



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the exchange of New Year greetings

This morning, at 10.00, in the Hall of Blessings of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the exchange of New Year greetings.

After some introductory words from the dean of the Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency Mr. Georges Poulides, ambassador of Cyprus to the Holy See, and after the introductory greeting from the Holy Father, Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli, under-secretary of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, read out the following address prepared by Pope Francis:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come together this morning for a meeting that, apart from its institutional character, seeks above all to be a family event: a moment in which the family of peoples symbolically gathers, through your presence, to exchange fraternal good wishes, to leave behind the disputes that divide us and instead to find what unites us. At the beginning of this year, which is particularly meaningful for the Catholic Church, our coming together has a symbolism all of its own. For the Jubilee is meant to help us step back from the increasingly frenzied pace of daily life in order to be refreshed and nourished by what is truly essential. In a word, to rediscover ourselves, in him, as children of God and as brothers and sisters, to pardon offences, to support the weak and the poor in our midst, to give rest and relief to the earth, to practise justice and to recover hope. This is a summons to all those

who serve the common good and who exercise that lofty expression of charity – perhaps the highest form of charity – that is politics.

In this spirit, I offer you a warm welcome. First, I thank His Excellency Ambassador George Poulides, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, for his kind words conveying your shared sentiments. To all of you, I express my gratitude for the affection and esteem for the Apostolic See shown by your peoples and governments, whom you capably represent. This is seen by the visits of more than thirty Heads of State or Government whom I had the joy of receiving in the Vatican in 2024, as well as the signing of the *Second Additional Protocol to the Agreement between the Holy See and Burkina Faso on the legal status of the Catholic Church in Burkina Faso* and the *Agreement between the Holy See and the Czech Republic on some legal questions*, signed during the course of the past year. Then, last October, the *Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China regarding the Appointment of Bishops* was renewed for a further four years, a sign of the desire to continue a respectful and constructive dialogue in view of the good of the Catholic Church in the country and of all the Chinese people.

For my part, I have sought to reciprocate this affection by my recent Apostolic Journeys, which have taken me to such distant lands as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore, as well as to nearer countries such as Belgium and Luxembourg and, most recently, Corsica. Although they are obviously very different destinations, each trip represents an opportunity for me to meet and engage in dialogue with different peoples, cultures and religious traditions, and to bring a word of encouragement and comfort, especially to those in greatest need. Added to these trips are the three visits I have made to Verona, Venice and Trieste here in Italy.

It is to the Italian authorities, national and local, that I would like, at the beginning of this Jubilee year, to express my particular gratitude for the efforts made to prepare Rome for the Jubilee. The unremitting work of these months, which has caused not a few inconveniences, is now being compensated for by the improvement of certain services and public spaces, so that everyone, citizens, pilgrims and tourists, can enjoy even more the beauty of the Eternal City. To the people of Rome, known for their hospitality, I address a special word of thanks for the patience they have shown in recent months, but also for that which they will show in welcoming the many visitors who arrive this year. I would also like to offer my heartfelt thanks to the police forces, the civil protection and healthcare authorities, and all those volunteers who are doing their utmost each day to guarantee security and a peaceful Jubilee.

Dear Ambassadors,

In the words of the prophet Isaiah, which the Lord Jesus read in the synagogue of Nazareth at the start of his public life, as we learn from the evangelist Luke (4:16-21), we find epitomized not only the mystery of Christmas that we have just celebrated, but also of the present Jubilee. Christ came “to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (*Is 61:1-2a*).

Sadly, we begin this year as the world finds itself rent by numerous conflicts, large and small, more or less known, but also by the resumption of heinous acts of terror, such as those that recently occurred in Magdeburg in Germany and in New Orleans in the United States.

