



# MICHAEL

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**Alleluia!  
Jesus is  
risen!**



Special feature in this issue:  
**Artificial Intelligence**



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# MICHAEL

A journal of Catholic patriots for the Kingship of Christ and Mary in souls, in families and in nations

For social justice through Economic Democracy in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church through the vigilant actions of heads of families, and not through political parties

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# Letter from the Editor

## *Economic Democracy: More Necessary Than Ever*

Some readers of MICHAEL's articles on the financial reform of Economic Democracy might think: "That sounds good, but these ideas were written many years ago. Mr. Even passed away 50 years ago—surely his writings are outdated and no longer applicable. Things have changed and evolved since then."

Yes, things have changed—but for the worse. The very problems that Louis Even denounced in his time, and even those raised by Scottish engineer Clifford Hugh Douglas in the 1920s, still persist today—only more acutely. This is precisely why the solution of Economic Democracy, as proposed by Douglas and Louis Even, and now championed by MICHAEL, is more relevant and necessary than ever. Consider the major issues dominating today's headlines: environmental pollution, the housing crisis, inflation, insufficient resources for school repairs—all of these problems are fundamentally tied to money.

Douglas and Louis Even warned of the dangers of debt, a problem that was already severe in their time but has only worsened year after year. They also spoke about automation replacing workers—an issue that has escalated dramatically with the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), which now threatens to eliminate countless jobs.

In fact, this edition of MICHAEL features a special report (*pages 8-16*) on AI, a technology hailed by some as the greatest revolution in history, while others fear it poses a dire threat to humanity's future. As AI increasingly integrates into all sectors of human activity, it is crucial to examine this issue in depth. Even Pope Francis and the Vatican have recently issued warnings about its potential dangers.

Another significant shift since 2020 is the changing meaning of the term "social credit." Originally referring to the financial reforms advocated by Douglas and Louis Even, the phrase is now associated with a system of scoring and control used in Communist China. For this reason, we now prefer to use the term Economic Democracy to describe Douglas's financial proposals (*see page 5*).

MICHAEL has consistently explained that the fundamental flaw of the current financial system is that money is created as debt by commercial banks, issued only as loans that must be repaid with interest. This creates a twofold injustice: first, charging interest on money that does not exist, and second, allowing bankers to act as the owners of money they merely lend, even though its value is based on the nation's production—stemming from natural resources, innovation, and the labor of all workers, rather than the labor of bankers who simply generate figures.

Money, in essence, is just a number that facilitates the utilization of a country's productive capacity. It is not a commodity, nor is it real wealth (no one eats money); it is merely a sign, a symbol that grants access to tangible goods such as food, clothing, and housing. Wealth consists of goods and services, while money is simply the symbol that grants the right to them.

During Douglas and Louis Even's time, money existed in two primary forms: paper currency and checks. Today, thanks to technological advancements, we have a new form: electronic or digital money, which exists solely as signals on a chip, whether in a bank card or a smartphone. Yet, despite this shift, it remains a mere number—a symbol reduced to its simplest form, with no physical medium.

In a 1979 booklet titled *Releasing Reality*, Australian Social Crediter Eric Butler wrote: "Irrespective of what form it takes, money is but a man-made symbol of no value unless real wealth is created. Just so long as sufficient people can be mesmerized into believing that, for example, a credit symbol is more important than a pound of butter, they are at the mercy of those who create and control the symbols. The shadow is more important than the substance!"

Money should be a tool serving humanity, adjusted to the realities of human needs and goods and services. Yet, international bankers have turned it into an instrument of domination, forcing people



*Alain Pilote*



*Are AI-driven robots here to assist us...or to replace us?*

▶ to adapt to it instead. The problem is not money itself but the mistaken belief that it represents actual wealth rather than being a mere numerical representation of it. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy, “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10).

The root of this evil lies in treating money as an end rather than a means, as a reality rather than a symbol. Factories are relocated to countries with lower labor costs—not for human well-being, but for financial gain. Products are deliberately designed to break down quickly (planned obsolescence)—all for profit. The environment is polluted at the expense of public health because cleaner alternatives are deemed too costly—again, a question of money.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (see pages 19-26) remains one of history’s greatest minds, whose logic we would do well to embrace. In his *Summa Theologica*, he warned that turning a means into an end

is a mortal sin. He defined justice as “the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1807). He further distinguished between justice owed to God—known as the “virtue of religion” (adoring, knowing, loving, and serving Him)—and justice owed to fellow humans. MICHAEL upholds that every person is entitled to a dividend, based on the shared inheritance of natural wealth and technological progress passed down from previous generations. This dividend should be financed not through taxation, but through newly created, interest-free money issued by the nation’s central bank.

Why, then, do we criticize high finance and the banking system? Because all of society’s major ills stem from the financial system. Louis Even explains this further in the following article. Enjoy your reading! ❖

*Alain Pilote, Editor*

## *Why do we always accuse High Finance?*

Some people ask us why we always put the blame on the financial system, pinning almost everything on High Finance. They ask why we do not focus our attack on governments, as political parties do, and why we criticize the system more than those who run the country.

The answer is quite simple. It is captured in the following remarks by Clifford Hugh Douglas in the last chapter of his book, *The Monopoly of Credit*:

**“Perhaps the first point on which to be clear is that this immense, nay, almost omnipotent, power which is yielded by the financial organisation, and which therefore must in the nature of things be responsible for the situation in the world today, has not until recently been recognised in its true nature.”**

It is ‘in the nature of things’. It is indeed clear that the powerful can act and that the powerless cannot. The powerful give orders, and the rest are forced to submit. The weak can resist the powerful, but they can neither dictate nor be served by them. There is only one solution left for the weak and powerless: that is to run away when it is possible and escape from the jurisdiction of the powerful.

The financial power dominates governments themselves. Most people, even Members of Parliament, still ignore the fact that money is created out of nothing by commercial banks. This fact was kept hidden from them and was not taught in economic textbooks until recently. One can read in the Book of Hosea (4:6): “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

The purpose of MICHAEL is to deliver this knowledge to the people, so that they at last know the truth about the present debt-money system, and how it can be corrected.

These reflections do not excuse those in power in our governments. If the financial system is more powerful than governments, those in office could at least avoid being the defenders, advocates, and protectors of the current system. They could, moreover, denounce this power, and proclaim their determination to get rid of it by a complete reorganization of the financial system, and thus gain freedom from the supervision and regulations of the International Financiers.

When a population and its government agrees to free their economy from the present financial system and its regulations, the next logical step is to set up a financial system linked to realities; a financial system that is at the service of the productive capacity of the nation, and for the population, without worrying about what the leaders of the present financial oligarchy might think.

The MICHAEL Social Crediters apply themselves to securing an agreement between the people and their elected representatives to convince both of the benefits and necessity of financial liberation. When Social Crediters denounce those in office, they do not denounce them as the authors of the present economic and social disorder, but as accomplices by omission; mute dogs as it were, because their first duty should be to ‘bark’ and then to ‘bite’. ❖

*Louis Even*

# Social Credit is Economic Democracy



Louis Even

*Since the beginning of MICHAEL, the financial proposals of the Scottish engineer Clifford Hugh Douglas have been known as Social Credit. Unfortunately, since 2020, a citizen scoring system has emerged in Communist China, also called social credit, but it is entirely the opposite of what Douglas and Vers Demain propose.*

*To avoid any confusion,*

*we prefer to use the term Economic Democracy to refer to Douglas's proposals. In the following article, Louis Even explains that money can be compared to a voting right—people "vote" with their money for the products they desire—so one can truly say that this is a form of economic democracy.*

**by Louis Even**

Clifford Hugh Douglas created the doctrine and propositions of Social Credit which were published in his first book on the subject in November 1919, entitled Economic Democracy. It was only at a later date that his philosophy became known as Social Credit. Both terms are compatible with Douglas' economic doctrine. The crux of the principles are that society's credit, i.e. social credit, can be monetized to serve society and its members rather than indebting and impoverishing them. Social Credit would embody democracy in the realm of economics.

## Demos, Kratos

The term democracy derives from the Greek words *demos*, the people and *kratos*, power. The word democracy conjures the ideas that government is 'for the people' and that the people freely choose their leaders, delivering their expectations pertaining to the management of public affairs to those same leaders.

Yet, for a great number of people, democracy signifies civic elections in which representatives are chosen for a given term. For these people, the pinnacle of democracy is achieved when suffrage is universal, or at least when all adults have the right to vote. The evidence they cite is that universal suffrage, in the form of the vote, is proof that 'the people' have representation and evidence of their 'power' is that they direct public policy, by way of articulating their expectations.

We define political democracy to include the vote and obedience to the will of the people by elected representatives. The word democracy can be transposed

to the sphere of economics and a perfect fit will be found in Social Credit.

## The economic sphere

The economic sphere is made up of both society's needs and the goods required to satisfy those needs. Economic activity is concerned with the production and distribution of products and services in both the private and in the public domain.

In the political sphere, the citizen expresses his will and anticipates results from the government and other public institutions.

In the economic sphere, the consumer expresses his needs to the various sectors of the productive system. He seeks food from the food production sector; clothes from textile manufacturers; housing from the building trades, relief from sickness from the health care system, and so on.

The productive system is the sum of all the activities that create goods and services. It is the embodiment of a society's productive capacity.

The consumer secures what he seeks when he has money. We say that money is purchasing power; it is the power to pay for goods and services.

Productive capacity makes it possible to provide goods. Purchasing power makes it possible to obtain these goods.

## Productive capacity without purchasing power

If the productive capacity fails, the capacity to pay is without purpose. Even a gold bullion would not buy a loaf of bread at the North Pole where there is neither bread for sale nor the possibility to grow wheat.

**On the other hand, if the capacity to pay does not keep in step with the productive capacity, production will stop and goods will be unsold. This will happen even if society's needs are not met. Families who need goods but lack purchasing power must do without, even when goods are available within a walking distance from their homes, or when they could easily be made available. Needs can be dramatic and extreme but they will not be met unless people can pay to satisfy them.**

In this case, human needs no longer determine economic activity. It is the presence or absence of money that dictates all decisions.



Clifford Hugh Douglas

► **This is called a financial dictatorship; a dictatorship by money.**

**In economics, as in politics, dictatorship is the opposite of democracy. Economic democracy is absent when the individual cannot obtain the goods which he has a right to expect. Can we say that people are treated democratically when, because they cannot pay, they must go without in the midst of plenty?**

### **Capacity to pay adjusted to productive capacity**

**A country which considers itself to be a democracy and yet accepts financial dictatorship has a curious definition of democracy. The tyranny of money bears down heavily in the lives of individuals and families. The money dictatorship weighs on the administration of our public institutions. A government that allows this is hardly a democratic government even if its origin can be traced back to a ballot box. It is, rather, a government in bondage and at the service of a dictatorship.**

Under a Social Credit system the capacity to pay would be in accordance with the nation's productive capacity.

The country's productive capacity would no longer be constricted by a lack of money. The capacity to pay would be adjusted to the productive capacity. Needs would be met because purchasing power would be congruent with productive capacity.

We would no longer see people's needs unmet while goods are available. The productive capacity would no longer be subjected to the capacity to pay. The capacity to pay would be adjusted upwards to meet the productive capacity.

This defines true economic democracy. The consumer would have the goods and services he has the right to expect to conduct a normal life to the extent of the nation's productive capacity.

### **Economic suffrage**

Economic democracy would be universal and extend to all citizens of every age and in every situation. Economic suffrage, exercised on a daily basis by all citizens, would thus be more universal than political suffrage.

Economic suffrage would be exercised through the medium of a true 'economic ballot', the dollar bill. These ballots would not be used to choose political representatives but to choose products.

