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Press Conference on the theme: “The Vatican Apostolic Library for the growth of a new humanism”

At 11.30 today, a press conference was held at the Holy See Press Office on the theme “The Vatican Apostolic Library for the growth of a new humanism”.

The speakers were: Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani, archivist and librarian of the Holy Roman Church, and the Reverend Don Mauro Mantovani, S.D.B., prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library and director of the Vatican School of Library Sciences.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani

Good morning, everyone. We are pleased to welcome you here to share the recent initiatives of the Apostolic Library, and to outline the future path in view of the Jubilee, and extraordinary event that constitutes for us a unique opportunity to celebrate, together with the faith, the cohesive role of the cultural diplomacy that the Library has been carrying out ever since its creation, around five centuries ago. During the course of the last year we worked intensively to anticipate, with some cultural initiatives, this global event of spiritual and social renewal.

A trove of inestimable cultural treasures and patrimony of humanity created at the behest of the pontiffs, the Vatican Apostolic Library is one of the oldest libraries in the world. It has always been open to scholars and houses a composite and unique patrimony that ranges throughout the centuries and embraces numerous civilizations. But the Vatican Library is also, by its very nature, a constant “laboratory” of projects and initiatives, a lively place of exchange and encounter with international interlocutors of various types who regularly foster numerous internal and external initiatives. These include intense publishing activity, an active presence in the context of professional training with the School of Library Sciences, participation in exhibitions all over the world, participation in the most relevant meetings of the various disciplines, and full availability for institutional and

interdisciplinary collaborations. Every day, new opportunities for cooperation and intercultural dialogue are created and advanced research and technological experimentation is cultivated. In recent times, we have opened several fronts for dialogue and relations with realities of different natures, in a kaleidoscope of fruitful relationships of mutual enrichment, which will be a fruitful starting point and junction for future developments.

In 2024, we welcomed a number of particularly fruitful initiatives in the area of intercultural relations. I am thinking in particular of the “Study Program” of the “Marshall T. Meyer” Latin American Rabbinical Seminary, which the Library has hosted, offering its manuscript holdings for study and analysis to the participants; the trip I made to Iraq to participate, on behalf of the Holy See, in the seventeenth Rabee al-Shahada International Festival; the regular collaboration with our benefactors, including the Sanctuary of Culture Foundation, always attentive to the needs of the Library, and the Japanese company NTT Data, which for several years has been a partner of the Vatican Library in technological experimentation and innovation; to the Library's presence in the circuit of the great international library organizations, such as IFLA, CENL, or CERL, which ensures that we are actively connected with other institutions which, like us, hold important collections; to the various initiatives which strengthen our friendship with Japan, such as the presentation of the volume dedicated to the martyred and Christian missionaries in Japan, a subject which is very close to our heart, also in light of the enhancement of the precious collection of Marega papers, a unique testimony to the evangelization of Japan.

I would like to take a closer look at a recent large-scale event that we organized recently, 14 and 15 November, hosted in collaboration with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: a meeting with the representatives of the main national libraries from around the world, entitled *Conservata et perfecta allis tradere. Libraries in dialogue*, planned to initiate a reflection and exchange between the Vatican Library and similar institutions on the basis of an *Instrumentum laboris* shared in advance by the Library with other participants. On this initiative we opened up a space and time for reflection on experiences already realized or in the process of implementation regarding the library collections, and in particular on the management of spaces for conservation and the systems and activities that favour direct and remote consultation; the new technologies and tools of information technology, taking account of the challenge of artificial intelligence; cultural policies and guidance for studies of an institution that is at the same time an institute for study and research, for a new understanding of the concept of cultural impact. The event concluded with a special audience granted by the Holy Father Francis, and included two greatly appreciated concerts: on 14 November, in the Sistine Hall of the Apostolic Library, the artist Omar Harfouch performed a concert for peace, of his own composition; and on 15 November, in the Sistine Chapel, the Pontifical Sistine Chapel Choir performed a concert in honour of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina to mark five hundred years since his birth, broadcast live and now available to be streamed on *Raiplay*. Some musical manuscripts from the Apostolic Library were specially displayed for the occasion in the Sala Regia.

