

SPES NON CONFUDIT

“Hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5)

Theologian’s Corner, Sept. 22, 2024

Types of Papal Documents¹

1. **Apostolic Constitutions** are solemn documents which possess a legislative character, used by the pope to promulgate or modify laws, teachings, or structures within the Church. For example, *Munificentissimus Deus* (Pius XII, 1950) defined the dogma of the Assumption of Mary.
2. **Bulls:** A bull is a papal document that is traditionally sealed with a circular leaden or wax seal, known as a “bulla.” Bulls are used for various purposes, including the establishment of new dioceses, canonization of saints, granting of privileges to individuals or institutions, and other significant administrative actions.
3. **Papal Encyclicals** are lengthy letters often addressed to the entire Christian faithful that focus on a topic the pope wishes to catechise on. Encyclicals are often teaching documents, for example, *Laudato Si’* (Francis, 2015) calls on Christians to care for the natural environment.
4. **Apostolic Exhortations** are pastoral letters usually written following a Synod of Bishops in which the pope synthesises the discussions and conclusions to express the fruits of the synod. *Christifideles Laici* (John Paul II, 1988), for example, deals with the vocation of the lay faithful. Occasionally, the pope may issue an apostolic exhortation without a synod.
5. **Apostolic Letters** address a wide range of purposes to particular groups within the Church, or to the whole faithful, depending on the circumstances. For example, *Ubiquumque et Semper* (Benedict XVI, 2010) established the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation.
6. **Motu proprio** describes the way a papal letter is issued. If a letter or a rescript – a response to a petition – is given *motu proprio* (Latin for ‘by one’s own impulse’), it means the pope is exercising papal authority on a certain matter. Decrees to amend ecclesial discipline or announcements of personnel appointments are often issued this way. *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (Francis, 2023), for example, established procedures for safeguarding against abuse in the Church.

Thoughts and Reflection Questions

1. The pope has declared a jubilee year of hope. Pope Francis hopes this year will encourage a deeper encounter with Christ, who is our “door” and our “hope.”
 - a. How are you preparing to celebrate?
 - b. What are some prayer habits you can start developing?
 - c. Are there intentions you wish to hold close?
2. The progression of the document moves from *A word of hope* → to *a journey of hope* → to *a sign of hope* → *anchored in hope*
 - a. Important words that are linked to hope are love and patience.
 - i. How can we develop patience, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit?
 - b. Patience moves us towards more extraordinary acts of *spiritual intensity*, namely a pilgrimage.
 - i. How is God calling you toward the path of faith and renewal?
 - c. Hope asks us to look at our world's difficult moments and see where redemption is.
 - i. How can we bring signs of hope to those who are in despair?

¹ <https://www.popefrancis2024.sg/what-are-the-different-types-of-papal-documents/>

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- ii. How is God asking you to sit in our world's difficult moments and seek hope?
- d. Being anchored in hope asks us to put our faith in Jesus Christ and do charitable acts.
 - i. How is our belief in Heaven changing the way we live our lives?
 - ii. We are asked to be witnesses, like the martyrs to the truths of our faith, and people of unity, love, and hope.
 1. How can we work towards that greater sense of self sacrifice?
 2. What ways are we asked to be purified and let go of our own sins and hurts in order to receive and experience God’s consolation?