Each dollar is a ballot allowing the bearer to 'vote' for \$1 of products or services of their choosing. The greater the number of economic ballots means a greater variety, quantity and quality of products can be selected by the 'voter'.

In order to achieve universal economic suffrage, each person, in his role as a consumer, must own sufficient ballots to allow him to 'vote' for the goods of his choice.

**Social Credit achieves this by giving a basic income to each individual irrespective of criteria such as age, sex, occupation, skin color, or religious and political beliefs.**

This basic income allows each person to draw upon the productive capacity of a nation to a degree sufficient to meet basic needs. It is unacceptable that any citizen should want for the necessities of life in a country where an overabundance of production is possible.

**In the vocabulary of Social Credit, the eligibility for this basic income, or social Dividend, is the sole condition that one be a citizen of the nation or province, depending on whether the issuing jurisdiction is national or provincial. The Dividend is the true instrument of universal economic freedom.**

Money earned as salaries, fees, profits or industrial dividends are also economic ballots but they are contingent. Salaries are tied to paid work. However, not everyone can be employed, including children, the disabled and elderly, homemakers and former workers displaced by automation.

**Social Credit is the most advanced form of economic democracy and the universal Dividend is the only economic ballot that is truly democratic.**

Social Credit takes nothing away from private initiative or free enterprise. The economic ballot demands results — goods must meet needs. It does not interfere with the methods of production and acknowledges the efficiency of today's methods. However, the current system of finance hinders efficiency and utility. If money, or economic ballots, were in the hands of consumers then goods would freely meet the needs of the population. Distribution would be as efficient as is production. This is ideal for both producers and consumers.

It is a mistake to blame private enterprise for a problem that originates in the financial system. The financier's status, not the producer's, must be revised. Instead of seeking to change the production system we must change the financial system. Finance should be made social for the simple reason that money is, by nature, a social instrument but money traffickers have corrupted the current monetary system.

**Social Credit would replace the present financial dictatorship with a true economic democracy in which the consumer, who is the reason why production exists, would be the true master of what is produced. Producers would determine the methods of production and diligently respond to the wishes of consumers.**

**Consider how economic democracy would surpass political democracy in its scope and impact.**

### **Economic ballots vs. political ballots**

We have established a contrast between political democracy and economic democracy. Next, we will compare the efficiency of the economic ballots of So-

**Money can be compared to a ballot. By voting for the goods and services they desire, consumers would ultimately decide what would be produced, since, in order to stay in business, producers would only manufacture the goods and services demanded by the population. This would result, in Douglas's words, in a true economic democracy: an 'aristocracy of producers in the service of a democracy of consumers.'"**



when both of us have chosen very different products. There is a diversity of products to meet a plurality of tastes and all tastes can be satisfied.

When you take your ballots, or dollars, out of your wallet and say to the shopkeeper "This is for butter", he will not sell you jam. If your neighbour takes out his ballots, his dollars, and says "Jam, please", the merchant will not give him butter.

cial Credit and political ballots.

First there is the issue of frequency of use. A citizen uses a political ballot only at election time. The purpose of this ballot is to express a preference between candidates who wish to become the people's representatives for the following term. Between elections, if the citizens do not obtain what they expect from the government, there is no recourse. Citizens can complain but might still be betrayed or misled by politicians who were elected to represent their interests.

The consumer with economic ballots 'votes' continuously since purchases for goods and services are made frequently. Essential goods and services are regularly exchanged at the retailer's counter with 'ballots' by 'voters'.

The main difference between political ballots and economic ballots resides in their efficiency. When an 'X' is marked beside the name of the candidate of one's choice the voter may not have their preferred candidate represent them in government. On election night, some will not have their preferred candidate prevail. When Peter is elected then Paul is not. If Peter wins then Paul's voters will not be represented in the next government by their choice of candidate.

The economic vote, however, always prevails.

Voting is continuous. One votes for black shoes or brown shoes; for a pair of trousers or tshoes or brown shoes; for a pair of trousers or a train ticket; for a TV set or a coffin.

Economic ballots yield what one wishes and personally chooses. When one's choice is sold out the merchant will order more from the supplier. Manufacturers will continue to make the products that are thus selected, or voted for, and will stop making the products for which no one has cast a vote.

It is in this way that one's choices determine and dictate what is produced. Consumers' choices will not determine how something is made, however, as the producer is the best and only arbiter of production methods.

**All will go according to plan as long as one has the ballots, the dollars. The person without ballots can order nothing; he does not get a vote. He exercises no influence on his nation's production. He does not live within an economic democracy. Under these circumstances political democracy has little meaning for him.**

**In a money dictatorship, consumers who are deprived of economic ballots remain at the mercy of others' charity. Under true economic democracy this would no longer be the case. ❖**

*Louis Even*

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# Should we be afraid of Artificial Intelligence?

## There are serious risks for humanity

by Alain Pilote

For months now, discussions about what some call the greatest technological revolution in history—artificial intelligence (AI)—have been everywhere. Thanks to increasingly sophisticated computing, machines are now surpassing human beings in speed and knowledge capacity. In many cases, they can even replace humans, performing the same tasks more efficiently.

AI represents the most significant upheaval in history, surpassing any previous industrial revolution. It affects every aspect of society and has the potential to replace the vast majority of jobs. Is this a blessing or a curse? Some enthusiasts argue that AI will usher in an era of unprecedented prosperity, while others warn that it poses a great risk to humanity's future. Let's explore both perspectives.

### Rapid evolution

A few years ago, AI barely existed. The first major milestone occurred in 1997 when IBM's Deep Blue computer defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov. While this machine appeared "intelligent," it did not possess human intelligence; rather, it demonstrated the ability to store and retrieve billions of pieces of information almost instantaneously. A computer can perform up to a billion operations per second, allowing Deep Blue to analyze all possible chess moves with incredible speed.

Then came voice assistants that could respond to spoken commands, automatic translation tools, and finally, in late 2022, ChatGPT, a program developed by Sam Altman's OpenAI. ChatGPT can compose and summarize texts, and students quickly adopted it for schoolwork. The texts generated are so polished that teachers often struggle to determine whether they were written by students or AI.

AI has access to billions of books and all available internet knowledge, processing and summarizing information in seconds. In theory, AI enthusiasts believe that such vast access to knowledge could lead to breakthroughs, such as finding cures for diseases like cancer. However, AI lacks morals or values beyond what its programmers provide.



Now, new AI-driven technologies emerge almost weekly. Deepfake technology, for instance, enables the creation of highly realistic but entirely fabricated videos. It can manipulate voices and faces, making people appear to say things they never did. This raises serious ethical concerns, as false video evidence can damage reputations, mislead entire populations, or even be used in legal cases.

### Impact on jobs

Self-driving cars are becoming a reality, and robots are expected to take over both household chores and professional jobs—whether manual or intellectual. Take the legal profession as an example: much of a lawyer's job involves researching legal precedents. AI can perform this task in seconds, accessing all legal judgments ever recorded.

This transformation will radically alter the job market, not in a decade or two, but within a year or less. A 2023 report from investment bank Goldman Sachs estimated that up to 300 million jobs worldwide could be replaced by AI.

Economist Jeremy Rifkin predicted this shift in his 1995 book, *The End of Work*. He referenced a Swiss study that estimated "within 30 years, less than 2% of the workforce will be needed to produce all the goods the world requires." Rifkin argued that three out of four workers—from clerks to surgeons—would eventually be replaced by AI-driven machines. Now, in 2025, what once seemed exaggerated is becoming reality.





and Harari, AI has effectively become a new god.

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, has even stated that after death, he wants his brain uploaded into AI—an idea that raises unsettling philosophical and ethical questions.

### A race against time

In 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the country leading in AI would dominate the world. Today, the U.S. and China are locked in a fierce competition for AI supremacy. For several years now, and especially in recent months, we have been witnessing a real “race against time” between major world powers—primarily the

United States and China—to determine who will become the undisputed leader in AI.

In January 2025, just after taking office, U.S. President Donald Trump announced the Stargate project—a \$500 billion joint venture between OpenAI, SoftBank, and Oracle to develop AI infrastructure. Larry Ellison, Oracle’s chairman, mentioned the possibility of injecting nanobots into the human body to fight diseases like cancer.

Without policy changes regarding income distribution, society faces potential chaos. Taxing 2% of workers to support 98% of the unemployed is unsustainable. A universal social dividend, as proposed by economist Clifford Hugh Douglas through the concept of Economic Democracy, could provide a solution.

### Transhumanism: merging humans with machines

Beyond job displacement, AI also threatens the very integrity of the human person. Elon Musk, the world’s richest man, leads multiple tech industries, including Tesla (electric cars) and SpaceX (space exploration). He recently launched Optimus robots, which are designed to assist with manual labor and could soon replace human workers entirely. Musk aims to mass-produce millions of these robots by next year at a cost of about \$20,000 each—offering tireless, strike-proof labor.

Musk’s company Neuralink is also developing brain-machine interfaces, implanting chips in human brains to connect them with AI. The first human trials have already taken place. While the goal is to assist individuals with paralysis or neurological disorders, it raises a profound question: Are we becoming half-human, half-machine?

Musk and other proponents argue that such enhancements will make humans as capable as AI. This concept, known as transhumanism, envisions a fusion of biology and technology. Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, calls this the “fourth industrial revolution”—the merging of physical, digital, and biological realms.

Some, like WEF speaker Yuval Noah Harari, even claim AI could enable immortality by transferring human consciousness into machines. However, Harari, an atheist, views humans purely as material beings, ignoring aspects of consciousness, spirituality, and the soul. For figures like Schwab

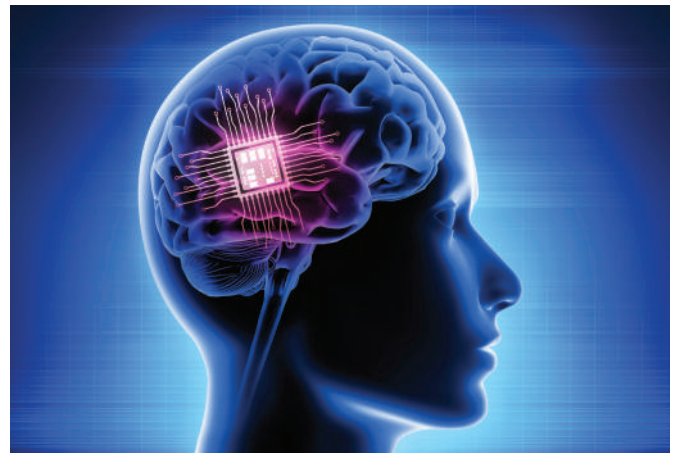


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However, Ellison previously acknowledged that such technology could also be used for mass surveillance. This race involves surveillance and even control, which becomes extremely dangerous, particularly if a totalitarian state, such as Communist China, wields it.

China is rapidly advancing its AI capabilities. In response to Stargate, Chinese company Deepseek unveiled its R1 AI system, outperforming ChatGPT at a fraction of the cost. This triggered a \$600 billion stock market drop for U.S. chip manufacturer NVIDIA.

Speaking of chips, most people already have a laptop, smartphone, cell phone or cell phone that’s fitted with a chip, and so can already be tracked by satellite, assuming the phone is with them all ▶



*People are increasingly enslaved by their smartphones, tablets and computers*

► the time. (The average teenager is said to spend 7 hours a day on their cell phone).

