

Pope Francis' Critique of the 'Technocratic Paradigm'

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Critique of Technocratic Paradigm in *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Laudate Deum* (2023)

- **Influence of Romano Guardini (1885-1968)**
- **It is “a certain way of understanding human life and activity [that] has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us”. Deep down, it consists in thinking “as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such”. As a logical consequence, it then becomes easy “to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology” (*LD*, 20, citing *LS* at a number of points).**
- **January 2024, ‘Artificial Intelligence and Peace’**

Romano Guardini – Background and Key Writings on Technology and Power

- **Italian family background but life in Germany**
- **Priesthood**
- **Appointment to chair of ‘Philosophy of Religion and Catholic Weltanschauung’ Berlin, 1923**
- **Dismissed by Nazi government 1939: “When the state itself has a worldview, there is no room at the University of Berlin for an academic chair on the Catholic worldview.”**
- **Chairs with same title in Tübingen and Munich to 1963, succeeded in Munich by Karl Rahner**

Letters from Lake Como: Explorations in Technology and the Human Race

- Written in early 1920s, published 1927.
 - **Look, what has already taken place in the North I saw beginning here. I saw machines invading the land that had previously been the home of culture. I saw death overtaking a life of infinite beauty, and I felt that this was not just an external loss that we could accept and remain who we were. Instead, a life, a life of supreme value that can arise only in the world that we have long since lost, was beginning to perish here, as well as in the North ... all at once, then, on the singing lines of a small town, I saw the great box of a factory (5, 6).**
- **‘what we need is not less technology but more. Or, more accurately, we need stronger, more considered, more human technology’**

Das Ende der Neuzeit (1950). (*The End of the Modern World*)

- **‘technology is a concentration of processes which allow man to posit ends in conformity with his own desires’**
- **‘power is its motive—a lordship of all; that man seizes hold of the naked elements of both nature and human nature’**
- **‘Man today holds power over things, but we can assert confidently that he does not yet have power over his own power’**
- **A final age of humanity: ‘With these words I proclaim no facile apocalyptic. No man has the right to say the end is here, for Christ himself has declared that ‘only the Father knows the day and the hour’. (Mt 24:36) ... If we speak here of the nearness of the End, we do not mean nearness in the sense of time, but nearness as it pertains to the essence of the End, for in essence man’s existence is now nearing an absolute decision. Each and every consequence of that decision bears within it the greatest potentiality and the most extreme danger.’**

Laudate Deum, October 2023

- **‘with the passage of time I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point’ (LD2).**
- **‘In recent years, we have been able to confirm this diagnosis, even as we have witnessed a new advance of the above paradigm, Artificial intelligence and the latest technological innovations start with the notion of a human being with no limits, whose abilities and possibilities can be infinitely expanded thanks to technology. In this way, the technocratic paradigm monstrously feeds upon itself’ (LD21).**

Die Macht: Versuch einer Wegweisung. (Power and Responsibility) 1951

- **Man's natural God-likeness consists in this capacity for power, in his ability to use it and in his resultant lordship. Herein lies the essential vocation and worth of human existence—Scripture's answer to the question: Where does the ontological nature of power come from? Man cannot be human and, as a kind of addition to his humanity, exercise or fail to exercise power; the exercise of power is essential to his humanity ... Only when these facts have been accepted, does the phenomenon of power receive its full weight, its greatness, as well as its earnestness, which is grounded in responsibility. If human power and the lordship which stems from it are rooted in man's likeness to God, then power is not man's in his own right, autonomously, but only as a loan, in fief. Man is lord by the grace of God, and he must exercise his dominion responsibly, for he is answerable for it to him who is Lord by essence. Thus sovereignty becomes obedience, service (14–15).**
- **We hope for a new humanity which 'will have power not only over nature, but also over his own powers. In other words, he will understand how to subordinate power to the true meaning of human life and works. He will be the genuine "regent" who alone can save our age from going down in violence and chaos' (83). This new humanity 'knows that the world is in the hands of freedom, hence he feels responsibility for tomorrow's kind of freedom. And love, his love of the world is very special, deepened by the precariousness, vulnerability, helplessness of his beloved' (85–60).**

Guardini's Influence on *Laudato Si'*

Key insights from *Das Ende der Neuzeit* (cited 8 times)

- Increase in power not necessarily progress.