This event provided the context for two important collaboration agreements signed by the Library, respectively with the King Hamad Digital Library of the Kingdom of Bahrain for mutual cultural and scientific collaboration in the various spheres of library activity, and with the Norwegian National Library for the digitalization of documents regarding Norwegian history, held both in the Apostolic Library and the Apostolic Archive, thanks to the sharing of technologies and experience in the development of digital repositories, the realization of digitalization tools and the development of the digital humanities.

Among the initiatives which distinguish the Vatican Library's mission of openness and dissemination, participation in exhibitions has long been an area in which the Library expresses itself with generosity and enthusiasm in choral events of cultural synergy. In 2024, works have been loaned for exhibitions in major museums around the world, including the British Museum in London, the County Museum of Art in Los Angeles, and the Shanghai Museum. Also in the year to come, the Library will contribute to various exhibitions at prestigious institutions, such as the *Gallerie dell'Accademia* in Venice, the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, the *Scuderie del Quirinale* and *Palazzo Braschi* in Rome, and *Palazzo Strozzi* in Florence; in particular, 2025 will open with our participation in the exhibition *The Art of Numbers*, which will be held as part of the Islamic Art Biennale organized by the Diriyah Biennale Foundation; The exhibition will open on 25 January at the Hajj terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport, an architectural structure designed to handle the enormous influx of pilgrims and which has a profound significance for Muslims all over the world, hosting millions of travellers who pass through it every year to make the sacred pilgrimages of the Hajj and Umrah to Mecca.

For some years now, exhibition activities have been successfully pursued also in the Library, since November 2021 when, thanks to the generous support of some benefactors, the Kirk Kerkorian Hall was inaugurated. Since last 25 October, it has been hosting, open to the public, the exhibition *The Book and the Spirit*, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the death of Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and Saint Thomas Aquinas. On display in the Kerkorian Hall and the surrounding rooms are precious codices and various documentary evidence relating to the life, work and intellectual legacy of the two medieval Masters, who are deeply connected to the very history of the Library not only as “luminaries” of the theological sciences, but also as a source of inspiration for dialogue with today’s culture and the social challenges of our time. The exhibition is open until Saturday, 14 December 2024 and can be visited by appointment.

In addition to these initiatives that punctuated the final phase of this year, there is an upcoming joint project of the Library with the *Istituto di Cultura e Formazione Antonio Rosmini* (ISCUFAR) that will start next December and continue until the end of 2025. The initiative, entitled *PAROLE APERTE. Jubilee lexicon* for our time, aims to strengthen hope in a time of disorientation of consciences by enhancing the connection with the Vatican Library, which in its collections testifies to the excellence of human ingenuity and at the same time embodies an appreciated international reference point for research and education. Eight meetings are planned at the Library's Sistine Hall, with free access and by personal invitation, which will focus on eight words chosen in adherence with the message expressed by the Bull proclaiming the Jubilee. Each word will be analyzed in the course of a lecture by a specialist from different disciplinary fields, who may be joined by a discussant; this will be followed by the reading of excerpts taken from texts preserved in the Library and selected in coherence with the identified theme, interpreted by Italian and foreign professionals, with musical accompaniment. Depending on the word chosen, poetic and theatrical texts by the young Karol Wojtyła, texts by Pope Francis and Jorge Luis Borges will be recited from time to time, with the intervention of an Argentinean singer as a tribute to the Holy Father, and a special event will be dedicated to Our Lady in the month of May, with lyrical singing and lauds. The meetings will start on 13 December 2024 (*visions*), and will continue in 2025 with recurring appointments on 14 February (*journey*), 14 March (*silence*), 9 May (*Word*), 13 June (*intelligence*), 10 October (*charity*), 21 November (*humanism*) and 12 December 2025 (*hope*).