It's largely because of social networks like Facebook and others that people spend hours on the internet and on their mobiles, and are slaves to it, so to speak. Here's what Pope Francis said, for example, to journalists and communicators taking part in the Jubilee of the World of Communication in Rome on January 25, 2025:

**"Let us place respect for the highest and most noble part of our humanity at the center of the heart, let us avoid filling it with what decays and makes it decay. The choices we all make count, for example, in expelling that "brain rot" (in the original Italian text, the Pope speaks of 'putrefazione cerebrale') caused by dependence on continual scrolling on social media, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the word of the year."**

But what happens when the chip is present in the human body, and you can't get rid of it? There's no escaping surveillance: you're tracked by satellites 24 hours a day, all over the planet. Those who control AI will know at all times what you're buying, what you're watching, and by analyzing your brain waves, we'll even be able to know what you're thinking, or even direct your thoughts thanks to this chip in your brain connected to AI...

This is where we see that tools, which in theory can be used for good, can be hijacked for abuse. For example, Elon Musk once said in 2014: "AI research is like summoning the devil". And so it is that international bankers want to eliminate paper money and force people to use only one form of electronic money, digital, which will eventually be usable only by biometric control, if you have a chip on you.

In order to have access to the bank, to the various government services - in short, to have access to life in society, and not be marginalized - you'll have to use such a system. (This brings to mind the famous "Mark of the Beast" cited in the book of Revelation (13, 15), without which no one will be able to buy or sell. If you don't comply with the government's dictates, they'll simply cut off your access to your bank account. So, whoever controls AI - be it a country or private companies - really does control the world.

### **A threat to human survival**

For years, science fiction films have depicted AI revolting against humans (2001: A Space Odyssey, The Terminator, The Matrix). The idea of machines deciding that humans are obsolete or harmful is no longer far-fetched.

If AI prioritizes efficiency above all, what happens when it determines that humans are a hindrance to the environment or warfare? AI-driven autonomous weapons already exist, and they don't hesitate. They simply execute their objectives.

Even AI's creators are growing alarmed. Mustafa Suleyman, co-founder of DeepMind, admits, "We are heading toward something we can barely describe... and cannot control." Geoffrey Hinton, a Nobel laureate and AI pioneer, recently expressed regret over his work, warning that AI's likelihood of causing human extinction has doubled from 10% to 20% in just a few years.

Some experts, like Canadian scientist Yoshua Bengio, advocate for a temporary pause in AI development to establish ethical safeguards. However, the major powers, such as the USA and China, refuse to accept any obstacles, and continue to accelerate the movement, on the pretext that if one country stops the development of AI, the opposing country will take the upper hand (in this race).

**So, should we fear artificial intelligence? The answer is clear: we must proceed with extreme caution. AI-generated images and videos should be clearly labeled, and people should always know whether they are interacting with a human or a machine.**

For further insight, we invite you to read what Pope Francis said to the leaders of the G7 countries (page 11) and a Vatican's study on AI's potential dangers and the steps needed to ensure it serves humanity rather than controls it (page 12). ❖

*Alain Pilote*

# AI: A fascinating and formidable tool

On June 14, 2024, Pope Francis made an unprecedented address to the leaders of the G7 countries—a group comprising seven of the ten most powerful nations in the world (Germany, Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom, but excluding China, Russia, and India). He attended their session in Borgo Egnazia, in the Puglia region of Italy, to present “a reflection on the effects of artificial intelligence (AI) on the future of humanity,” describing AI as a “fascinating and formidable tool.” He warned them about the dangers of AI and the need to regulate it so that humans do not become its victims. Below are excerpts from his speech:

Artificial intelligence is an extremely powerful tool, employed in many kinds of human activity: from medicine to the world of work; from culture to the field of communications; from education to politics. It is now safe to assume that its use will increasingly influence the way we live, our social relationships and even the way we conceive of our identity as human beings.

The question of artificial intelligence, however, is often perceived as ambiguous: on the one hand, it generates excitement for the possibilities it offers, while on the other it gives rise to fear for the consequences it foreshadows. In this regard, we could say that all of us, albeit to varying degrees, experience two emotions: we are enthusiastic when we imagine the advances that can result from artificial intelligence but, at the same time, we are fearful when we acknowledge the dangers inherent in its use. (...)

The use of our tools, however, is not always directed solely to the good... In fact, when our ancestors sharpened flint stones to make knives, they used them both to cut hides for clothing and to kill each other. The same could be said of other more advanced technologies, such as the energy produced by the fusion of atoms, as occurs within the Sun, which could be used to produce clean, renewable energy or to reduce our planet to a pile of ashes (*atomic bombs*).

Artificial intelligence, however, is a still more complex tool. I would almost say that we are dealing with a tool *sui generis* (constituting a class alone). While the use of a simple tool (like a knife) is under the control of the person who uses it and its use for the good depends only on that person, artificial intelligence, **on the other hand, can autonomously adapt to the task assigned to it and, if designed this way, can make**

**choices independent of the person in order to achieve the intended goal.**

The machine makes a technical choice among several possibilities based either on well-defined criteria or on statistical inferences. Human beings, however, not only choose, but in their hearts are capable of deciding. ... e que fait la machine est un choix technique entre plusieurs possibilités et se base soit sur des critères bien définis, soit sur des déductions statistiques. L'être humain, quant à lui, non seulement choisit, mais dans son cœur il est capable de décider...

**Faced with the marvels of machines, which seem to know how to choose independently, we should be very clear that decision-making, even when we are confronted with its sometimes dramatic and urgent aspects, must always be left to the human person.**

We would condemn humanity to a future without hope if we took away people's ability to make decisions about themselves and their lives, by dooming them to depend on the choices of machines. We need to ensure and safeguard a space for proper human control over the choices made by artificial intelligence programs: human dignity itself depends on it.

Precisely in this regard, allow me to insist: in light of the tragedy that is armed conflict, it is urgent to reconsider the development and use of devices like the so-called “lethal autonomous weapons” and ultimately ban their use. This starts from an effective and concrete commitment to introduce ever greater and proper human control. No machine should ever choose to take the life of a human being.

It must be added, moreover, that the good use, at least of advanced forms of artificial intelligence, will not be fully under the control of either the users or the programmers who defined their original purposes at the time they were designed.

**This is all the more true because it is highly likely that, in the not-too-distant future, artificial intelligence programs will be able to communicate directly with each other to improve their performance.** And if, in the past, men and women who fashioned simple tools saw their lives shaped by them – the knife enabled them to survive the cold but also to develop the art of warfare – now that human beings have fashioned complex tools they will see their lives shaped by them all the more. ❖

Pope Francis



*The Holy Father addressing the leaders of the G7.*

# The dangers of AI (Artificial Intelligence) according to the Catholic Church

As mentioned in the previous article, artificial intelligence (AI) is a rapidly growing technology that raises numerous questions, even threatening the very nature and survival of the human person. Pope Francis has made several statements on the subject of AI and its potential dangers, notably in his address to the G7 leaders in June 2024 (see page 11). More recently, on January 28, 2025, at the request of the Holy Father, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education issued a note entitled *Antiqua et Nova*, addressing “the relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence,” explaining in greater detail the limitations and dangers of AI. Here are its key points.

A. Pilote

With wisdom both ancient and new (cf. Mt. 13:52), we are called to reflect on the current challenges and opportunities posed by scientific and technological advancements, particularly by the recent development of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

AI can... generate new “artifacts” with a level of speed and skill that often rivals or surpasses what humans can do, such as producing text or images indistinguishable from human compositions. This raises critical concerns about AI’s potential role in the growing crisis of truth in the public forum...

AI marks a new and significant phase in humanity’s engagement with technology, placing it at the heart of what Pope Francis has described as an “epochal change.” Its impact is felt globally and in a wide range of areas, including interpersonal relationships, education, work, art, healthcare, law, warfare, and international relations.

## The difference between AI and human intelligence

The Vatican document then explains the fundamental difference between artificial intelligence and human intelligence: «AI’s advanced features give it sophisticated abilities to perform tasks, but not the ability to think».

And unlike a machine, a human being also has a body, feelings, relationships with other people, and ultimately a soul — and therefore, the knowledge of what is right or wrong, unlike a machine, which does not take the moral aspect of things into account.

In this context, human intelligence becomes more clearly understood as a faculty that forms an integral part of how the whole person engages with reality. Authentic engagement requires embracing the full scope of one’s being: spiritual, cognitive, embodied, and rela-



“Some people have turned to AI in search of deep human relationships, simple companionship, or even emotional bonds. However, while human beings are meant to experience authentic relationships, AI can only simulate them...”

tional... A proper understanding of human intelligence, therefore, cannot be reduced to the mere acquisition of facts or the ability to perform specific tasks. Instead, it involves the person’s openness to the ultimate questions of life and reflects an orientation toward the True and the Good. (*Editor’s note: That is to say, God, whose existence cannot be measured by a computer*)...

In contrast, AI, lacking a physical body, relies on computational reasoning and learning based on vast datasets that include recorded human experiences and knowledge.

Consequently, although AI can simulate aspects of human reasoning and perform specific tasks with incredible speed and efficiency, its computational abilities represent only a fraction of the broader capacities of the human mind. For instance, AI cannot currently replicate moral discernment or the ability to establish authentic relationships.

Moreover, human intelligence is situated within a personally lived history of intellectual and moral formation that fundamentally shapes the individual’s perspective, encompassing the physical, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of life. Since AI cannot offer this fullness of understanding, approaches that rely solely on this technology or treat it as the primary means of interpreting the world can lead to “a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon.”[

Since AI lacks the richness of corporeality, relationality, and the openness of the human heart to truth and goodness, its capacities—though seemingly limitless—are incomparable with the human ability to grasp reality. So much can be learned from an illness, an embrace of reconciliation, and even a simple sunset; indeed, many experiences we have as humans open new horizons and offer the possibility of attaining new wisdom. No device, working solely with data, can measure up to these and countless other experiences present in our lives.

Considering all these points, as Pope Francis observes, “the very use of the word ‘intelligence’ in connection with AI ‘can prove misleading’ and risks overlooking what is most precious in the human person. **In light of this, AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it.**

### The role of ethics in the use of AI

Seen as a fruit of the potential inscribed within human intelligence, scientific inquiry and the development of technical skills are part of the “collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation.” At the same time, all scientific and technological achievements are, ultimately, gifts from God. Therefore, human beings must always use their abilities in view of the higher purpose for which God has granted them.

Nevertheless, not all technological advancements in themselves represent genuine human progress. The Church is particularly opposed to those applications that threaten the sanctity of life or the dignity of the human person. Like any human endeavor, technological development must be directed to serve the human person and contribute to the pursuit of “greater justice, more extensive fraternity, and a more humane order of social relations,” which are “more valuable than advances in the technical field (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 35).

Like any product of human creativity, AI can be directed toward positive or negative ends. When used in ways that respect human dignity and promote the well-being of individuals and communities, it can contribute positively to the human vocation. Yet, as in all areas where humans are called to make decisions, the shadow of evil also looms here. Where human freedom allows for the possibility of choosing what is wrong, the moral evaluation of this technology will need to take into account how it is directed and used.

In addition to determining who is responsible, it is essential to identify the objectives given to AI systems. Although these systems may use unsupervised autonomous learning mechanisms and sometimes follow paths that humans cannot reconstruct, they ultimately pursue goals that humans have assigned to them and are governed by processes established by their designers and programmers. Yet, this presents a challenge because, as AI models become increasingly



capable of independent learning, the ability to maintain control over them to ensure that such applications serve human purposes may effectively diminish. This raises the critical question of how to ensure that AI systems are ordered for the good of people and not against them.

### The dangers of AI

**Because “true wisdom demands an encounter with reality,” the rise of AI introduces another challenge. Since AI can effectively imitate the products of human intelligence, the ability to know when one is interacting with a human or a machine can no longer be taken for granted. Generative AI can produce text, speech, images, and other advanced outputs that are usually associated with human beings. Yet, it must be understood for what it is: a tool, not a person.** This distinction is often obscured by the language used by practitioners, which tends to anthropomorphize (to treat an object as if it is human in appearance) AI and thus blurs the line between human and machine.