‘our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience’ (LS105).

- Need for a ‘a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of settling limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint’
 - Guardini’s evocation of love for the world, in its helplessness and vulnerability, is echoed by Francis in a passage in his *Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*: ‘An authentic faith—which is never comfortable or completely personal—always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters’ (EG, 183).

The ‘Technocratic Paradigm’ in Francis’ Writings

- **Section II of Chapter 3 of *Laudato Si*,’ entitled ‘The Globalization of the Technocratic Paradigm’: ‘humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm’**
- **‘technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build’ (LS 107).**
- **‘tends to dominate economic and political life...Finance overwhelms the real economy’ (LS109).**
- **‘life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence’ (LS110).**
- **‘All of this shows the urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution’ (LS114).**

Artificial Intelligence and Peace, World Day of Peace message, January 1, 2024.

- **‘This should lead us to reflect on something frequently overlooked in our current technocratic and efficiency-oriented mentality, as it is decisive for personal and social development: the “sense of limit”. Human beings are, by definition, mortal; by proposing to overcome every limit through technology, in an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves; in the quest for an absolute freedom, we risk falling into the spiral of a “technological dictatorship”. Recognizing and accepting our limits as creatures is an indispensable condition for reaching, or better, welcoming fulfilment as a gift. In the ideological context of a technocratic paradigm inspired by a Promethean presumption of self-sufficiency, inequalities could grow out of proportion, knowledge and wealth accumulate in the hands of a few, and grave risks ensue for democratic societies and peaceful coexistence.’**

Discernment of Technology's Role and Purpose in a Christian Ethical Perspective

LS chapter 5: 'Lines of Approach and Action'

- **Religions in dialogue with science, role of classic religious texts**
- **'technical solutions will be powerless without a spiritual and moral compass', exhorting believers to learn from 'the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve'. (LS200)**
- **dialogue between religions, between the different sciences, and also between the different ecological movements, which have their own ideological conflicts. (LS201)**

LS chapter 6: 'Ecological Education and Spirituality'

- **principles and perspectives in theology and spirituality as a basis for an 'integral ecology' that can situate technology within an attitude of grateful receptivity to creation and care for the earth.**

Ecological Conversion

- **Our present situation calls for ecological conversion, and the heritage of Christian spirituality offers rich resources for this. This must include profound interior conversion, since ‘living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue’ (LS217).**
- **St Francis of Assisi**
- **Christian spirituality also proposes ‘an alternative understanding of the quality of life’, a ‘prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption’. (LS222) This ‘inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and the common good’. (LS225).**
- **Together with other spiritual paths, Christian faith offers a mystical and sacramental perspective on creation, which can remedy the technocratic drive to reduce creation to inert, malleable nature.**
- **Citing Muslim and Christian mystics**

Conclusion

Francis has highlighted the ways in which Christian faith and spirituality can envision the world in an alternative way: as creation to be cherished and cared for. While criticizing the ‘technocratic paradigm,’ he applauds the progress in human welfare that science and technology have made possible.

William Schweiker ‘The Destiny of Creation: Theological Ethical Reflections on *Laudato Si*’

- **‘Yet, one can surely ask, how are human beings to know this universal destiny in order to assume their responsibility other than by the promise of the biblical witness and Catholic teaching (490)...Is there a sense that its teaching is only open to a spiritual elite?’**

Celia Deane-Drummond ‘Pope Francis’ Integral Ecology Paradigm: An Exploration of Its Theological Foundations and Ethical Implications’

- **‘Pope Francis is doing far more than simply building on previous encyclicals and ideas—he is asking for a radical cultural revolution’**