We also observe in many countries growing conflictual social and political tensions. We see increasingly polarized societies marked by a general sense of fear and distrust of others and of the future, which is aggravated by the continuous creation and spread of *fake news*, which not only distorts facts but also perceptions. This phenomenon generates false images of reality, a climate of suspicion that foments hate, undermines people’s sense of security and compromises civil coexistence and the stability of entire nations. Tragic examples of this are the attacks on the Chairman of the Government of the Slovak Republic and the President-elect of the United States of America.

This climate of insecurity leads to the erection of new barriers and the drawing of new borders, whereas others, such as the one that has divided the island of Cyprus for over fifty years and the one that has cut in two the

Korean peninsula for over seventy, remain firmly in place, separating families and splitting up homes and cities. These modern borders presume to be lines of identity demarcation, where diversity becomes a reason for mistrust, distrust and fear: “Whatever comes from there cannot be trusted, for it is unknown, unfamiliar, not part of the village... As a result, new walls are erected for self-preservation, the outside world ceases to exist and leaves only ‘my’ world, to the point that others, no longer considered human beings possessed of an inalienable dignity, become only ‘them’.” [1] Ironically, the word “border” (“*confine*”) does not mean a place that separates, but one that unites, (*cum-finis*), where one can meet others, get to know them and enter into dialogue with them.

My prayerful hope for this new year is that the Jubilee may represent for everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike, an opportunity also to rethink the relationships that bind us to one another, as human beings and political communities. But also to overcome the *logic of confrontation* and embrace instead the *logic of encounter*, so that the future does not find us hopelessly adrift, but pressing forward as pilgrims of hope, individuals and communities on the move, committed to building a future of peace.

Furthermore, in the face of the increasingly concrete threat of a world war, the vocation of diplomacy is to foster dialogue with all parties, including those interlocutors considered less “convenient” or not considered legitimized to negotiate. Only in this way is it possible to break the chains of hatred and vengeance that bind and to defuse the explosive power of human selfishness, pride and arrogance, which are the root of every destructive determination to wage war.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the light of these brief considerations, I would like to trace with you this morning, starting from the words of the prophet Isaiah, some features of a *diplomacy of hope*, of which all of us are called to be heralds, so that the dense clouds of war may be swept away by renewed winds of peace. More generally, I would like to highlight some responsibilities that every political leader should bear in mind in fulfilling his or her responsibilities, which ought to be directed towards pursuing the common good and the integral development of the human person.

Bringing good news to the oppressed

In every time and place, human beings have always been attracted by the idea that they can be sufficient unto themselves and the architects of their own destiny. Whenever we let ourselves be dominated by such presumption, we find ourselves forced by external events and circumstances to realize that we are frail and powerless, poor and needy, subject to spiritual and material adversity. In a word, we discover our *misery* and our need for someone to save us from it.

Great is the misery of our time. More than ever before, humanity has come to know progress, development and wealth, yet perhaps never before has it found itself so lonely and lost, even at times preferring pets to children. There is an urgent need to hear glad tidings. Glad tidings that, from the Christian perspective, God offers us on Christmas night! Even so, everyone – even those who are not believers – can become the bearer of a message of hope and truth.

Human beings, for that matter, are endowed with an innate thirst for truth. That is a fundamental aspect of our human condition, as every person carries deep within a longing for objective truth and an irrepressible desire for knowledge. While this has always been the case, in our time the denial of self-evident truths seems to have gained the upper hand. Some distrust rational argumentation, believing it to be a tool in the hands of some unseen power, while others believe that they unequivocally possess a truth of their own making, and are thus exempt from discussion and dialogue with those who think differently. Others tend to invent their own “truth”, disregarding the objectivity of reality. These tendencies can be amplified by the modern communications media and by artificial intelligence; they can be misused to manipulate minds for economic, political and ideological ends.

Modern scientific progress, especially in the area of information and communications technology, has brought

undoubted benefits for mankind. It has allowed us to simplify many aspects of daily life, to stay in touch with loved ones even if they are physically far away, to remain informed and to increase our knowledge. At the same time, its limitations and dangers cannot be overlooked, since it often contributes to polarization, a narrowing of intellectual perspectives, a simplification of reality, misuse, anxiety and, ironically, isolation, particularly as a result of the use of social media and online games.