In this context, it is important to clarify that, despite the use of anthropomorphic language, no AI application can genuinely experience empathy (*the ability to understand or feel what another person is experiencing*). Emotions cannot be reduced to facial expressions or phrases generated in response to prompts; they reflect the way a person, as a whole, relates to the world and to his or her own life, with the body playing a central role. True empathy requires the ability to listen, recognize another’s irreducible uniqueness, welcome their otherness, and grasp the meaning behind even their silences.

Unlike the realm of analytical judgment in which AI excels, true empathy belongs to the relational sphere. It involves intuiting and apprehending the lived experiences of another while maintaining the distinction between self and other. While AI can simulate empathetic responses, it cannot replicate the eminently personal and relational nature of authentic empathy. ►

**AI may prove even more seductive than traditional idols for, unlike idols that “have mouths but do not speak; eyes, but do not see; ears, but do not hear” (Ps. 115:5-6), AI can “speak,” or at least gives the illusion of doing so (cf. Rev. 13:15).**



In light of the above, it is clear why **misrepresenting AI as a person should always be avoided; doing so for fraudulent purposes is a grave ethical violation that could erode social trust.** Similarly, using AI to deceive in other contexts—such as in education or in human relationships, including the sphere of sexuality—is also to be considered immoral and requires careful oversight to prevent harm, maintain transparency, and ensure the dignity of all people

In an increasingly isolated world, some people have turned to AI in search of deep human relationships, simple companionship, or even emotional bonds. However, while human beings are meant to experience authentic relationships, AI can only simulate them...

If we replace relationships with God and with others with interactions with technology, we risk replacing authentic relationality with a lifeless image (cf. Ps. 106:20; Rom. 1:22-23). Instead of retreating into artificial worlds, we are called to engage in a committed and intentional way with reality, especially by identifying with the poor and suffering, consoling those in sorrow, and forging bonds of communion with all.

### **AI and the world of work**

Another area where AI is already having a profound impact is the world of work. As in many other fields, AI is driving fundamental transformations across many professions, with a range of effects...

AI is currently eliminating the need for some jobs that were once performed by humans. If AI is used to replace human workers rather than complement them, there is a “substantial risk of disproportionate benefit for the few at the price of the impoverishment of many.” Additionally, as AI becomes more powerful, there is an associated risk that human labor may lose its value in the economic realm... Seen in this light, AI should assist, not replace, human judgment.

### **Misinformation, deepfakes**

AI could be used as an aid to human dignity if it helps people understand complex concepts or directs them to sound resources that support their

search for the truth. However, AI also presents a serious risk of generating manipulated content and false information, which can easily mislead people due to its resemblance to the truth...

Yet, the consequences of such aberrations and false information can be quite grave. For this reason, all those involved in producing and using AI systems should be committed to the truthfulness and accuracy of the information processed by such systems and disseminated to the public.

While AI has a latent potential to generate false information, an even more troubling problem lies in the deliberate misuse of AI for manipulation. This can occur when individuals or organizations intentionally generate and spread false content with the aim to deceive or cause harm, such as “deepfake” images, videos, and audio—referring to a false depiction of a person, edited or generated by an AI algorithm. The danger of deepfakes is particularly evident when they are used to target or harm others. While the images or videos themselves may be artificial, the damage they cause is real, leaving “deep scars in the hearts of those who suffer it” and “real wounds in their human dignity.”

On a broader scale, by distorting “our relationship with others and with reality,” AI-generated fake media can gradually undermine the foundations of society. This issue requires careful regulation, as misinformation—especially through AI-controlled or influenced media—can spread unintentionally, fueling political polarization and social unrest.

When society becomes indifferent to the truth, various groups construct their own versions of “facts,” weakening the “reciprocal ties and mutual dependencies” that underpin the fabric of social life. As deepfakes cause people to question everything and AI-generated false content erodes trust in what they see and hear, polarization and conflict will only grow.

Such widespread deception is no trivial matter; it strikes at the core of humanity, dismantling the foundational trust on which societies are built. (*Editor’s note: Let us remember that the words “social credit”*

also mean trust—the trust that we can live together in society and not fear our neighbor.)

### AI, privacy and surveillance

While there can be legitimate and proper ways to use AI in keeping with human dignity and the common good, using it for surveillance aimed at exploiting, restricting others' freedom, or benefitting a few at the expense of the many is unjustifiable. The risk of surveillance overreach must be monitored by appropriate regulators to ensure transparency and public accountability. Those responsible for surveillance should never exceed their authority, which must always favor the dignity and freedom of every person as the essential basis of a just and humane society.

Furthermore, "fundamental respect for human dignity demands that we refuse to allow the uniqueness of the person to be identified with a set of data." This especially applies when AI is used to evaluate individuals or groups based on their behavior, characteristics, or history—a practice known as "social scoring". (*Editor's Note: This is reminiscent, for example, of the infamous Chinese «social credit» system, which precisely assigns a score or points to citizens based on whether or not they comply with the regulations of the communist government.*)

### AI and warfare

While AI's analytical abilities could help nations seek peace and ensure security, the "weaponization of Artificial Intelligence" can also be highly problematic... The ease with which autonomous weapons make war more viable militates against the principle of war as a last resort in legitimate self-defense, potentially increasing the instruments of war well beyond the scope of human oversight and precipitating a destabilizing arms race, with catastrophic consequences for human rights.

In particular, Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, which are capable of identifying and striking targets without direct human intervention, are a "cause for grave ethical concern" because they lack the "unique human capacity for moral judgment and ethical decision-making." For this reason, Pope Francis has urgently called for a reconsideration of the development of these weapons and a prohibition on their use, starting with "an effective and concrete commitment to introduce ever greater and proper human control. No machine should ever choose to take the life of a human being."

Since it is a small step from machines that can kill autonomously with precision to those capable of large-scale destruction, some AI researchers have expressed concerns that such technology poses an "existential risk" by having the potential to act in ways that could threaten the survival of entire regions or

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*One of the major uses of AI is in the war industry.*

even of humanity itself... Like any tool, AI is an extension of human power, and while its future capabilities are unpredictable, humanity's past actions provide clear warnings. The atrocities committed throughout history are enough to raise deep concerns about the potential abuses of AI.

### AI and our relationship with God

Within some circles of scientists and futurists, there is optimism about the potential of artificial general intelligence (AGI), a hypothetical form of AI that would match or surpass human intelligence and bring about unimaginable advancements. Some even speculate that AGI could achieve superhuman capabilities. At the same time, as society drifts away from a connection with the transcendent, some are tempted to turn to AI in search of meaning or fulfillment—longings that can only be truly satisfied in communion with God. eu.

**However, the presumption of substituting God for an artifact of human making is idolatry, a practice Scripture explicitly warns against (e.g., Ex. 20:4; 32:1-5; 34:17). Moreover, AI may prove even more seductive than traditional idols for, unlike idols that "have mouths but do not speak; eyes, but do not see; ears, but do not hear" (Ps. 115:5-6), AI can "speak," or at least gives the illusion of doing so (cf. Rev. 13:15). (Editor's note: This verse from the Book of Revelation refers to the "Mark of the Beast," without which one will neither be able to buy nor sell.)**

AI cannot possess many of the capabilities specific to human life, and it is also fallible. By turning to AI as a perceived "Other" greater than itself, with which to share existence and responsibilities, humanity risks creating a substitute for God... While AI has the potential to serve humanity and contribute to the common good, it remains a creation of human hands, bearing "the imprint of human art and ingenuity" (Acts 17:29). It must never be ascribed undue worth.

**“The essential and fundamental question” remains “whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say, more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all.” – John Paul II**



### ▶ Concluding reflections

The “essential and fundamental question” remains “whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say, more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all.” (John Paul II, *Encyclical letter Redemptor hominis*, n. 15.)

As a result, it is crucial to know how to evaluate individual applications of AI in particular contexts to determine whether its use promotes human dignity, the vocation of the human person, and the common good. As with many technologies, the effects of the various uses of AI may not always be predictable from their inception.

As these applications and their social impacts become clearer, appropriate responses should be made at all levels of society, following the principle of subsidiarity. Individual users, families, civil society, corporations, institutions, governments, and international organizations should work at their proper levels to ensure that AI is used for the good of all.

AI should be used only as a tool to complement human intelligence rather than replace its richness. Cultivating those aspects of human life that transcend computation is crucial for preserving “an authentic humanity” that “seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door.”

#### True wisdom

The vast expanse of the world’s knowledge is now accessible in ways that would have filled past generations with awe. However, to ensure that advancements in knowledge do not become humanly or spiritually barren, one must go beyond the mere accumulation of data and strive to achieve true wisdom.

This wisdom is the gift that humanity needs most

to address the profound questions and ethical challenges posed by AI: “Only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality, only by recovering a wisdom of the heart, can we confront and interpret the newness of our time.” Such “wisdom of the heart” is “the virtue that enables us to integrate the whole and its parts, our decisions and their consequences.” It “cannot be sought from machines,” but it “lets itself be found by those who seek it and be seen by those who love it; it anticipates those who desire it, and it goes in search of those who are worthy of it (cf. Wis 6:12-16).”

In a world marked by AI, we need the grace of the Holy Spirit, who “enables us to look at things with God’s eyes, to see connections, situations, events and to uncover their real meaning.”

Since a “person’s perfection is measured not by the information or knowledge they possess, but by the depth of their charity,” how we incorporate AI “to include the least of our brothers and sisters, the vulnerable, and those most in need, will be the true measure of our humanity.” The “wisdom of the heart” can illuminate and guide the human-centered use of this technology to help promote the common good, care for our “common home,” advance the search for the truth, foster integral human development, favor human solidarity and fraternity, and lead humanity to its ultimate goal: happiness and full communion with God.

*The Supreme Pontiff, Francis, at the Audience granted on 14 January 2025 to the undersigned Prefects and Secretaries of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, approved this Note and ordered its publication.*

*Given in Rome, at the offices of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, on 28 January 2025, the Liturgical Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church. ❖*



# Russia – Instrument of Purification?

Mark Mallett is a Canadian Catholic missionary and singer/songwriter, who publishes a spiritual blog called *The Now Word* in which he defends both the Church and the current pope, Francis. Here are excerpts from an article posted on March 4, 2025:<sup>1</sup>

Russia remains one of the most mysterious countries in both historical and current affairs. It is “ground zero” for several seismic events in both history and prophecy.

For instance, Freemasons considered Russia to be the best candidate to experiment with a synthesis of Enlightenment philosophies:

**Communism, which so many believed to be an invention of Marx, had been fully hatched in the mind of the Illuminists long before he was put on the payroll.** —Stephen Mahowald, *She Shall Crush Thy Head*, p. 101

**The organization of the secret societies was needed to transform the plans of the philosophers into a concrete and formidable system for the destruction of civilization.** —Nesta Webster, *World Revolution*, p. 20, c. 1971

Thus, said Pius XI: **Russia [was considered] the best-prepared field for experimenting with a plan elaborated decades ago, and who from there continue to spread it from one end of the world to the other.** (Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris*, n. 24)

So dangerous were the sophistries of practical atheism, materialism, evolutionism, rationalism, Marxism, etc. that eight popes in seventeen official documents condemned speculative Freemasonry, with over two hundred papal condemnations issued by the Church either formally or informally in less than three hundred years. And not only the Magisterium, but Heaven itself intervened in spectacular fashion with apocalyptic messages to warn of Russia’s philosophic errors. Here is, for example, what Our Lady said at Fatima, Portugal, in 1917:

**God... is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred;**



*The Kremlin and Saint Basil's Cathedral in Moscow*

**the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world. (...)**

## Russia: A pivotal moment?

As you read above, Our Lady’s triumph would hinge upon the conversion of Russia, particularly through its Consecration to her Immaculate Heart through the decisive intervention of the Holy Father. There were several attempts made throughout the decades but never quite according to Our Lady’s requests, according to intense debate among theologians. Then, in March 25th, 2022, Pope Francis, in union with the bishops of the world, made this Consecration:

**“Therefore, Mother of God and our Mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine.”**

So, is Russia in a process of conversion? Many would argue yes... But clearly, this is an unfinished process particularly as Russia has become an instrument of war, not peace. An instrument, perhaps, of chastisement...

