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Academic Act for the Institution of the study cycle on “Care of our Common Home and the protection of Creation”, and of the UNESCO Chair “On Futures of Education for Sustainability”

This morning, after leaving the Casa Santa Marta, the Holy Father Francis visited the Pontifical Lateran University where he presided at the Academic Act for the institution of the study cycle on “Care of our Common Home and Protection of Creation”, and the UNESCO Chair “On Futures of Education for Sustainability”:

The following is the Pope’s address to those present during the institution of the study cycle and the UNESCO Chair:

Address of the Holy Father

His Holiness, my dear brother Bartholomew,

Distinguished Ms. AudreyAzoulay, director general of UNESCO,

Grand Chancellor, Magnificent Rector and the Lateran academic community,

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am delighted to be among you for this Academic Act dedicated to ecological and environmental issues. It is also intended to lay the foundations for an open and structured dialogue with everyone on how to know and listen to the voice of our common home, which demands to be cared for and nurtured. It is an event involving Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom we share the duty to proclaim love for creation and the commitment to its care. As the Encyclical *Laudato si'* was being drafted, the light coming from him and from the Church of Constantinople was strong. To care for creation - I quote His Holiness – “is a way of loving, of moving gradually from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and dependence” (*Conference at Utstein Monastery, Norway, 23 June 2003*).

Today, common reflection as disciples of Christ has succeeded in entering into many contexts, bringing together often distant interests, such as in the sphere of international organisations, of special multilateral conferences dedicated to different environmental sectors or ecosystems. It is from this perspective, for example, that we have recently prepared a Message with Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Justin Welby, Primate of the Anglican Church, in view of the upcoming COP26 meeting in Glasgow. I think we are all aware that the harm we are doing to the planet is no longer limited to damage to the climate, water and soil, but now threatens life itself on earth. Faced with this, it is not enough to repeat statements of principle that make us feel good because, among other things, we are also interested in the environment. The complexity of the ecological crisis demands responsibility, practicality and competence. I was so struck by the fact that one of the scientists, in the meeting we had with them and also with religious leaders [this October 4], this scientist, president [of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences], said: "My granddaughter, who was born last month, will have to live in an uninhabitable world if we don't change things".

These choices recall the original mission of the *Universitas*, as a privileged place of training and preparation, where different areas of knowledge meet, where students and teachers come together to reflect and creatively develop new ways forward. The University is also the place where efforts are made to form an ecological conscience and develop research to protect the common home. Academic activity is called upon to foster integral ecological conversion in order to preserve the splendour of nature, first and foremost by reconstructing the necessary unity between the natural and social sciences with what is offered by theological, philosophical and ethical reflection, so as to inspire legal standards and a sound economic vision.

At today's meeting, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is also represented at the highest level. It is responsible for preserving the world's cultural and natural heritage and for promoting the dynamic nature of the sciences, first and foremost through education. I would like to thank UNESCO for the active attention it has paid to this initiative by launching the process for establishing a chair on the *Future of Education for Sustainability*.

These are the spirit, the assumptions and the intent entrusted to the new study cycle in ecology and the environment that is being launched today in this University. As part of the journey towards full ecclesial communion, it will work together with the See of the Apostle Andrew, with an open perspective, a great spirit capable of welcoming the attention of the Christian Churches, the various religious communities, those who are seeking and those who profess to be non-believers. In other words, it must be a meeting point for reflection on integral ecology, capable of bringing together different experiences and thoughts, combining them through the method of scientific research. In this way the *Universitas* is not only an expression of the unity of knowledge, but also the custodian of an imperative that has no religious, ideological or cultural boundaries: to safeguard our common home, to preserve it from wicked actions, perhaps inspired by politics, economics and education linked to the immediate result, to the advantage of the few.

Expectations linked to the objectives of sustainable development to be achieved by 2030, together with more specific goals linked to the protection of air, water, the climate or the fight against desertification, are receding. Perhaps because we have only linked these goals to a cause-effect relationship, perhaps in the name of efficiency, forgetting that "there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" (*Laudato si'*, 118). Without a true integral ecology we will have "yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones" (*ibid.*). The idea of a special cycle of studies, therefore, serves to transform even among believers the mere interest in the environment into a mission carried out by trained people, the fruit of an adequate educational experience. This is the greatest responsibility in the face of those who, because of environmental degradation, are excluded, abandoned and forgotten. A work to which the Churches, by vocation, and every person of good will are called to give all the necessary contribution, making themselves the *voice of those who have no voice*, which rises above partisan interests and does not simply complain.

To the Lateran academic community, in all its components, I address my encouragement to continue, with humility and perseverance, to intercept the signs of the times. An attitude that requires openness, creativity, and broader educational offerings, but also sacrifice, commitment, transparency and rectitude in choices, especially in these difficult times. Let us definitively abandon the attitude that "it has always been done this way" – it is suicidal, this "it has always been done this way" – which does not make us credible because it generates

superficiality and answers that are only seemingly valid (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 33). On the contrary, we are called to qualified work, which demands generosity and gratuitousness from everyone in order to respond to a cultural context whose challenges demand concreteness, precision and the ability to confront them. May God fill us with his tenderness and pour the strength of his love upon our path, “that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction” (*Laudato si'*, 246). Thank you.