The growth of artificial intelligence raises broader concerns about intellectual property rights, the job security of millions of people, the need to respect privacy and to protect the environment from e-waste. Hardly any corner of our world has been left untouched by the broad cultural transformation brought about by the rapid advances in technology, whose alignment to commercial interests is increasingly evident, generating a culture rooted in consumerism.

This imbalance threatens to subvert the order of values inherent in the creation of relationships, education and the transmission of social mores, whereas parents, close relatives and educators must remain the main channels for the transmission of culture, for the sake of which governments should limit themselves to providing support for them in their educational responsibilities. Here we see the importance of media literacy education, which aims to provide the essential tools needed to promote critical thinking skills, to equip young people with the necessary means for their personal growth and their active participation in the future of their societies.

A diplomacy of hope is consequently, above all, a *diplomacy of truth*. If the link between reality, truth and knowledge is missing, human beings will no longer be able to speak and understand one another, because the foundations of a common language, anchored in the reality of things and therefore universally comprehensible, are lacking. The purpose of language is communication, which is only successful if words are precise and the meaning of terms is generally accepted. The biblical account of the Tower of Babel shows what happens when everyone speaks only in his or her “own” language.

Communication, dialogue, and commitment to the common good thus require good faith and adherence to a common language. This is particularly the case in the diplomatic sphere, especially in multilateral contexts. The impact and success of any statements, declarations, resolutions, and, more generally, negotiated texts depend on this. It is a proven fact that multilateralism is only strong and effective when it focuses on the issues at hand and uses simple, clear and agreed language.

As a result, the attempt to manipulate multilateral documents – by changing the meaning of terms or unilaterally reinterpreting the content of human rights treaties – in order to advance divisive ideologies that trample on the values and beliefs of peoples is particularly worrying. It represents a form of genuine ideological colonization that attempts, in accordance with carefully planned agendas, to uproot the traditions, history and religious bonds of peoples. This is a mentality that, by claiming to leave behind what are considered to be “the dark pages of history”, opens the door to the “cancel culture”. It tolerates no differences and focuses on individual rights, to the detriment of duties towards others, especially the weakest and most vulnerable. [2] In this regard, it is unacceptable, for example, to speak of an alleged “right to abortion” that contradicts human rights, particularly the right to life. All life must be protected, at every moment, from conception to natural death, because no child is a mistake or guilty of existing, just as no elderly or sick person may be deprived of hope and discarded.

This approach is particularly relevant in the context of the different multilateral bodies. I think in particular of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, of which the Holy See is a founding member, having taken an active part in the negotiations that, half a century ago, led to the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975. It is more urgent than ever to recover the “spirit of Helsinki”, with which opposing states, considered “enemies”, succeeded in creating a space of encounter and did not abandon dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts.

Yet the multilateral institutions, most of which came into being at the end of World War II some eighty years ago, no longer seem capable of ensuring peace and stability, or of carrying on the fight against hunger and promoting the development for which they were created. Nor do they seem able to respond in a truly effective way to the new challenges of this twenty-first century, such as environmental, public health, cultural and social issues, to say nothing of the challenges posed by artificial intelligence. Many of them are in need of reform, bearing in mind

that any such reform needs to be based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, and respect for the equal sovereignty of states. Regrettably, the risk exists of a “monadology” and of a fragmentation into *like-minded clubs* that only let in those who think in the same way.

Nevertheless, there have been and continue to be encouraging signs, wherever there is the good will to come together. I think of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Chile and Argentina, signed in Vatican City on 29 November 1984, which, with the mediation of the Holy See and the goodwill of the Parties, put an end to the Beagle Channel dispute. In this way, it showed that peace and friendship are possible when two members of the international community renounce the use of force and solemnly commit themselves to respecting all the rules of international law and promoting bilateral cooperation. More recently, I think of the positive signs of a resumption of negotiations to return to the framework of the Iran nuclear deal, with the aim of ensuring a safer world for all.

