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Intervention of the Cardinal Secretary of State at the International Conference “Saving our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth” on the third anniversary of the Encyclical “Laudato si”

The following is the intervention by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin at the opening of the International Conference *Saving our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth*, held on the third anniversary of the Holy Father Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato si’*, in the Vatican’s New Synod Hall from 5 to 6 July 2018:

Intervention of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Your Eminences,

Your Excellencies,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of Governments,

Distinguished Leaders and invited guests from Civil Society Groups, Movements, Faith Institutions, Indigenous Communities, Academia, International Organizations,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A very good morning to each and every one of you.

I wish to thank His Eminence, Cardinal Peter Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, for the kind invitation to deliver the opening remarks at this Conference aimed at reflecting on *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis’ encyclical letter on Care for Our Common Home.

Since its publication in May 2015, the Encyclical has been well received as a powerful contribution to understand

better and to address more effectively a number of timely, even critical issues, that are challenging humanity, on the basis of the broader and more profound approach of integral ecology. It is precisely from the context of interrelationality, that “everything is connected” that the Holy Father reminds us that humanity is the steward of and not the lord over creation. Indeed, as he points out on various occasions, the brokenness in man’s relationship with God, with the other and with creation, at its roots, stems from a misplaced anthropocentrism.

Just to underline the wide reception the encyclical *Laudato si’* has had, it is worth mentioning that the scientific community has been particularly appreciative of it and that it has made a very deep impression also on adherents of other faiths. At the beginning of *Laudato si’* Pope Francis underlines that “with this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS, 3), appealing “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” (LS, 14). Perhaps the debate it fostered within the scientific community and among various religious groups is a clear sign of the willingness to work toward its implementation.

In these brief opening remarks, I would like to highlight three aspects that particularly characterize *Laudato si’*.

First of all, in the context of the current and ever-emerging environmental challenges of our age, there is a clear urgency in the invitation of Pope Francis to take care of our common home. We all know how precarious is the situation of our planet today. The encyclical is indeed a timely response to one of the most urgent challenges faced by humanity today, namely, a possible collapse of the very home that sustains us and all forms of life.

Secondly, *Laudato si’* is important for its message of an *Integral Ecology*. Pope Benedict XVI observed in *Caritas in veritate* that the *Book of Nature is one and indivisible* (*Caritas in veritate*, 51). Human ecology and natural ecology belong together and are inseparable concerns of the human family. Pope Francis sees in Saint Francis “the example *par excellence* of care for the vulnerable and of an *integral ecology* lived out joyfully and authentically. [...] He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (LS, 10). Everything, for Pope Francis, is interconnected; so that the “cry of the Earth” is intimately linked to the “cry of the poor” (LS, 49). Accordingly, as members of the common household, we all need to come together to commit to saving our common home. As Pope Francis writes, “all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents” (LS, 14). [1]

Thirdly, *Laudato si’* adds a depth of dimension to the ecological discourse, an attention which is often lacking in discussions about the environment. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis offers a profoundly spiritual vision of the natural world, speaking of the “gospel” of creation, the very title of the second chapter of the encyclical. He points out “how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters” (LS, 64). This again is an aspect of the Pope’s message of *integral ecology*; and it is intimately linked with the relational anthropological vision of *Laudato si’*. As the Pope writes: “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (LS, 66). Our relationship with God and our neighbour necessarily includes our relationship with mother Earth. This relationship can be and should be harmonious; but as Pope Francis observed at the beginning of his encyclical letter, “*The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.*” (LS, 2). As a result of this *violence present in our hearts*, the earth herself is burdened and laid waste, human life itself is abused in a predominant *throwaway culture*, and all of creation totters on the edge of catastrophe. It is urgent then that we change our sense of human progress, the management of our economy and our lifestyle.

The Catholic doctrine of creation does not regard the world as an accident. Our planet, indeed the universe, is an intentional act of God that is offered to human beings as a gift. Creation is the first step in the great vocation of man: creation, incarnation, redemption.

Humanity is not an afterthought. God did not have two agendas: first, the world and then, humanity. Man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, they are an intrinsic part of the universe, and their vocation is “to till and to keep” it all. But tilling and keeping should not include domination and devastation. Such

behaviour makes a mockery of the dignity of and the respect due to *God's gifts*.

In this light, we should find it easy to understand the concerns of Pope Francis for the poor and for nature. He is not offering worldly advice on how to be prudent and practical, although his message has immense practical consequences. Rather, he is reminding us of:

- a) the *basic consequence of creation, which establishes a three-fold level of relationships for the human person*:
- *with God the Creator,*
 - *with other human persons in a bond of fraternity, and*
 - *with the world as the garden-home for our existence, and*
- b) the basic demands of our vocation to participate in God's work as *co-creators*, and so
- c) our responsibility for the work of God Who does not hide His face from any aspect of creation, poor or rich, natural or human, now or in the future.

May our gathering these days to reflect on the delicate state of our common home lead us to trace out concrete and participatory lines of action to save creation. We are all aware of how long and how demanding this journey is going to be, but we have a very good compass to help guide us in the encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*. May the encyclical serve you as a guide and inspiration in your deliberations and sharing these days. Please be assured of my fraternal and prayerful support for all that you do.

Thank you.

[1] Cf. Pope Benedict XVI: "*Every Christian is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the pólis. This is the institutional path — we might also call it the political path — of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the pólis. When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have.*" (Civ. No.7)