For the first two appointments (*visions* and *journey*), a visit to the current exhibitions in the Kerkorian Exhibition Hall of the Library is also planned.

Intervention of the Reverend Don Mauro Mantovani S.D.B.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome,

I will add some further information on the Library’s initiatives for the coming year, starting with a project we consider to be of particular importance for the Jubilee, realized by the *Medagliere*, the Library’s numismatic collection. Within the precious collection of about two thousand coins found around the tomb of Saint Peter during excavations promoted by Pope Pius XII in the years 1940-1949, the *Medagliere* preserves a *picciol* (*denarius parvus*) of the Rome mint with the Holy Face of Veronica on one side, whose issuance is dated during the 1450 Jubilee proclaimed by Nicholas V Parentucelli, which saw the presence of an extraordinary number of pilgrims, so much so as to be remembered as one of the most attended in the history of the Holy Years and as the last great collective religious event of the medieval age. The coin represents the offering left to Saint Peter by a pilgrim of hope (probably an inhabitant of the city of Rome itself) in the Jubilee of 1450. The Library, with the generous help of some benefactors, decided to reproduce the *petiole* by placing it inside the three-dimensional reproduction of the *Trofeo di Gaio*, the aedicule which, around 200 A.D., already indicated to the first pilgrims the location of Saint Peter's tomb, today enclosed in the “niche of the Palli” inside the Vatican *Confessio*. With the decision to reproduce this coin, we wished to pay homage to the quintessential silent offering, that of the Widow of the Gospel of Mark and Luke, who puts two coins, everything she possessed, into the Temple treasury, as Jesus Himself comments: “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living” (*Mk 12:43-44*).

For the whole of 2025, a large exhibition will be on display in the Vatican, which continues and at the same time renews the appointment that since 2021 has engaged it in fruitful dialogue with contemporary artists, with whom it compares its own historical legacy. The theme chosen is that of “world tours”, which began to multiply during the last decades of the nineteenth century, also on the wave of the possibilities offered by new means of transport. The exhibition will illustrate the travels of the Italian diplomat Cesare Poma (1862-1932), from whose legacy the Vatican Library received, and will present for the first time, a formidable collection of newspapers from the most remote parts of the world and printed in many languages, with very interesting cases of combinations of different languages and alphabets. This journey will be juxtaposed with those of two French journalists and six women who, out of a sporting challenge, for a new form of journalistic information or for the most diverse cultural reasons, set off around the world alone, defying prejudices and commonplaces. Three renowned contemporary artists were called upon, simultaneously, to participate in the narration of these journeys. The exhibition can be visited by booking online and will be presented at a special press conference.

The Jubilee will coincide with another major world event, *Expo 2025*, which will be held in Osaka. On this occasion, the Library is involved in a collaborative project with the Japanese company NTT (Nippon Telegraph and Telephon) Group, which has been a partner for several years in the technological implementation of certain sectors of the Vatican Library, thanks to its NTT Data division. This currently lively and fruitful link was already greatly appreciated on the occasion of the Dubai *Expo 2020*, when NTT Data designed and realized a “virtual tour” of the famous Tower of Winds, now part of the Vatican Apostolic Archive. *Expo 2025* in Osaka (13 April - 13 October 2025) is dedicated to the theme *Designing Future Society for Our Lives*, and will emphasize the transformation of the city, the common journey of humanity, dialogue between peoples, cultures, religions and generations, the promotion of life and openness to hope. Fundamental dimensions of the “new humanism”, for the development of a technology placed at the service of integral human, individual and social growth.

The Holy Year is an opportunity to build bridges, promote dialogue and look to the future with hope. The Library opens up to the world in its own language and in the ways befitting its mission, weaving relationships and encouraging its interlocutors to a choral and participatory vision, in mutual growth on this common journey. We invite you to continue to follow us and to share this extraordinary journey with the world.

Thank you for your attention. We are at your disposal for any questions.
