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Audience with participants in the seminar “The common good in the digital age”, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

At 10.30 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father received in audience the participants in the seminar “The common good in the digital age”, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and taking place in the Vatican from 26 to 28 September 2019.

The following is the Pope's address to the participants:

Address to the Holy Father

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome all of you who are participating in the meeting on the theme of “The Common Good in the Digital Age”, sponsored by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Pontifical Council for Culture. I thank Cardinal Turkson and Cardinal Ravasi for this initiative. The remarkable developments in the field of technology, in particular those dealing with artificial intelligence, raise increasingly significant implications in all areas of human activity. For this reason, open and concrete discussions on this theme are needed now more than ever.

In my Encyclical Letter on care for our common home, I pointed to a fundamental parallelism. The indisputable benefit that humanity will be able to draw from technological progress (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 102) depends on the degree to which the new possibilities at our disposal are employed in an ethical manner (cf. *ibid.*, 105). This correlation requires an adequate development of responsibility and of values alongside the vast technological progress underway.

Otherwise, a dominant paradigm – the “technocratic paradigm” (cf. *ibid.*, 111) – that promises uncontrolled and unlimited progress will be imposed and perhaps will even eliminate other factors of development, with great danger for the whole of humanity. By your work, you have sought to prevent this and to make concrete the culture of encounter and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Many of you are important experts in various fields of applied science: technology, economics, robotics, sociology, communications and cyber-security, as well as philosophy, ethics and moral theology. In these areas, you give voice not only to a wide range of competencies but also to different sensibilities and diverse approaches in the face of the problems that arise in the fields of your expertise, from phenomena such as artificial intelligence. I am grateful that you wished to meet each other in an inclusive and fruitful dialogue that helps everyone to learn from one another and does not allow anyone to close themselves off in prearranged methodologies.

The principal objective you have set yourselves is considerably ambitious: to arrive at criteria and fundamental ethical parameters capable of providing guidance in ethical problems that occur with the widespread use of technology. I realize how difficult it must be for you, who represent at the same time the globalization and specialization of knowledge, to define certain essential principles in a language that is acceptable and can be shared among all. Yet do not lose heart in seeking to attain such a goal, focusing also on the ethical value of ongoing transformations connected to the principles established by the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations. Indeed, the key areas you are exploring will have an immediate and real impact on the lives of millions of people.

The conviction we share is that humanity faces unprecedented and completely new challenges. New problems require new solutions. Respect for principles and tradition must always be experienced in a form of creative fidelity, not rigid imitation or obsolete reductionism. I consider it commendable, therefore, that you have not been afraid to state both theoretical and practical moral principles, at times even with real precision, so that the ethical challenges examined may be addressed precisely in the context of the *common good*. The common good is a good to which all people aspire, and there is no ethical system worthy of the name that does not see such a good as one of its essential points of reference.

The problems you have been called upon to analyze concern all humanity and require solutions that can be extended to all of humanity.

A good example would be robots in the workplace. On the one hand, they could put an end to certain arduous, risky and repetitive types of work – that emerged, for instance, at the start of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century – which often cause suffering, boredom and exhaustion. On the other hand, robots could become a purely hyper-efficient tool, used only to increase profits and returns, and could deprive thousands of people of work, putting their dignity at risk.

Another example would be the advantages and risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence seen in debates on major social issues. On the one hand, it is possible to allow greater access to reliable information and thus guarantee the affirmation of correct analyses. On the other hand, it is possible, as never before, to circulate tendentious opinions and false data that could poison public debates and even manipulate the opinions of millions of people, to the point of endangering the very institutions that guarantee peaceful civil coexistence. For this reason, technological development, which we have all witnessed, requires that we reclaim and reinterpret the ethical terms that others have handed down to us.

If technological advancement became the cause of increasingly evident inequalities, it would not be true and real progress. If mankind’s so-called technological progress were to become an enemy of the common good, this would lead to an unfortunate regression to a form of barbarism dictated by the law of the strongest. Dear friends, I thank you, therefore, because by your work you are engaged in efforts to promote civilization, whose goal includes the attenuation of economic, educational, technological, social and cultural inequalities.

You have laid a strong ethical foundation for the task of defending the dignity of every human person, convinced

that the common good cannot be separated from the specific good of each individual. Your work will continue until no one remains the victim of a system, however advanced and efficient, that fails to value the intrinsic dignity and contribution of each person.

A better world is possible thanks to technological progress, if this is accompanied by an ethic inspired by a vision of the common good, an ethic of freedom, responsibility and fraternity, capable of fostering the full development of people in relation to others and to the whole of creation.

Dear friends, I thank you for this meeting. I accompany you with my blessing. God bless you all. And I ask you please to pray for me. Thank you.
