



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**

Consistory Hall

Monday, 20 February 2023

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear brothers and sisters,
Your Eminence, dear Bishops,*

I offer you a warm welcome! I thank Archbishop Paglia for his words of greeting and all of you for your dedicated commitment to the promotion of human life. Thank you! In these days you will reflect on the relationship between the person, emerging technologies and the common good. This is a delicate frontier, where progress, ethics and society meet, and where faith, in its perennial relevance, can make a valuable contribution. The Church never ceases to encourage the progress of science and technology placed at the service of the dignity of the person, for an "integral and integrating" human development [\[1\]](#). In the letter I addressed to you on the occasion of the twenty-fifth year of the founding of the Academy, I invited you to explore this very theme [\[2\]](#). Now I would like to reflect with you on three challenges that I consider important in this regard: the changing conditions of human life in the technological world; the impact of new technologies on the very definition of "man" and "relationship", with particular reference to the condition of the most vulnerable; and the concept of "knowledge" and the consequences that derive from it.

The first challenge is the changing conditions of human life in the world of technology. We know that it is specific to humanity to act in the world in a technological way, transforming the environment and improving the conditions of life. Benedict XVI reminded us of this, saying that technology "touches the heart of the vocation of human labour" and that "in technology, seen as the project of his genius, man recognizes himself and forges his own humanity" [\[3\]](#). Technology,

therefore, helps us to understand better the value and potential of human intelligence and at the same time speaks to us of the great responsibility we have towards creation.

In the past, cultures, social activities and the environment were less interconnected, and their effects were slower and had less of an impact. Today, instead, the rapid development of technical means makes the interdependence between humanity and our “common home” more intense and evident, as Saint Paul VI already recognized in *Populorum Progressio* [4]. In fact, the force and acceleration of this progress is producing significant changes – because this is a geometric acceleration, not an arithmetic one – both in the environment and in human living conditions, with effects and developments that are not always clear and predictable. This is shown by various crises, from the pandemic to the energy crisis, from the climate to the crisis of migration, whose consequences affect and amplify one another. Sound technological development cannot fail to take into account these complex connections.

The second challenge is the impact of new technologies on the definition of “man” and “relationship”, especially with regard to the condition of the most vulnerable. It is clear that the technological form of human experience is becoming more pervasive every day. In the distinctions between “natural” and “artificial”, “biological” and “technological”, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern what is proper to humans and what is proper to technology. Therefore, serious reflection on the very value of the human person is important. In particular, the concept of personal consciousness as relational experience, which cannot be separated from corporeality or culture, must be decisively reaffirmed. In other words, in the network of relationships, both subjective and communal, technology must not supplant human contact, the virtual must not substitute the real, and social networks must not replace the social environment. We are tempted to let the virtual prevail over the real: this is an ugly temptation.

Even within the processes of scientific research, the relationship between the person and the community has increasingly complex ethical implications, for example, in the field of health care, where the quality of information and assistance for the individual depends largely on the collection and study of available data. Here the problem of reconciling the confidentiality of personal data with the sharing of information that affects the interest of all must be addressed. Indeed, it would be selfish to ask to be treated with the best resources and skills available to society without contributing to their increase. More generally, I am thinking of the urgent need to distribute resources and provide access to care to everyone, so that inequalities are reduced and necessary support is guaranteed especially for the most fragile, such as the disabled, sick and poor.

It is therefore necessary to be vigilant about the speed of transformation, the interaction between changes, and the possibility of guaranteeing an overall balance. Moreover, this balance is not necessarily the same in different cultures, as the technological view would appear to presume when it imposes itself as a universal and homogeneous language and culture – this is a mistake. Instead, efforts must be made to ensure that each culture “be helped to grow in its own distinct

way and to develop its capacity for innovation while respecting its proper values” [5].

The third challenge is the definition of the concept of knowledge and the consequences that derive from this. All the elements considered so far lead us to ask ourselves about our ways of knowing, aware of the fact that the type of knowledge we implement already has moral implications in itself. For example, it is reductive to look for the explanation of phenomena only in the characteristics of the individual elements of which they are composed. There is a need for more structured models that take into account the interplay of relationships from which single events are woven. For instance, it is paradoxical, when referring to technologies that enhance an individual’s biological functions, to speak of an “augmented” person if one forgets that the human body is related to the integral good of the person and therefore cannot be identified with the biological organism alone. A wrong approach in this field actually ends up not by “augmenting” but by “constricting” men and women.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* and especially in *Laudato si'*, I emphasized the importance of knowledge on a human and organic scale, for example by highlighting that “the whole is greater than its parts” and that “everything in the world is connected” [6]. I believe that such insights can also foster a renewed way of thinking in the field of theology [7]. Indeed, it would be good for theology to move beyond mainly apologetic approaches, in order to contribute to the definition of a new humanism and to foster reciprocal listening and mutual comprehension between science, technology and society. In fact, the lack of constructive dialogue between these realities impoverishes the reciprocal trust underlying all human coexistence and every form of “social friendship” [8]. I would also like to mention the importance of the contribution that dialogue between the great religious traditions makes to this end. These traditions possess deep-rooted wisdom, which can be of great help. You have shown that you know how to grasp the value of this, for example by also recently promoting interreligious meetings on the topics of the “end of life” [9] and artificial intelligence [10].

Dear brothers and sisters, faced with such complex challenges, the task before you is enormous. It involves starting again from our shared human experiences and studying these from various perspectives, employing trans-disciplinary dialogue and cooperation. Yet we must never be discouraged: we know that the Lord does not abandon us and that what we accomplish is rooted in the trust we place in Him, the “lover of life” (Wis 11:26). You have committed yourselves in recent years to work toward reconciliation between scientific and technological growth and the “development in human responsibility, values and conscience” [11]. I invite you to continue along this path, while I bless you and ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, no. 141.

[2] Cf *Humana communitas*, 6 January 2019, nos. 12-13.

[3] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, n. 69.

[4] Cf. no. 65.

[5] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, no. 51.

[6] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, nos. 234-237; Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, n. 16.

[7] Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, nos. 4-5.

[8] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, no. 168.

[9] Cf. *Position Paper of the Abrahamic monotheistic religions on matters regarding the end of life*, 28 October 2019.

[10] Cf. Signing of the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, 10 January 2023.

[11] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, no. 105.