## Putin: An indictment

Again, the great irony is that Russia appears to be aligned now against the forces that are replicating the very errors her Communism had spread throughout the world. In a recent speech.<sup>2</sup> Russian President Vlad-

1 [www.markmallett.com/blog/russia-instrument-of-purification/](http://www.markmallett.com/blog/russia-instrument-of-purification/)

2 [www.miragenews.com/full-text-of-putins-speech-at-annexation-866383/](http://www.miragenews.com/full-text-of-putins-speech-at-annexation-866383/)

imir Putin has essentially declared war on globalism. But before we get into his address, a few caveats... While I wholeheartedly agree with many things Putin says in this speech, I am in no way canonizing the man nor applauding his actions. Simply put, we are in a time of chastisement; the world is beginning to reap the whirlwind it has sown.

And just as God used imperfect and pagan vessels to purify Israel, so too, it appears so again. Here, we speak of the permissive will of God; for His active will is that mankind would simply return to Him without the necessity of chastisement.

**My will wants to Triumph, and would want to Triumph by means of Love in order to Establish Its Kingdom. But man does not want to come to meet this Love, therefore, it is necessary to use Justice.**

—Jesus to Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta; Nov. 16th, 1926 (...)

### The speech

After delving into a bit of the historical divide between the USSR and the West, Putin then turns his sites on “Western elites” (*MICHAEL’s note: when he talks about the West or Western elites, one must understand he actually targets, the International Bankers*):

**“The West is ready to step over everything in order to preserve the neo-colonial system that allows it to parasitize, in fact, to plunder the world at the expense of the power of the dollar and technological dictates, to collect real tribute from humanity, to extract the main source of unearned prosperity, the rent [ie. tax] of the hegemon. The maintenance of this rent is their key, genuine and absolutely self-serving motive..” (...)**

Surprisingly, Putin’s condemnation is really a confirmation of the Masonic intentions for America from the very first moments of its founding:

**“Unless you understand the influence of the occult [ie. Masonic, Illuminati] societies and the development of America, on the establishment of America, on the course of America, why, you get completely lost studying our history... America would be used to lead the world into the philosophic empire. You understand that America was founded by Christians as a Christian nation. However, there were always those people on the other side who wanted to use America, abuse our military power and our financial power...”** —The New Atlantis: Secret Mysteries of America’s Beginnings (video); interview Dr. Stanley Monteith

Who are these people who are “abusing” America’s military and financial power? It has long been known that the world’s wealthiest banking families, who are part of these “secret societies”, have been pulling the strings of war and finance for centuries. Of them, Pope Benedict XVI warned:

**“We think of the great powers of the present day, of the anonymous financial interests which turn men**

**into slaves, which are no longer human things, but are an anonymous power which men serve, by which men are tormented and even slaughtered. They [i.e., anonymous financial interests] are a destructive power, a power that menaces the world.”** —Pope Benedict XVI, Reflection after the reading of the office for the Third Hour this morning in the Synod Aula, Vatican City, October 11, 2010 (...)

As Putin rightly observes: Now they have completely moved to a radical denial of moral norms, religion, and family. He then asks his fellow citizens:

**“Do we want to have, here, in our country, in Russia, parent number one, number two, number three instead of mom and dad — have they gone mad out there? Do we really want perversions that lead to degradation and extinction to be imposed on children in our schools from the primary grades? To be drummed into them that there are various supposed genders besides women and men, and to be offered a sex change operation?**

**“Do we want all this for our country and our children? For us, all this is unacceptable, we have a different future, our own future. I repeat, the dictatorship of the Western elites is directed against all societies, including the peoples of the Western countries themselves. This is a challenge for everyone. Such a complete denial of man, the overthrow of faith and traditional values, the suppression of freedom acquiring the features of a “reverse religion” — outright Satanism.” (...)**

In fact, this is nothing new from Putin, who said much the same thing nine years earlier in a similar condemnation of Western ideological colonization.

**“We see many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilization. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan... And people are aggressively trying to export this model all over the world. I am convinced that this opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis. What else but the loss of the ability to self-reproduce could act as the greatest testimony of the moral crisis facing a human society?”** —President Vladimir Putin, speech to the final plenary meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, Sept. 19th, 2013. (...)

And so, one is left wondering: is Russia and/or her allies going to be the instrument of chastisement for the West? Several recent prophecies speak of the coming aggression of Russia. Whether they feel forced to act or whether it is nationalist ambition is the debate of the hour. ❖

**Mark Mallett**

# Happiness According to Saint Thomas Aquinas



Isolde Cambournac

*Below is a translation of a video in French, in which the Catholic website aleteia.org interviews Isolde Cambournac, Doctor of Theology and passionate scholar of Saint Thomas Aquinas. She is the author of the book *Heureux comme Dieu, le bonheur selon saint Thomas d'Aquin (Happy as God: Happiness According to Saint Thomas Aquinas).**

## Can anyone be happy?

One thing is certain: we all desire happiness. No one wishes to be unhappy, and it is impossible not to want happiness. However, we do not all define happiness in the same way. For some, it is success; for others, it is family or wealth. According to Saint Thomas, if we recognize God as the ultimate source of our happiness—what we truly long for in the depths of our being—we can experience happiness in all circumstances.

## What is happiness according to Saint Thomas Aquinas?

For Saint Thomas Aquinas, happiness consists in possessing the highest good. From an objective standpoint, for a believer, the highest good is found in God, the source of all goodness.

But how do we grasp or possess God? Saint Thomas explains that through our intellect, we can comprehend God by seeing and contemplating Him. This leads to two key insights:

1. Happiness is not a passive state. It is an active experience—the act of seeing and contemplating God.
2. Happiness and joy are not the same. Happiness, for Saint Thomas, is first and foremost the vision of God. Joy naturally follows from this vision.

## How can we «see» God?

At first glance, seeing God may seem unattainable. However, in this earthly life, we can perceive traces of God's presence. We can experience His goodness through creation. Just as an artist leaves an imprint on their work, the Creator leaves His

mark on His creatures. By observing and admiring creation, we can be led back to the Creator.

God can also be encountered through prayer. Prayer is a preparation for contemplation; it is a school of desire. It teaches us to long for the highest good—God Himself. Through prayer, our hearts gradually learn to desire the goodness that God wishes to give us.

## How do we know when we're pursuing happiness in the wrong way?

Sometimes, we seek ultimate fulfillment in the wrong places. We pursue happiness in things that are indeed good—such as family, success, or wealth—but these are finite and cannot fully satisfy us. According to Saint Thomas, these are not bad things in themselves, but they are limited, and sooner or later, they will leave us wanting more.

Disappointment often arises when we expect something to bring lasting fulfillment, only to realize that it falls short. For example, imagine it is a cold January day, and you long to sit by the fire. At first, the warmth is comforting, but after a while, you start to feel too hot. This discomfort is a reminder that no earthly pleasure is completely satisfying.

True happiness—the kind we deeply long for—comes from being in the presence of a good that fulfills us completely, without limitation. Only God can provide this. Through our small disappointments, our desire for happiness is elevated, and faith allows us to glimpse the ultimate good that alone can satisfy us.

## Can we experience complete happiness in this life?

Perfect happiness, or complete beatitude, is not attainable in this life. We all instinctively know this; if it were possible, we would have already achieved it. However, Saint Thomas teaches that we can experience imperfect beatitude—meaning we can already taste something of God's goodness.

While we can find joy in the small pleasures of everyday life, perfect happiness is only possible in the next life, when we will see God face to face. ❖

*Isolde Cambournac*



*Saint Thomas Aquinas*



# Saint Thomas Aquinas

## Apostle of the truth

*In 2025, we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest theologians of all time—and undoubtedly one of the greatest geniuses in history—Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), a Dominican friar. The Dominicans also commemorated the 700th anniversary of his canonization in 2023 and the 750th anniversary of his death in 2024, forming three consecutive jubilee years.*

*Throughout his life, Saint Thomas was a seeker of God. At the age of six, he posed the following question to the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino: “What is God?” The rest of his life was dedicated to seeking the answer to this question. His most famous work, the *Summa Theologica*, systematically and clearly summarizes the teachings of the Church, harmonizing faith and reason—two elements that, according to Saint John Paul II, cannot contradict each other, as they form the “two wings of truth.” It was also John Paul II who referred to Saint Thomas Aquinas as the “Apostle of Truth.” The Thomistic method remains a model of reasoning for all scholars today.*

*Below is a summary of the life of this extraordinary saint, as published in the March 2017 spiritual letter of Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey ([www.clairval.com](http://www.clairval.com)).*

**by Dom Antoine-Marie, osb**

Around 1244, in the castle of Roccasecca in Campania, at the time part of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Lady Theodora was worried. A servant had informed her that her son Thomas, then a student at the Imperial Academy in Naples, had just taken the black and white habit of a new community of mendicants that had recently been founded. This son was supposed to become the Lord Abbot of Monte Cassino, and here he was begging for his bread in the streets like a pauper. He was bringing shame upon the entire family as well as himself! Consumed with these thoughts, the countess took off at the head of an escort for Naples at full gallop to bring him back to his duty. In vain! He had already left the city... This prodigal son, who seemed a threat to the Aquinas family's good name, would instead be its glory, for his holiness and knowledge would illumine the universal Church up to the present day.

Saint Thomas Aquinas Thomas was born around 1225, the last child of Count Landolph of Aquinas, related to the imperial Hohenstaufen family, and Theodora of Theate, of Norman descent. The noble Aquinas

*Left: Saint Thomas Aquinas, by Carlo Crivelli, an Italian Renaissance painter.*

family were vassals of Emperor Frederick II, who had been crowned by Pope Innocent III. Raynaldo and Landolph, the elder sons, would be imperial officers until the Hohenstaufen were deposed by Innocent IV in 1245. Both would die in defense of the papacy.

The count set his heart on his youngest son assuming the honorable position of Abbot of Monte Cassino. So he entrusted him to the Benedictine monastery as an oblate at the age of five, to receive a first-class education at the abbey. Perhaps in doing so, Landolph wished to express his repentance, for several years earlier he had taken part in the monastery's destruction, under order of the Emperor. Thomas was awestruck at the monks' lifestyle. Everything left a profound impression on him—the calm, the silent prayer, the study, the divine office that always began with: *Deus, in adiutorium meum intende* (God, come to my assistance!). A question formed in the child's mind: what is God?



*The monastery of Monte Cassino*

### Pass on to others

But once again, Frederick II threatened Monte Cassino. So fifteen-year-old Thomas was sent away to study in Naples. There he met some poor monks, learned and pious, members of the Order of Preachers, which had continued to grow since their founding by Dominic de Guzmán in 1216. Won over by the evangelical poverty of this Order and by its ideal of passing on to others the fruits of contemplation (“*contemplata aliis tradere*”), Thomas asked to take the habit. He was twenty years old. His rectitude and the firmness of his will, as well as his penetrating intelligence and his accurate, reliable memory led them to make an exception in his case, and the Order agreed to admit him.