Binding up the broken-hearted

A diplomacy of hope is also a *diplomacy of forgiveness*, capable, at a time full of open or latent conflicts, of mending relationships torn by hatred and violence, and thus caring for the broken hearts of their all too numerous victims. My wish for the year 2025 is that the entire international community will work above all to end the conflict that, for almost three years now, has caused so much bloodshed in war-torn Ukraine and has taken an enormous toll of lives, including those of many civilians. Some encouraging signs have appeared on the horizon, but much work must still be done to create the conditions for a just and lasting peace and to heal the wounds inflicted by the aggression.

Similarly, I renew my appeal for a ceasefire and the release of the Israeli hostages in Gaza, where there is a very serious and shameful humanitarian situation, and I ask that the Palestinian population receive all the aid it needs. My prayerful hope is that Israelis and Palestinians can rebuild the bridges of dialogue and mutual trust, starting with the smallest, so that future generations can live side by side in the two States, in peace and security, and that Jerusalem can be the “city of encounter”, where Christians, Jews and Muslims live together in harmony and respect. Just last June, in the Vatican gardens, we joined in commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Invocation for Peace in the Holy Land that, on 8 June 2014, saw the presence of the then President of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, and the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, along with Patriarch Bartholomew I. That meeting bore witness to the fact that dialogue is always possible and that we cannot give in to the idea that enmity and hatred between peoples will have the upper hand.

At the same time, it must also be pointed out that war is fuelled by the continued proliferation of ever more sophisticated and destructive weapons. This morning, I reiterate my appeal that “with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life”. [3]

War is always a failure! The involvement of civilians, especially children, and the destruction of infrastructures is not only a disaster, but essentially means that between the two sides only evil emerges the winner. We cannot in any way accept the bombing of civilians or the attacking of infrastructures necessary for their survival. We cannot accept that children are freezing to death because hospitals have been destroyed or a country’s energy network has been hit.

The entire international community seems to agree on the need to respect international humanitarian law, yet its failure to implement that law fully and concretely raises questions. If we have forgotten what lies at the very foundation of our existence, the sacredness of life, the principles that move the world, how can we think that this right is effectively respected? We need to recover these values and to embody them in precepts of the public conscience, so that *the principle of humanity* will truly be the basis of our activity. I trust, then, that this Jubilee year will be a favourable moment in which the international community will take active steps to ensure that inviolable human rights are not sacrificed to military needs.

On this basis, I ask that efforts are made to continue to ensure that disregard for international humanitarian law

may no longer be an option. Greater efforts are also needed to ensure that the matters discussed at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent that took place last October in Geneva will be acted upon. The 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions has just been commemorated, and it remains imperative that the norms and principles on which those Conventions are based will be implemented in the all too many open theatres of war.

Among these, I think of the various conflicts that persist on the African continent, particularly in Sudan, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Mozambique, where a serious political crisis is underway, and in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the population suffers from serious health and humanitarian need, at times aggravated by the scourge of terrorism, resulting in loss of life and the displacement of millions of people. To this, we can add the devastating effects of floods and drought, which worsen already precarious conditions in various parts of Africa.

The prospect of a diplomacy of forgiveness is not, however, meant to heal international or regional conflicts alone. It makes everyone responsible for becoming an *artisan of peace*, in order to build truly peaceful societies in which legitimate political, but also social, cultural, ethnic and religious differences constitute an asset and not a source of hatred and division.

I think in a special way of Myanmar, where the population suffers greatly from the constant armed clashes that are forcing people to flee their homes and to live in fear.

