that the protection of the environment is also a way to preserve urban and rural spaces culturally and historically, and that these features are of fundamental importance for both economic, social and other reasons.

In this respect, it has recently become evident that whilst the physical decay of works of art may be arrested, any sustained damage is irreversible. Years ago, there was a very great deal of concern about the effects of atmospheric pollution in Rome: the Archaeological Superintendence announced that the great marbles of antiquity - monuments with sculptures and narrative reliefs - were quickly and progressively deteriorating due to accelerated chemical erosion. Marble undergoes transformation, followed by destruction, through a chemical process caused by a changing ecology and a polluted atmosphere. The sculptural reliefs were either going to be detached from their supports or they were going to decay irreversibly as a result of wind and water erosion. The process was irreversible: transformed matter cannot ever recover its original structure. Since some of the most important historical monuments of Rome were affected by these destructive processes - for example, the arches of Titus, of Septimius Severus, of Constantine, the columns of Trajan and of Marcus Aurelius - such a serious situation caused the Italian government and Rome's municipal authorities to give full consideration to the problem, and effective measures were taken both for cleaning and consolidating the monuments and for improving the environment in which the monuments were positioned. In 1978, the problem of preserving monuments from atmospheric pollution arose in Rome for the first time ever, and that year also marked the first ever stir towards environmental awareness. Today, creating a space where city life is not in collision with its historical elements, still seems to be the greatest challenge in seeking to protect our cultural patrimony.

As regards the conservation of historical features in urban areas, there is still considerable debate, both in Italy and elsewhere, about the realisation of new high quality architectural projects in ancient settings (e.g. the new building at Rome's Ara Pacis). This, however, does not seem to be a need quite as urgent as the reorganization and renovation of run down modern suburban districts.

In the last few years, our museums have become more and more connected with their geographical areas, and in particular - as a consequence of a much wider diffusion of local institutes - with smaller districts. Unfortunately, museums suffer the results of changing attitudes in national and local governments, as well as more

generalised changes in public opinion. The very function of museums seems to be changing too: there is less concern about education and more attention to the promotion of tourism and other economic interests, not to mention the role museums should play in research. It has been completely forgotten, it seems, that museums are institutions of the highest importance for studies too. The most astonishing example of this attitude is given by the Egyptian Museum of Turin, which has recently been transformed into a foundation with private participation. The trustees plan to undertake a complete renovation of the institute with the aim of attracting half million tourists a year to Turin, there is no intention however, of improving its function in relation to the study of documents and works of art therein collected.

The present Italian system clearly still keeps in force good laws for the protection of the artistic and historical patrimony, in spite of the latest measures adopted by Parliament that reduce public powers of control of the cultural heritage. At the same time however, it is also true that good laws are not always effective if not accompanied by strong cultural awareness and public opinion. This is why the role that schools may still assume in the defence of cultural heritage, ultimately, is of extreme importance

What is the role of an educational institution in all of this. It must prepare students who can recognize the great problems of our times and contribute to their solution. There are three forms of equilibrium to be aimed at:

1. Nature
2. Wealth
3. Cultures

(1) We observe constantly environmental disasters which put at risk both the lives of people and their ambient. We also see examples of uncontrolled industrial development which destroys nature and the health of people. What is necessary is an awareness of the need to find an equilibrium between our way of living and the way other people live.

(2) We can see clearly - on a worldwide scale - the conflict between the rich and the poor nations.

It must not be forgotten that one of the biggest Empires of the ancient world - The Roman Empire - collapsed because its confine was surrounded by populations which had a much lower standard of living and these necessities put pressure on the frontiers to the point where they collapsed.

(3) In relation to Cultures we are living in a moment of history where there is again the danger of a conflict between the Western and Oriental cultures - this danger, as I

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mentioned before, was clearly anticipated by Alexander the Great who tried to avoid a clash of this type.

These are points which, in my opinion, can be taken into consideration by educators and absorbed by their students.

You, graduating students, will be protagonists in the world to come and this brings with it a great sense of responsibility but even greater opportunities to make a large contribution to creating a world which is better, more beautiful and just.

I want to express again my gratitude to you all, and in particular to a distinguished artist, Professor Breda Ennis, the director of the Pyramid Art Studio with which the American University of Rome has enriched the cultural activities of this city.