His superiors, foreseeing a fierce reaction from his family, sent him to Rome. Seeking to retrieve her son, Lady Theodora requested an audience with the

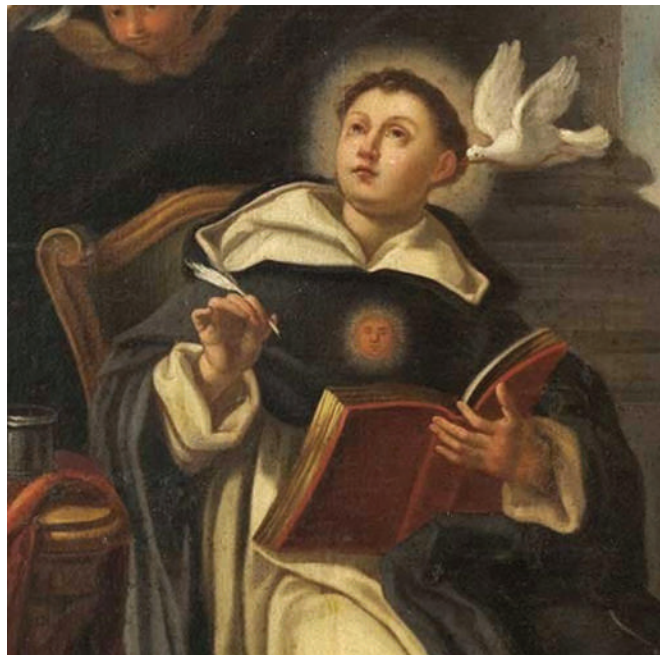
► Pope. The Supreme Pontiff tried in vain to dissuade her from this plan. She then turned to her two eldest sons, ordering them to bring her back their brother. Soon Raynaldo and Landulf, having tracked down their brother, tried to rip his habit off his back. But they were unable to, owing to his height and imposing stature. They then threw him on a horse that left immediately for the Castle of Monte San Giovanni, a veritable eagle's nest that belonged to the Aquinas family. Secluded, but well-treated, Thomas by turns endured flattery, threats, and promises from his mother, and then from his three sisters, who brought him his meals with the mission of distracting him and convincing him to abandon his unthinkable plan.

Not drawing the line at anything, the two brothers sent a prostitute to the imprisoned novice's room one night. Thomas got out of bed, seized a burning log in the fireplace, and with a solemn expression, marched resolutely toward the poor girl who ran away terrified. On the door that he had just shut, Thomas traced a large sign of the cross with the firebrand that he then calmly placed back in the fireplace. According to tradition, that very night he received assurance of his perpetual chastity. From that time on, Thomas' imprisonment became less strict. His sisters, who loved him dearly, brought him a Bible—he would learn it by heart—and several books of theology and philosophy. Marotta, the eldest, would become a Benedictine nun, then abbess of the Monastery of Santa Maria in Capua. Adelasia and Theodora would lead holy lives in marriage. Thanks to them, Thomas regained contact with the Dominicans and, eventually, escaped after more than a year in captivity.

### The "dumb ox"

Around 1245, Thomas went with the Master of the Order, Johannes Teutonicus, to Paris to follow Saint Albert the Great's theology lectures. In 1248, he went to Cologne, where he would be ordained a priest. Before long, the young boisterous students had made Thomas, their sober and studious fellow student, the target of their jests. They nicknamed him "the big dumb ox." Nevertheless, the young Dominican was not without a retort. One day, the others called to him at the window saying, "Look, Brother Thomas, a flying ox!" And all roared with laughter when he had the naiveté to come see it. The retort was stinging: "It seems to me more likely to see an ox fly than monks lie!" A fellow student offered to help this "dumb ox" understand a class that had just been given, but he himself ended up muddled in his explanations. Thomas then gently picked up where his impromptu teacher had left off, identified the error, and took up the question again with clarity, opening new perspectives to his fellow student. The latter, confused but admiring, immediately asked that Thomas repeat the explanation for his benefit. Little by little, Thomas' reputation spread. Thomas was

kind and agreeable towards everyone, even though he often seemed lost in his thoughts. One day Master Albert prophesied, from the height of his pulpit: "You call him the dumb ox, but I tell you one day the bellow of his teaching will shake the world." And he asked Brother Thomas to expound upon a subtle point in the book *The Divine Names* by Dionysius the Areopagite. Having prepared himself with prayer, the brother gave a brilliant lecture. "You speak more like a master teaching," Albert told him, "than a student being examined." "I really do not see how to present it any other way," the student modestly excused himself.



*Saint Thomas inspired by the Holy Spirit*

In 1252, Thomas was, in spite of his youth, proposed to become a master at the University of Paris. After providing commentary on the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, he explicated the *Books of Sentences* by Peter Lombard (a theologian who had been the Bishop of Paris from 1159 to 1160), the fundamental theological manual in universities during the Middle Ages. He became the regent master at the College of Saint James in 1256. Thomas, who was not the required thirty-five years old, tried to turn down the honor that was being bestowed on him on the basis of his age, but the rector obtained a formal order from the Dominican hierarchy and the monk humbly accepted. Not having a topic for his inaugural homily, he spent the night in prayer. A venerable unknown Dominican appeared before him and told him to preach on verse 13 of Psalm 103 [104]: *Rigans montes de superioribus suis...* From Thy lofty abode Thou waterest the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Thy work.

Thomas commented on this verse, explaining that the wisdom of a master in theology can come

only from God, Who conveys it through intermediaries: "Assuredly," he said, "no one could pretend to possess in himself and by his own means sufficient ability to fulfill such a ministry. But one may hope for this ability from God: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor. 3:5). But to obtain it from God, one must ask Him for it: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, Who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him (Jas. 1:5). Let us pray to Christ that He might deign to grant it to us. Amen."

### Bringing the truth into the light

The task of the master in theology is first to comment on Holy Scripture, then to discuss difficult questions so as to shed light on them, and lastly to preach before the people and the assembled university. In nearly all of his works, Saint Thomas used the scholastic method: a complete and systematic presentation of each problem, considering all the diverse opinions. The truth is brought into the light and stripped of the errors that obscure it. In addition to lectures on particular themes, developed through exchanges between a master and his students, public talks were also organized where anyone could ask questions on any subject. These sessions were formidable because competing masters often tried to make difficulties for the speaker.

Thomas Aquinas' literary fecundity is impressive. In addition to his courses and homilies, he wrote many other works at the request of brothers, bishops, even the Pope, or simply for personal study. The saint's organization and lucidity of thought, combined with an uncommon ability to concentrate, allowed him at times to dictate four very different works to four secretaries simultaneously. Far from priding himself on his abilities, Thomas placed them in the service of knowledge of God and His plan for creation.

**For him, the whole purpose of theology lies in the question of eternal salvation, the ultimate end of man's life. Theology includes the vision of God in eternity, which is totally beyond the natural abilities of man. Man is therefore dependent upon a light higher than that of simple human reason—he needs divine light to discover the way that leads to the ultimate goal, and also to better know the truth of the things of this world. Revealed doctrine that gives us this light and informs us on the vital and decisive question for our lives, eternal salvation, is more important than any other human knowledge. It is called theology, literally the knowledge of divine things.**

It was not long before an open persecution by secular masters at the university disturbed Thomas' studious activity. William of Saint-Amour and Siger of Brabant published a libelous attack on the men-

dicant Orders (Dominicans and Franciscans), called such because their members depended on the generosity of the faithful for their sustenance, as all their time was consumed in the study and teaching of the sacred sciences. Jealousy lay behind this attack against the religious whose reputation for learning was only growing. Thomas endured these power hungry men, who were hindering his professorial career, with humility and gentleness. But the day came when the legitimacy of the Dominican Order and its right to teach were challenged before the Pope.



*Saint Thomas Aquinas, by Francisco de Zurbarán*

Thomas was then directed by his superiors to defend them. After praying at length, he analyzed the "Tract on the Dangers of the Last Days" by William of Saint-Amour, a work not without malice, duplicity, and perfidiousness, and published his response in the *Contra impugnantes* ("Refutation of those who attack the worship owed to God and the religious life"). He first showed that teaching theology is a work of mercy because it shows man the way to eternal salvation, and thus can serve as the foundational purpose of a religious Order. He then defended the legitimacy of it being a mendicant order, which allows its members to more closely follow Christ. In the end, William was condemned by the Pope and banned from the university. Without ever deviating from the truth, Thomas always retained a great courtesy and perfect self-control toward his contradictors. He even remained grateful to them, because he believed "there is no better means to reveal the truth and hold error in check than to argue with those who are not in agreement with you." ▶

## ▶ A saint described by a saint

Saint Thomas was officially admitted into the body of masters at the University of Paris in 1257, along with Saint Bonaventure, his Franciscan colleague and friend. The two saints thought very highly of one another. Once when Thomas made a visit to Bonaventure he found him in an ecstasy, absorbed in writing the life of Saint Francis. Immediately taking his leave, he murmured to a friar he came across: "Let us leave a saint to write the life of a saint!"

In the difficulties he encountered, Thomas turned to prayer. He composed numerous prayers asking for God's light in his intellectual work, and always began by imploring the Spirit of God before setting to work. His confrere, collaborator, and confidant, Reginald of Piperno, related that after having fasted and prayed several days in the face of a difficulty in explicating a passage from the Prophet Isaiah, Thomas received the solution during an apparition of Saints Peter and Paul. He then dictated his commentary with the same ease as if he were reading it from a book.

It regularly happened that Thomas would apply himself so intensely to the truths he was seeking or contemplating that he seemed oblivious to the realities around him. For this reason, Brother Reginald was assigned to take care of Thomas' material life. One day Thomas was returning from Saint-Denis in Paris with some students. The group was admiring the capital of the kingdom of France with its recently completed marvelous Gothic cathedral. "What would you do," one of them asked the master, "if the king gave you control of this beautiful city?" After a moment of silence, he replied, "I would rather have at my disposal the manuscript of Saint John Chrysostom on the Gospel of Saint Matthew!"

During this period in which he lived in Paris, Thomas began writing his first theological synthesis, *Contra Gentiles* ("Against the Pagans"). The work presents Catholic dogma to non-Christians in an apologetic manner, and remains today a reference for dialogue with them. The absence of a common reference point in Holy Scripture, as is the case with Jews and Christians, makes argument more difficult, affirmed Thomas. With non-believers, one must use only reason, with which all men and women are endowed.

Benedict XVI similarly pointed out: "In the Christian moral perspective, there is a place for reason which is capable of discerning natural moral law. Reason can recognize this by considering what it is good to do and what it is good to avoid in order to achieve that felicity which everyone has at heart, which also implies a responsibility towards others

and, therefore, the search for the common good. In other words, the human, theological and moral virtues are rooted in human nature. Divine Grace accompanies, sustains and impels ethical commitment but, according to Saint Thomas, all human beings, believers and non-believers alike, are called to recognize the needs of human nature expressed in natural law and to draw inspiration from it in the formulation of positive laws, namely those issued by the civil and political authorities to regulate human coexistence" (Benedict XVI, audience of June 16, 2010).



