

Pius XII, Pope, 1876-1958  
On modern technology and peace  
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1953 Christmas Message  
Of Pope Pius XII

*Discourse of His Holiness*  
Pope Pius XII Broadcast to the World,  
Dec. 24, 1953



NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

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## **AROUND THE RADIANT CRADLE OF THE REDEEMER**

1. "The people that dwelt in darkness saw a great light." With this vivid picture, the prophetic spirit of Isaias (Is. 9, 1) foretold the coming on earth of the Heavenly Babe, Father of the world to come, and Prince of Peace. And with the same image, which in God's good time has become a reality and is the comfort of succeeding generations in this dark world, We wish, beloved sons and daughters of the whole Catholic world, to begin Our Christmas message, and by means of it to bring you once again to the brilliantly luminous cradle of the new-born Saviour.

### **LIGHT THAT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS**

2. Light rending and conquering darkness is, in fact, the essential meaning of the birth of the Saviour. This the Apostle St. John, giving echo to the solemn tones on the first page of Genesis at the appearance of light, briefly exposes in the sublime prologue to his Gospel when he says: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we saw His glory—glory as of the only-Begotten of the Father—full of grace and of truth," (John 1, 14). He Who is life and light in Himself shines in darkness, and makes it possible for all those who open their eyes and heart to Him, who welcome and believe in Him, to become children of God (cf. John 1, 12).

3. Despite such a generous outpouring of Divine Light from the humble manger, man still has the terrifying power to sink himself in the former darkness caused by the first sin, where the spirit grows callous in works of evil. For such as thus blindly follow their own will, through lost or weakened faith, Christmas holds no other attraction than that of a merely human festival dissolved into hollow sentiment and purely earthly memories, which nevertheless they often dearly cling to, but as to a covering devoid of content. Around the radiant cradle of the Redeemer, then, there remain zones of darkness, and men go around with their eyes closed to the heavenly light, not because God Incarnate, even in His mystery, has not light to enlighten everyone that comes into His world, but because many are dazzled by the ephemeral splendor of human ideals and achievements, and limit their gaze to the confines of the created

world, incapable of raising it to the Creator, the beginning, the harmony and the final end of all existent things.

## TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS

4. It is to these men whose spirit is in darkness that We wish to point out "the great light" radiating from the manger, asking them above all else to realize the cause which in our time is making them blind and insensible to the Divine. It is the excessive, and sometimes exclusive, esteem for what is called "progress in technology." This dream was first cherished as the omnipotent myth and dispenser of happiness, then pushed forward by every device to the most daring conquests; and it has finally imposed itself on the minds of men as the final end of man and of life, substituting itself therefore for every kind of religious and spiritual ideal.

5. But now it is becoming ever clearer that its undue exaltation has so blinded men's intelligence, that they exemplify in themselves what the Book of Wisdom castigated in the men of its time (*Wisdom*, 13, 1). They are incapable of learning from the visible world of Him Who is, of discovering the worker from His work; still more today, the supernatural world and the work of redemption, which is above all natural things and was accomplished by Jesus Christ, remain wrapped in total obscurity for those men who walk in darkness.

## IT COMES FROM GOD AND OF ITSELF LEADS TO GOD

6. Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned erroneous consequence does not follow necessarily, nor are our present criticisms to be understood as a condemnation of technological progress in itself. The Church loves and favors human progress. It is undeniable that technological progress comes from God, and so it can and ought to lead to God. In point of fact, while the believer admires the conquests of science and makes use of them to penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of creation and of the forces of nature, that by means of machines he may better master them for the service of mankind and the enrichment of human life, it most often happens that he feels himself drawn to adore the Giver of those good things which he admires and uses, knowing

full well that the eternal Son of God is the “firstborn of every creature. For in Him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible” (*Col. 1, 15-16*).

7. Very far, then, from any thought of disavowing the marvels of technology and its lawful use, the believer may find himself more eager to bow his knee before the celestial Babe of the manger, more conscious of his debt of gratitude to Him Who gives all things, and the intelligence to understand them, more disposed to find a place for those same works of technology with the chorus of angels in the hymn of Bethlehem: “Glory to God in the highest” (*Luke 2, 14*). He will even find it natural to place beside the gold, frankincense and myrrh, offered by the Magi to the Infant God, also the modern conquests of technology: machines and numbers, laboratories and inventions, power and resources.

8. Furthermore, such an offering is like presenting Him with the work which He Himself once commanded and which is now being effected, though it has not yet reached its term. “Fill the earth and subdue it” (*Gen. 1, 28*) said God to man as He handed creation over to him in temporary heritage. What a long and hard road from then to the present day, when men can at last say that they have in some measure fulfilled the divine command!

### **MODERN TECHNOLOGY AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS SPLENDOR AND FRUITFULNESS**

9. Technology has, in fact, brought man’s domination of the material world to a pitch of perfection never known before. The modern machine allows a mode of production that substitutes for, and multiplies a hundredfold, human energy for work, that is entirely independent of the contribution of organic forces and which ensures a maximum of extensive and intensive potential and at the same time of precision. As we embrace with a glance the results of this development, nature itself seems to give an assent of satisfaction to what has been done in it, and to incite to further investigation and use of its extraordinary possibilities. Now it is clear that all search for and discovery of the forces of nature, which technology effectuates, is at once a search for and discovery of the greatness, of the wisdom, and of the harmony of God. Looked at in this way, there is nothing to disapprove of or condemn in technology.