It is also painful to see that there are still, especially in the Americas, various situations of heated political and social conflict. I think of Haiti, where I trust that the necessary steps can be taken as soon as possible to re-establish democratic order and put an end to the violence. I think too of Venezuela and the grave political crisis it is experiencing, which can only be overcome by sincere adherence to the values of truth, justice and freedom, by respect for the life, dignity and rights of every person, including those arrested as a result of the events of recent months, by the rejection of every form of violence and, let us hope, by the start of negotiations in good faith and aimed at the common good of the country. Likewise, I think of Bolivia, which is experiencing a troubling political, social and economic situation, and Colombia, where I trust that with everyone's help there can be an end to the many conflicts that have long torn the country apart. Lastly, I think of Nicaragua, where the Holy See, which is always open to respectful and constructive dialogue, follows with concern the measures taken against individuals and institutions of the Church and asks that religious freedom and other fundamental rights be adequately guaranteed to all.

In the end, there can be no true peace without the guarantee of religious freedom, which entails respect for the conscience of individuals and the possibility of publicly manifesting one's faith and membership in a community. In this regard, the growing expressions of anti-Semitism, which I strongly condemn, and which affect an increasing number of Jewish communities around the world, are a source of deep concern.

Nor can I remain silent about the numerous persecutions against various Christian communities, often perpetrated by terrorist groups especially in Africa and Asia. Nor, for that matter, about the more "discreet" forms of restriction on religious freedom that at times are found also in Europe, where legal norms and administrative practices are growing that "limit or in fact annul the rights formally recognized by the Constitution for individual believers and religious groups". [4] In this regard, I would reiterate that religious freedom constitutes "an achievement of a sound political and juridical culture", [5] because when it "is acknowledged, the dignity of the human person is respected at its root, and the ethos and institutions of peoples are strengthened". [6]

Christians are able and desire actively to contribute to the building up of the societies in which they live. Even where they are not a majority in society, they are citizens in their own right, especially in those lands where they have lived from time immemorial. I am speaking especially of Syria, which after years of war and devastation, seems to be pursuing a path of stability. I hope that the territorial integrity, the unity of the Syrian people and the necessary constitutional reforms will not be compromised by anyone, and that the international community will help Syria to be a land of peaceful coexistence where all Syrians, including the Christian community, can feel themselves to be full citizens and share in the common good of that beloved nation.

I think too of beloved Lebanon, and express my hope that the country, with the decisive help of its Christian community, can possess the necessary institutional stability needed to address the grave economic and social situation, to rebuild the south of the country affected by war, and fully to implement the Constitution and the Taif Agreement. May all Lebanese work to ensure that the country of the great cedars is never disfigured by division, but rather distinguished for “living together”. May Lebanon remain a country and a message of coexistence and peace.

Proclaiming liberty to the captives

Two thousand years of Christianity have helped eliminate slavery from every legal system. Nonetheless, many forms of slavery still exist, starting with the seldom acknowledged but widely practised form of slavery that involves labour. Too many people live as slaves to their work, which from a means becomes an end, and are frequently chained to inhuman working conditions in terms of safety, working hours and wages. Efforts need to be made to create dignified working conditions, so that work, which is in itself noble and ennobling, does not become an obstacle to the fulfilment and growth of the human person. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that real job opportunities exist, especially where widespread unemployment encourages undeclared work and consequently crime.

Then there is the horrific slavery of drug addiction, which affects young people in particular. It is unacceptable to see the number of lives, families and countries being ruined by this scourge, which appears to be on the rise, not least because of the advent of often deadly synthetic drugs, widely available as a result of the heinous phenomenon of drug trafficking.

Among other forms of slavery in our day, one of the most dreadful is due to human trafficking by unscrupulous people who exploit the needs of thousands of people fleeing war, famine, persecution or the effects of climate change in search of a safe place to live. A diplomacy of hope is a *diplomacy of freedom*, which calls for the common commitment of the international community to eliminate this *horrid commerce*.