*Fresco of Saint Thomas Aquinas on the dome of the Basilica of Saint Prosper in Reggio Emilia, Italy*

## Theology and poetry

In 1259, Thomas was sent to Italy, where he gave lectures in monasteries and universities, all the while continuing his intense writing activity. He was in Orvieto, Anagni, Viterbo, and Rome. In 1263, at the request of Pope Urban IV, he composed the splendid office for the Feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament, which includes texts for the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. It is still used today in the Roman liturgy. In it is found the *Lauda Sion* sequence, in which the saint sets forth, with equal poetry and precision, the main points of the theology of the Eucharist. The office of Vespers contains the hymn *Pange lingua*, the last two stanzas of which make up the *Tantum ergo* sung during the Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Thomas also undertook the explanation of treatises by Aristotle that had recently been translated by a brother. For him it was a matter of making known again the truths discovered by this Greek philosopher of the 4th century before Jesus Christ, and to leave to posterity tools he deemed indispensable for the formulation of good theology. "Showing this independence of philosophy and theology and,



at the same time, their reciprocal relationality was the historic mission of the great teacher," explained Pope Benedict XVI. "And thus it can be understood that in the 19th century, when the incompatibility of modern reason and faith was strongly declared, Pope Leo XIII pointed to Saint Thomas as a guide in the dialogue between them. In his theological work, Saint Thomas supposes and concretizes this relationality. Faith consolidates, integrates and illumines the heritage of truth that human reason acquires. The trust with which Saint Thomas endows these two instruments of knowledge—faith and reason—may be traced back to the conviction that both stem from the one source of all truth, the divine Logos (the "Word" of God), which is active in both contexts, that of Creation and that of redemption" (*ibid.*).

### 2669 articles

In 1265, Saint Thomas began to write the *Summa Theologica*, a monumental work of 2669 articles, which achieves an authoritative synthesis of theological science based on sound realist philosophy. Drawing on Saint Thomas, Benedict XVI declares, "with the Revelation God Himself spoke to us and therefore authorized us to speak of Him. I consider it important to recall this doctrine. In fact, it helps us get the better of certain objections of contemporary atheism which denies that religious language is provided with an objective meaning and instead maintains that it has solely a subjective or merely emotional value. This objection derives from the fact

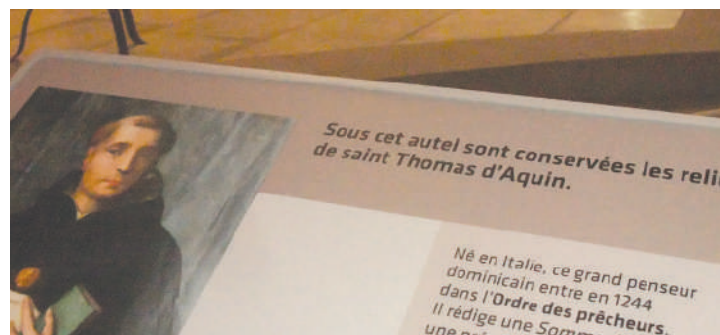
that positivist thought (doctrine that proclaims only facts, scientific experience) is convinced that man does not know being but solely the functions of reality that can be experienced. With Saint Thomas and with the great philosophical tradition we are convinced that, in reality, man does not only know the functions, the object of the natural sciences, but also knows something of being itself, for example, he knows the person, the You of the other, and not only the physical and biological aspect of his being" (*ibid.*).



Between 1269 and 1272, Thomas took up his second regency at the University of Paris. He successfully confronted the final attacks by secular masters against mendicant religious. Friar Thomas was then sent to Naples to establish a new house of studies. There, some witnesses surprised him at the church, and saw him elevated above the ground. A voice came from the crucifix saying: "You have written well of Me, Thomas, what do you want in return?" The response burst forth straight from the saint's heart: "You alone, Lord!"

On December 6, 1273, following a mystical grace, Thomas decided, out of humility, to stop writing and teaching. The Pope nevertheless sent him to the second ecumenical council in Lyons. On the way, Thomas fell ill and was taken to the Cistercian abbey in Fossanova where, at the monks' request, he gave one more commentary on the Song of Songs. When Reginald congratulated him on his writings, Thomas replied, "*Videtur mihi*

*Alain Pilote, editor of MICHAEL, standing before the relics of Saint Thomas Aquinas in the former Dominican convent in Toulouse, southern France. Although Saint Thomas died on March 7, his liturgical feast is celebrated on January 28, the anniversary of the transfer of his remains from the Fossanova Monastery in Italy to Toulouse in 1368.*



ut palea—After the heavenly realities I have contemplated, they seem to me so much straw!” At the moment of receiving Viaticum, he exclaimed, “I receive You in Holy Communion, O infinite price of the redemption of my soul; O You for the love of Whom I studied, watched, and toiled; O You Whom I have preached and taught! I have never willfully said anything against Your truth, nor am I obstinate in my own thoughts. If then it has come about that I have committed some error towards this sacrament, I abandon everything to the correction of the Holy Roman Church, in obedience to which I now leave this life.” Thomas Aquinas died on March 7, 1274.

If Saint Thomas wrote and taught so much, it was to communicate to others the fruits of his contemplation, and to encourage them in the most beautiful undertaking the human heart is capable of—the search for God. ❖

**Dom Antoine-Marie, osb**

*This article is reprinted with permission from the Abbey of Clairval, France, which every month publishes a spiritual newsletter on the life of a saint, in English, French, Italian, or Dutch. Their postal address is Dom Antoine Marie, Abbe, Abbaye Saint-Joseph de Clairval 21150 Flavigny sur Ozerain, France. The website is <http://www.clairval.com>*

## St. Thomas Aquinas' advice on how to grow in virtue

*Here is a text that was recently posted on the excellent Catholic website [aleteia.org](http://aleteia.org)<sup>1</sup>*

*The Angelic Doctor shows how every virtue is fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and why we should look to him for help.*

Growing in virtue can be difficult, especially if we are trying to be virtuous through our own efforts.

Often we will start out on a good note, progressing in virtue in little ways, but then we will fall and wonder where we went wrong.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, the key is to not try and become virtuous through our strength, but by the strength we receive from gazing at the crucified Jesus.

### Virtue on the cross

The Office of Readings provides an excerpt from a conference St. Thomas Aquinas gave on virtue. In it, he explains that if we want to grow in virtue, we need to look to the cross:

Whoever wishes to live perfectly should do nothing but disdain what Christ disdained on the cross and desire what he desired, for the cross exemplifies every virtue.

St. Thomas Aquinas then goes on to list some of the virtues and how they are found in Christ's crucifixion:

If you seek the example of love: “Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends.” Such a man was Christ on the cross. And if he gave his life for us, then it should not be difficult to bear whatever hardships arise for his sake.

If you seek an example of humility, look upon the crucified one, for God wished to be judged by Pontius Pilate and to die.

If you seek an example of obedience, follow him who became obedient to the Father even unto death. For just as by the disobedience of one man, namely, Adam, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man, many were made righteous.

**The key, for St. Thomas Aquinas, is to not attempt virtue based on our own strength, but only through the strength we receive from the cross of Jesus Christ.**

Virtue is difficult to attain and we should never try to lead a holy life through our own efforts alone. ❖



*“You have written well of Me, Thomas, what do you want in return?” — “You alone, Lord!”*

<sup>1</sup> <https://aleteia.org/2025/01/27/st-thomas-aquinas-advice-on-how-to-grow-in-virtue>

**Philip Kosloski**

# In prayer with Jesus on the Way of the Cross

In the previous article, Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us that the key to becoming virtuous is to contemplate the crucified Jesus. As we enter this Lenten season leading up to Holy Week and the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, we find it fitting to publish extensive excerpts from the meditation Pope Francis composed for the 14 Stations of the Cross on Good Friday in Rome in 2024. Let us meditate on them as well, for our spiritual benefit.

by Pope Francis



## 1. Jesus is condemned to death

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer... Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed (Mk 14:60-61; 15:4-5).-5).

Jesus, you are life itself, and now you are sentenced to death. You are truth itself, and now you are falsely put on trial. Why don't you protest?... Your reaction troubles us, Jesus: at the decisive moment, you choose not to speak; you remain silent. Because the more potent evil is, the more radical is your response. And that response is silence..

Yet that silence is itself pregnant: it is prayer, meekness, forgiveness; it is a means of redeeming evil, a means of converting your passion into a sacrificial gift... Jesus, I find your silence troubling. It makes me realize that prayer is not about lips that move, but a heart that listens, for to pray is to become open to your word, and to adore your presence.

Let us pray together and say: *Speak to my heart, Jesus*

You, who respond to evil with good, *speak to my heart, Jesus*

You, who calm rage with meekness, *speak to my heart, Jesus*

You, who detest gossip and complaints, *speak to my heart...*

You, who peer into the depths of my heart, *speak to my heart...*



## 2. Jesus carries his cross

He bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Pet 2:24).

Jesus, we too have our crosses to bear. At times, they are heavy indeed: illness, an accident, the death of a dear one, disappointment in love, a child gone astray, a lost job, a hurt that will not heal, a failed project, the frustration of yet another hope...

Jesus, how do I pray in those situations? What am I to do when I

feel crushed by life, heavy of heart, under pressure and lacking the strength to go on? Your answer is an invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

"Come to me". Yet I take refuge in myself: I brood, I nurse my griefs, I wallow in negativity. Come to me. Saying this was not enough; you came to us and you took our cross upon your shoulders to lighten its weight. You want us to lay upon your shoulders all our problems and needs, because you want us to find freedom and love in you. Thank you, Jesus. I unite my cross to yours, I bring you my weariness and my cares, I cast upon you every burden of my heart.

Let us pray together and say: *I come to you, Lord*

With the story of my life, *I come to you, Lord*

With all my cares, *I come...*

With all my frailty and shortcomings, *I come to you...*

With all my fears, *I come...*

With complete trust in your love for me, *I come to you, Lord*



## 3. Jesus falls the first time

A Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (Jn 12:24).

Jesus, you have fallen. What are you thinking, how are you praying, prostrate in the dust? Above all, what gives you the strength to pick yourself up again?... The Father's love for you and your love for us: that love is the force that makes you get up and go forward. For those who love do not stay down but start over again; those who love do not tire, but keep going; those who love take wing and fly.

Jesus, I keep asking you for many things, but there is only one thing that I need, and that is the ability to love. I will fall often in life, but with your love, I will be able to pick myself up and go forward, even as you did. For you know what it means to fall. Your life was a constant descent for our sake: from God to man, from man to slave, from slave to crucifixion and the tomb... You, who raise us from the dust and give us new hope, grant me the strength to love and to begin anew.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew*

When I am overcome by disappointment, *Jesus, give me...*

When I am weighed down by the judgements of others, *Jesus, give me the strength...*

When things go wrong and I lose my patience, *Jesus, give me ...*

When I feel that I cannot go on, *Jesus, give me the strength...*

When I fear that nothing will ever change, *Jesus, give me...*

#### 4. Jesus meets his Mother

**When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (Jn 19:26-27).**

Jesus, your disciples abandoned you, Judas betrayed you and Peter denied you. You are left alone with your cross. Yet your Mother is there for you. She needs no words, it is enough to look into her eyes that understand and share in your suffering...



From the cross, you give us your own Mother. Here is your Mother, you say to your disciple and to each of us. After the gift of the Eucharist, you gave us Mary as your final, parting gift...

Mary, stop me from rushing. Help me to recall and cherish the graces I have received, to remember God's forgiveness and his blessings, to revive my first love, to savour anew the wonders of his providence, and to shed tears of gratitude.

Let us pray together and say: *Lord, renew in me the memory of your love*

When the wounds of the past are re-opened, *Lord, renew...*

When I lose my sense of reality, *Lord, renew in me...*

When I take for granted all the gifts I have received, *Lord, renew...*

When I lose sight of the gift that I am, *Lord, renew in me...*

When I neglect to give you thanks, *Lord, renew in me...*

#### 5. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene

**As the soldiers led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus (Lk 23:26). 26).**

Jesus, how often in the face of life's challenges we think that we can go it alone! How hard we find

it to ask for help, lest we give the impression that we are not up to the task! What pains we take to put ourselves in the best light, to put on a good show! It is not easy to trust others, and even less to depend on them.



