



**Address of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin  
Secretary of State of His Holiness  
at the Policy Debate of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Conference of UNESCO**

Paris, 12 November 2021

Dear President of the General Conference,  
Dear Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Dear Madame Director-General,  
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to extend to you, Mr. President of the General Conference, the most cordial greetings of the Holy Father and to congratulate you on your election to the leadership of this session.

I wish to express particular gratitude to you, Madam Director General, for your commendable commitment to peace through education, culture and science. Here I would like to reaffirm Pope Francis' esteem for the Organization that you lead and which, for 75 years, has never ceased to believe and to work to build a culture of encounter among peoples, in the conviction that only with peace is there the possibility of a more prosperous future for all.

In this time, still sadly marked by the pandemic, the possibility of returning to being together in person to address the challenges of humanity constitutes "a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles",<sup>1</sup> generating new processes and transformations.

**1. *Restarting from an inclusive and quality education***

We must start anew by listening to the cry of the new generations. This will "opens our eyes to both the urgent need and the exciting opportunity of a renewed kind

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, n. 77.

of education that is not tempted to look the other way and thus favour grave social injustices, violations of rights, terrible forms of poverty and the waste of human lives”.<sup>2</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted education for more than one billion children worldwide. In light of this, both recovery plans and efforts towards the implementation of the *2030 Agenda* will need to pay particular attention to education as a key enabler of sustainable development so as to leave no one behind.

In this sense, Pope Francis’ constant call for a Global Compact on Education is intended to be a concrete sign of the Holy See’s readiness to “rekindle our dedication for and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding”.<sup>3</sup> Added to this is the untiring work of the many Catholic schools, universities and educational institutions throughout the world, through which the Holy See will continue to play its role in ensuring that all have access to a quality education consonant with the dignity of the human person and our common vocation to fraternity.

To underscore this commitment, in the coming days we will be pleased to deposit the instrument of ratification of the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications*. This will enable the Holy See to commit itself effectively as a global partner, offering States its contribution to improving the quality of higher education.

## **2. *Education for Integral Ecology***

It should be understood that any effort to promote quality education is doomed to failure if it aims solely at providing a package of technical knowledge. In this sense, UNESCO has continued to affirm its commitment to “a holistic approach to education and learning that overcomes the traditional dichotomies between the cognitive, emotional and ethical aspects”.<sup>4</sup> It really is a task, therefore, of working towards a human formation of the mind, as the seat of knowledge, of the heart, as the seat of values and moral choices, and of the hands, as the symbol of action.<sup>5</sup>

For his part, Pope Francis insists on the need for “a new ecological approach that can transform our way of inhabiting the world, our lifestyles, our relationship with the

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Video Message for the “Global Compact for Education. Together to look beyond”, 15 October 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the Launch of the Global Compact for Education, 12 September 2019.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?*, Paris, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Interdicasterial Working Group on the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying towards care for the common home. Five years after Laudato Si’*. LEV, 31 May 2020, pp. 46 – 53.

Earth's resources and, in general, our way of looking at humanity and of living life.” For only “an integral human ecology, which involves not only environmental questions but also mankind in its entirety, becomes capable of listening to the cry of the poor and of being leaven for a new society”.<sup>6</sup>

To strengthen the interconnections between education and care for the common home, the Holy Father, in agreement with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, inaugurated a Department of Studies in Ecology and Environment at the Pontifical Lateran University. Moreover, thanks to the Agreement signed by Pope Francis and Mrs. Azoulay a *UNESCO Chair on Futures of Education for Sustainability* will soon be established within the new academic department<sup>7</sup>.

### **3. *Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Open Science***

To affirm an integral vision of life and the world means to admit that “there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology”.<sup>8</sup> Such is the challenge today that is strongly placed in the face of the evolution of technical capacity.

If it is undeniable that “technological development has allowed us to solve problems that were insurmountable until a few years ago”,<sup>9</sup> then it is equally true that it can produce “a dangerous spell: instead of delivering the tools that improve their care to human life, there is the risk of giving life to the logic of the devices that decide its value”.<sup>10</sup>

For the Holy See, “the principle that *not everything that is technically possible or viable is thereby ethically acceptable* remains ever valid”.<sup>11</sup> In order to be able to speak correctly of an ethics of artificial intelligence, it will therefore be necessary that the development of every algorithm always draws on an ethical vision, “algor-ethics”<sup>12</sup>, aimed at understanding, in the final analysis, “understand better what intelligence,

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Video message to mark the launch of the *Laudato Si'* action platform, 25 May 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, Address at the Academic Act for the institution of the Study Cycle on “Care for our Common Home and Safeguarding of Creation” and of the UNESCO Chair “on Futures of Education for Sustainability”, 7 October 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, n. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, 25 February 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 18 November 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Pope Francis, Address to the Participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, 28 February 2020.

conscience, emotionality, affective intentionality and autonomy of moral action mean in this context”.<sup>13</sup>

The Holy See is advocating for an artificial intelligence that serves each person and humanity as a whole; that respects the dignity of the human person, so that each individual may benefit from the advances of technology. Furthermore, it must not have as its sole objective the greatest profit or the gradual replacement of people in the workplace.

The Church does not expect science merely to follow ethical principles. She expects a positive contribution, which we can describe, as did St. Paul VI, as the “charity of knowledge”.<sup>14</sup> There is here a great possibility for dialogue concerning the principles underlying the so-called Open Science. For the Holy See too, in fact, it is necessary that “scientific research must put its results at the service of all, always seeking new forms of collaboration, sharing results and building networks”.<sup>15</sup> “This will prevent the future from adding new forms of knowledge-based inequality and increasing the gap between rich and poor.”<sup>16</sup>

#### **4. *The Cultural Heritage of Faith***

Science and technology have helped us to deepen the boundaries of our knowledge of nature, and in particular of the human person. However, by themselves they are not enough to provide all the answers. Today, we realize more and more that it is necessary to draw upon the treasures of wisdom preserved in religious traditions, popular wisdom, literature and the arts, which touch deeply on the mystery of human existence, without forgetting, indeed rediscovering, those contained in philosophy and theology.

In this regard, I would like to thank UNESCO for having included in the list of anniversaries which are associated with the biennium 2022-2023 some holy persons such as St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Nerses the Gracious. May their lives, beyond imprinting a mark on the inestimable heritage that Christianity has left for the socio-

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, 25 February 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. St. Paul VI, Address to the Plenary Session and the Week of Study on “Molecular Forces”, 23 April 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, Video message to mark the International Meeting on “Science for Peace”, 2 July 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 18 November 2017.

cultural formation of humanity, be an invitation to consider the transcendent dimension of life in order to cultivate together the dream of an integrated humanism.

Thank you for you kind attention.