At the same time, there is a need to care for the victims of this trafficking, the migrants themselves, who are forced to walk thousands of kilometres in Central America or in the Sahara desert, or to cross the Mediterranean Sea or the English Channel in overcrowded makeshift boats, only to be turned away or forced to live clandestinely in a foreign country. We can easily forget that we are dealing with real persons who ought to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated. [7]

I find it greatly disheartening to see that migration is still shrouded in a dark cloud of mistrust, rather than being seen as a source of empowerment. People on the move are seen simply as a problem to be managed. They cannot be treated like objects to be moved about; they have dignity and resources that they can offer to others; they have their own experiences, needs, fears, aspirations, dreams, skills and talents. It is only by viewing things in this perspective that progress can be made in confronting a phenomenon that requires the contribution of all countries, not least through the creation of safe regular pathways.

Then, too, it is crucial that we address the root causes of displacement, so that leaving one's home to look for another is a choice and not a necessary means of survival. With this in mind, I consider a common commitment to cooperation in development, as a means of helping eliminate some of the causes leading people to migrate, to be essential.

Release to prisoners

The diplomacy of hope is, in the end, a *diplomacy of justice*, without which there can be no peace. The Jubilee year is a favourable time to practise justice, to forgive debts and to commute the sentences of prisoners. However, there is no debt that allows anyone, including the State, to demand the life of another. In this regard, I reiterate my call for the death penalty to be eliminated in every nation, [8] since it finds no justification today among the instruments capable of restoring justice.

Nor can we forget that, in some sense, we are all prisoners, for all of us are debtors: to God, to others, and also to our beloved earth, from which we draw our daily sustenance. As I observed in my annual *Message for the World Day of Peace*, “each of us must feel in some way responsible for the devastation to which the Earth, our common home, has been subjected”. [9] Increasingly, nature itself seems to be rebelling against human action by extreme manifestations of its power. Examples of this are the devastating floods in Central Europe and Spain, the cyclones that hit Madagascar in the spring and, just before Christmas, the French Department of Mayotte and Mozambique.

We cannot remain indifferent in the face of all this! We do not have that right! Rather, we have a duty to make the greatest effort to care for our common home and its inhabitants, now and in the future.

At COP 29 in Baku, decisions were made to secure greater financial resources for climate action. I trust that these will allow for the sharing of resources for the many countries greatly affected by the climate crisis and burdened by oppressive economic debt. With this in mind, I ask the wealthier nations to forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them. This is not simply an act of solidarity or generosity, but above all an act of justice, also in the light of a new form of inequality of which we are increasingly aware today: the “ecological debt” that exists particularly between the global North and South. [10]

Also in light of this ecological debt, it is important to find effective ways to convert the external debt of poor countries into effective, creative and responsible policies and programmes to promote an integral human development. The Holy See is prepared to accompany this process, in the knowledge that there are no longer any borders or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide. [11]

Before concluding, I would like to express here my condolences and assurance of prayers for the victims and those who are suffering as a result of the earthquake that struck Tibet two days ago.

Dear Ambassadors,

From the Christian standpoint, the Jubilee is a season of grace. How I would like this year 2025 to be truly a year of grace, abounding in truth, forgiveness, freedom, justice and peace! “In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come”, [12] and each of us is called to make hope flourish all around us. This is my heartfelt wish for all of you, dear Ambassadors, for your families, and for the governments and peoples that you represent. May hope flourish in our hearts and may our time find the peace for which it so greatly longs. Thank you.

[1] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 27.

[2] Cf. *Meeting with Civil Authorities, Representatives of Indigenous Peoples and the Diplomatic Corps*, Citadelle de Québec, 27 July 2022.

[3] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 262; cf. SAINT PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 51.

[4] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1988, 2.

[5] BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 2011 World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2011, 5.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Cf. *Address to the Participants in the International Forum on “Migration and Peace”*, 21 February 2017.

[8] Cf. *Message for the 2025 World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2025, 11.

[9] *Ibid.*, 4.

[10] Cf. Bull *Spes Non Confundit* (9 May 2024), 16; Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 51.

[11] Cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 52.

[12] Bull *Spes Non Confundit*, 1.