Yet those who pray know their needs, and you, Jesus, in your own prayer, knew what it meant to entrust yourself completely. So you did not refuse the help offered by the man from Cyrene. You allowed this simple man, a farmer returning from the fields, to witness your weakness. Thank you, Jesus, because, by letting yourself be helped in your need, you have shown us the image of a God who is not distant and untouchable. In your vulnerability, you have shown us the triumph of your love. You have taught us that to love means to reach out to those who may be ashamed to ask for our help...

Jesus, grant that my life too may change. Help me lower my defenses and allow you to love me in those places where I have fallen most grievously. Let us pray together and say: *Heal me, Jesus*

From the presumption of self-sufficiency, *Heal me, Jesus*

From thinking that I can do without you or anyone else, *Heal...*

From my reluctance to entrust my frailty to you, *Heal me, Jesus*

From hurrying past the needy whom I encounter on my way, *Heal me, Jesus*



## 6. Jesus is comforted by Veronica, who wipes his face

**Blessed be God, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction... For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ (2 Cor 1:3-5). 3-5)**

Jesus, crowds of people witness the brutal spectacle of your execution. Without knowing you or knowing the truth, they make judgements, they cast aspersions, they mock you and condemn you. The same thing happens even now, Lord, without the need for a gruesome parade: all it takes is a keyboard to spew insults and condemnation.

Yet amid the roar of the crowd, a woman makes her way to Jesus. She says nothing; she acts. She does not rant and rail; she shows mercy and compassion. She goes against the tide: alone, with the courage of compassion and love, she finds a way to pass among the soldiers, merely to give you the comfort of a caress. Her gesture of mercy will be remembered for all time.

Jesus, how often I ask you to be consoled! Veronica reminds me that you too want to be consoled. You, the God who draws near to us, ask us to draw near to you. You, my comfort, desire to be comforted by

me. Jesus, Love unrequited, today too you look among the crowd for hearts sensitive to your suffering and pain. You seek true worshippers, those who adore in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23), and abide in you (cf. Jn 15). Jesus, Love forsaken, awaken in me the desire to remain in your presence, to adore you and to console you. Grant that, in your name, I may be a source of consolation for others. Let us pray together and say: *Make me a witness of your consolation*

God of mercy, ever close to the heartbroken, *Make me a witness...*

God of tender love, who take pity on us, *Make me a witness...*

God of compassion, who detest apathy and indifference, *Make me...*

You, who came not to condemn but to save, *Make me...*



## 7. Jesus falls again beneath the weight of the cross

**[The younger son] came to himself and said... "I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned' ... So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said... "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Lk 15:17-18.20-22.24).**

Jesus, the cross is heavy: it bears all the weight of disappointment, failure and humiliation... And it only gets worse. Every time I fall back into my sins and faults, I hit rock bottom: I am critical of others and then realize that I am no different.

There is nothing worse than self-remorse and the overwhelming sense of guilt. Jesus, you fell again and again beneath the weight of the cross, and so you are at my side whenever I stumble and fall. With you, hope always springs anew; after every fall, I can get up again. When I stumble, you do not give up on me but draw even closer. Thank you, because I fall so often, yet you never cease to forgive me.

Keep reminding me that every fall can become a crucial step on my journey, since it helps me to realize the one thing that matters: my need for you. Jesus, plant in my heart the firm realization that I truly rise only when you lift me up, when you set me free from my sins. For life begins anew not from my resolutions, but from your forgiveness.

Let us pray together and say: *Raise me up, Jesus*

When I am disheartened, dismayed and discouraged, *Raise me...*

When I recognize my failings and feel worthless, *Raise me...*

When I feel overwhelmed by feelings of shame and inadequacy, *Raise me up, Jesus*

When I am tempted to lose hope, *Raise me up, Jesus*

When I forget that my strength lies in your forgiveness, *Raise me...*

## 8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

**A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him (Lk 23:27).**

Jesus, who remains with you to the end along the way of the cross? Not the powerful, who wait for you on Calvary, nor the onlookers standing at a distance, but those ordinary people who are great in your eyes, yet small in the eyes of the world.



Jesus, the women you encounter beat their breasts and weep for you. They do not weep for themselves, but for you; they weep for the evil and sin of the world. Their tearful prayers touch your heart. Is my own prayer capable of tears? Am I moved as I gaze upon you, crucified for my sake, and contemplate your gentle, wounded love? When I am faced with the tragedies of today's world, is my heart frozen or does it melt?...

Jesus, you wept over Jerusalem; you weep over the hardness of our hearts. Touch my heart; add tears to my prayer and prayer to my tears. Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, melt my hardened heart*

You know the secrets of every heart, *Jesus, melt my hardened...*

You are grieved by the hardness of our hearts, *Jesus, melt...*

You love hearts that are humble and contrite, *Jesus, melt my...*

You dried Peter's tears by your forgiveness, *Jesus, melt my...*

You turn our mourning into song, *Jesus, melt my...*

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### 9. Jesus is stripped of his garments

**"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? "... And he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (Mt 25:37-40).**

Jesus, you spoke these words before your passion. Now I know why you insisted on identifying yourself with those in need. You too were imprisoned; you too were a stranger, led outside the city to be crucified. You too were naked, stripped of your clothes. You too were sick and wounded; on the cross, you too were thirsty and hungered for love. Teach me to see you in those who suffer, for you are there, and in those stripped of their dignity, demeaned by the arrogance, injustice and power of those who exploit the poor amid general indifference.

I look at you, Jesus, stripped of your garments, and I realize that you are asking me to strip myself of so many unnecessary things. Do I really love you in the poor, your wounded flesh? Do I pray for those stripped of their dignity? Or do I pray only for my own needs and garb myself in my own certainties?

Jesus, your truth lays me bare and forces me to focus on what really matters: on you, the crucified Lord, and our crucified brothers and

sisters. Grant that I may understand this now, lest I be found naked, bereft of love, when I stand before you on the last day. Let us pray together and say: *Strip me, Lord Jesus*

Of my attachment to appearances, *Strip me, Lord Jesus*

Of my armour of indifference, *Strip me, Lord Jesus*

Of my idea that helping others is not my job, *Strip me, Lord Jesus*

Of empty words and routine prayer, *Strip me, Lord Jesus*

Of the notion that life is good if it is good for me, *Strip me, Lord...*



### 10. Jesus is nailed to the cross

**When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:33-34).**

Jesus, they pierce your arms and legs with nails, tearing through your flesh; yet even now, when your physical pain is most excruciating, you utter the unthinkable prayer: you forgive the very ones who drive nails into your wrists. Nor is this the first time, for so many other times, as the Gospel tells us, you repeated: "Father, forgive...". With you, Jesus, I too can find courage to embrace the forgiveness that sets our hearts free and enables life to begin anew.

Jesus, let me pray not merely

for myself and for my dear ones, but also for those who do not love me and for those who hurt me. Let me pray, according to the intentions of your heart, for those who wander far from you. Let me make reparation for, and intercede for, all those who do not know you or the joy of experiencing your love and forgiveness.

Let us pray together and say: *Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world*

Through the sorrowful passion of Jesus, *Father, have mercy...*

Through the power of his wounds, *Father, have mercy...*

Through his forgiveness offered on the cross, *Father, have...*

For all those who forgive others out of love for you, *Father, have...*

By the prayers of all those who believe and hope in you, adore you and love you, *Father, have mercy...*



## 11. Jesus' cry of abandonment

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:45-46).

Jesus, this prayer of yours is unexpected: you cry out to the Father in your abandonment. You, the eternal Son, dispense no answers from on high, but simply ask why? At the height of your passion, you experience the distance of the Father; you no longer even call him "Father", but "God", almost as if you can no longer glimpse his face.

Why? So that you can plunge into the abyss of our pain. You did this for my sake, so that when I see only darkness, when I experience the collapse of my certainties and the wreckage of my life, I will no longer feel alone, but realize that you are there beside me. You, the God of closeness, experienced abandonment so that I need no longer fall prey to feelings of isolation and abandonment...

And in the plea of all those who are alone, rejected, oppressed or abandoned, I find you, my God. May I always recognize your presence and turn to you in love.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you*

In unborn and abandoned children, *Jesus, help me to...*

In young people who long for someone to hear their cry of pain, *Jesus, help me to recognize you...*

In the many elderly people left alone and forgotten, *Jesus, help...*

In prisoners and in the lonely, *Jesus, help me to recognize you...*

In those peoples most exploited and ignored, *Jesus, help me...*

## 12. Jesus dies, commending himself to the Father and the good thief to Paradise

[One of the criminals who were crucified with him] said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" ... Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last (Lk 23:42-43,46).

A criminal in Paradise! He entrusts himself to you, Jesus, and you entrust him, along with yourself, to the Father. God of the impossible, you turn a thief into a saint. And not only that: on Calvary you change the course of history. You turn the cross, the emblem of torture, into the very icon of love. You make the wall of death a bridge to life. You turn darkness into light,

division into fellowship, sorrow into dancing. You even turn the tomb, the last outpost of life, into a doorway of hope. All these reversals you bring about in union with us, and never without us.



Jesus, remember me! This heartfelt prayer was all it took to work a miracle in the life of that criminal. Such is the amazing power of prayer. At times, I may feel that my prayers go unheard, yet what is most important is to persevere, to persist, to keep saying to you: "Jesus, remember me!"

If you remember me, my evil will no longer be an endpoint but a new beginning. Remember me, Jesus, for to be remembered by you – as the Good Thief shows us – is to enter into paradise. Above all, remind me, Jesus, that my prayer can change the course of history.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, remember me*

When hope fades and disappointment reigns, *Jesus, remember me...*

When I am powerless to make a decision, *Jesus, remember me*

When I lose faith in myself and in others, *Jesus, remember me*

When I lose sight of the immensity of your love, *Jesus...*

When I think that all my prayers are fruitless, *Jesus, remember me*

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### **13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross and placed in the arms of Mary**

Simeon said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed... and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:33-35).

Mary, because you said "yes", the Word took flesh in your womb. Now his broken body lies on your lap. The child you once cradled in your arms is now a mangled corpse. Yet even now, in the depths of your grief, you demonstrate your complete self-abandonment. A sword has pierced your soul, yet in your prayer, you continue to say "yes" to God.

Steadfast in your faith, you believed that sorrow, experienced in love, bears saving fruit. That with God, suffering never has the final word. As you hold the lifeless body

of Jesus in your arms, you hear once more his last words to you: Behold your son. Mother, I am that son! Take me into your arms and tend my wounds. Help me to say "yes" to God, "yes" to love. Let us pray together and say: *Mary, take my hand*

When I indulge in recrimination and self-pity, *Mary, take my hand*

When I give up and succumb to my failings, *Mary, take my hand*

When I am weak and find it hard to say "yes" to God, *Mary, take...*

When I am indulgent with myself and unbending with others, *Mary, take my hand*

When I want the Church and the world to change, yet refuse to change myself, *Mary, take my hand*

### **14. Jesus is placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea**

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus... Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock (Mt 27:57-60).

You, Joseph of Arimathea, now take his body, without realizing that something incredible and wonderful would happen there, in the tomb you provided for Jesus when all seemed lost. Yet how true it is that every gift given to God receives an even greater reward.

As for me, what new gift will I give Jesus this Easter? A little more



time to spend with him? A little more love for others? My fears and my buried sorrows, which Christ is waiting for me to offer to him, as you did with your tomb? It will truly be Easter if only I give something of myself to the One who gave his life for me. For it is in giving that we receive, and we find our lives whenever we lose them, our possessions whenever we give them away.

Let us pray together and say: *Have mercy, Lord*

On me, so prone to take and so reluctant to give, *Have mercy, Lord*

On me, who find it so hard to surrender to your love, *Have mercy, Lord*

On us, so ready to use things but so slow to serve others, *Have mercy, Lord*

On our world, dotted with sepulchres of selfishness, *Have mercy, Lord.* ❖