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Audience with a delegation from the Max Planck Society

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the Max Planck Society (*Max Planck Gesellschaft*).

Due to a severe cold, the Pope handed to the participants the following address, prepared for the occasion:

Address of the Holy Father

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, good day and welcome!

I thank the President, Professor Martin Stratmann, for his kind words. I am most appreciative of your visit, which allows me once more to express the esteem of the Holy See for scientific research and, in particular, for the work of the Max Planck Society, in which thousands of individuals, within a variety of Institutes, are committed to the advancement of the sciences and progress in specific areas of research.

For this reason, I encourage the Max Planck Society to maintain, as it always has, the highest standards of scientific integrity, so that it can remain free from improper influences, whether political or economic in nature. This is an essential requirement at every stage of scientific work, from initial research to the publication of results and the way in which they are used. I believe that, in our time, support for pure science must be defended and, if possible, increased. Indeed, without prejudice to applied science, pure science should be recognized as a public good, whose contributions are to be placed at the service of the common good. Your Society can surely accomplish much in this regard.

The announcement of the forthcoming birth of so-called “hybrid thinking” resulting from a combination of biological and non-biological thought, as a means of preventing human beings from being supplanted by Artificial Intelligence, raises important issues both for ethics and for society as a whole. It should be recognized that a fusion between human cognitive capacities and the computational power of machines could substantially modify the species *Homo sapiens*. We can hardly fail, then, to raise the issue of ultimate meaning, namely the direction

towards which all this is moving. For those who identify with the *trans-humanistic* project, it is not a source of concern. The same cannot be said, however, for those who are committed to the *neo-humanist* project, according to which the separation of acting and intelligence is unacceptable. If the ability to solve problems is severed from the need to be intelligent in doing so, *intentionality* and thus the *ethical nature* of action will be abolished. I am certain that the Max Planck Society will want to make a fundamental contribution to this discussion.

One final consideration. As we know, the age of “second modernity” has witnessed within certain scientific circles the growth of a principle of “technical” responsibility that makes no room for moral judgement concerning what is good or evil. Acting, especially in the larger organizations, would be evaluated in purely functional terms, as if whatever is possible is, by that very reason, ethically licit. The Church can never accept such a position, whose tragic consequences are by now all too evident. The kind of responsibility that today we need to return to the fore of our culture is responsibility for the care for others, which is more than simply accounting for results achieved. For, in the end, we are responsible not only for what we do, but also, and above all, for what we can do, and yet choose not to do.

Dear friends, I thank you again for this visit and I offer you my best wishes for your work. May the Holy Spirit assist you in your research and in your various projects. I cordially bless you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me.