## **DANGER LEST IT CAUSE GRAVE SPIRITUAL HARM— THE 'TECHNOLOGICAL SPIRIT'**

10. Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that this technology which in our century has reached the height of its splendor and fruitfulness, is, through certain circumstances, changed into a grave spiritual danger. For it seems to give modern man, prostrate at its altar, a sense of self-sufficiency and satisfaction of his boundless thirst for knowledge and power. In its many varied uses, in the absolute confidence which it awakens, in the extraordinary possibilities that it promises, modern technology displays before man so vast a vision as to be confounded by many with the Infinite itself.

11. In consequence, it is allowed an inadmissible autonomy which, in turn, is translated, in the thoughts of some, into a false conception of life and of the world, known as the "technological spirit." In what exactly does it consist? In this, that what is most highly prized in human life is the advantage that can be drawn from the forces and elements of nature; whatever is technically possible in mechanical production takes precedence over all other forms of human activity, and the perfection of earthly culture and happiness is seen in it.

### **IT TENDS TO RESTRICT MAN'S GAZE TO MATERIAL THINGS . . .**

12. There is a fundamental falsehood in this distorted vision of the world offered by the technological spirit. The seemingly boundless panorama unfolded before the eyes of modern man, however extensive it may be, remains but a partial projection of life on reality, only expressing its relations with matter. Accordingly, it is a deceitful panorama, that finishes by shutting up as in a prison those who are too credulous with regard to the omnipotence and immensity of technology, a prison which is vast indeed, but nevertheless circumscribed, and hence in the long run insupportable to their true spirit. Their glance, far from reaching out over infinite reality as they thought, (for reality does not consist only of matter) will feel chafed by the barriers which matter of necessity opposes. From this results the deep anguish of contemporary man, made blind for having wilfully surrounded himself with darkness.



## . . . MAKES IT BLIND TO RELIGIOUS TRUTH

13. Much more serious is the damage in the realm of specifically religious truths and of his relations with the supernatural to the man who is intoxicated with the "technological spirit." This, too, is the darkness to which the Evangelist St. John alludes, that prevents the spiritual understanding of the mysteries of God and which the Incarnate Word of God is come to dispel.

14. Not that technology in itself requires as a logical conclusion the denial of religious values—on the contrary, as we have said, logic leads to their acknowledgment—but it is that "technological spirit" that puts man into a state of mind that is unfavorable for seeking, finding, accepting truths and goods of a supernatural order. The mind which has let itself be led astray by a concept of life outlined by the "technological spirit" remains uncomprehending, uninterested, and hence unseeing in the presence of those works of God, the mysteries of the Christian faith, totally different from technology.

15. The very remedy for this defect, which would consist in a redoubled effort to extend one's vision beyond the barrier of darkness and to stimulate in the soul an interest in supernatural truths, is made ineffective right from the beginning by the "technological spirit" itself.

16. For this way of looking at life deprives men of their sense of judgment on the remarkable unrest and superficiality of our time, a defect which even those who truly and sincerely approve technological progress must unfortunately recognize as one of its consequences.

17. Those who are imbued with the "technological spirit" find with difficulty the calm, the serenity, the inwardness essential for discovering the way that leads to the Son of God made man. They will even go so far as to belittle the Creator and His work, pronouncing human nature a defective product, when the necessary limitations of the human brain and other organs stand in the way of the fulfillment of technological plans and projects. Still less are they fit to understand and rightly esteem those very deep mysteries of life and of the divine economy, such as for example the mystery of Christmas, in which the union of the Eternal

Word with human nature brings into play realities and marvels quite other than those of technology. Their thought is along different lines and follows other patterns, under the one-sided influence of that "technological spirit" which only recognizes and reckons real what can be expressed in mathematical formulas and utilitarian calculations.

18. They think that thus they are breaking up reality into its elements, but their knowledge remains on the surface and deals with but one aspect. It is evident that whoever adopts the method of technology as the sole way of seeking truth must give up any idea of penetrating the profound realities of organic life, and even more so those of the spiritual life, the living realities of the individual person and of human society, because these cannot be analyzed into quantitative relationships.

19. How can one ask of a mind so formed assent and wonder before the awe-inspiring reality to which we have been elevated by Jesus Christ through His Incarnation and Redemption, His Revelation and His Grace? Even leaving aside the religious blindness which comes from this "technological spirit," a man who is possessed by it is arrested in his intellectual life, and yet it is precisely in that life that man is created to the image of God. God's intellect is infinitely comprehensive, whereas the "technological spirit" makes every effort to restrict in man the free expansion of his intelligence.

20. The technologist, whether master or pupil, who would free himself from this limitation needs not only an education of mind that aims at depth of knowledge, but above all he needs a religious formation which, despite what is sometimes asserted, is the kind most apt to safeguard his thought from onesided influences. Then the narrowness of his knowledge will be broken through, then creation will appear before him illumined in all its dimensions, especially when before the crib he will make an effort to comprehend "in all its breadth and length and height and depth the love of Christ" (cf. *Eph.* 3, 18-19). Otherwise, this era of technological progress will achieve its monstrous masterpiece, making man into a giant of the physical world, at the expense of his soul, reduced to a pygmy in the realm of the supernatural and eternal.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SPIRIT ON THE NATURAL ORDER OF MODERN MEN'S LIVES AND ON THEIR MUTUAL RELATIONS . . .

21. But this is not the only harm done by technological progress when it is accepted in the thinking of men as something autonomous and an end in itself. No one can fail to see the danger of a "technological concept of life," that is, considering life exclusively for its technological values, as an element and factor in technology. It has its repercussions both on the way modern men live and on their mutual relations.

22. Look for a moment at this spirit already at work among the people, and reflect especially how it has changed the human and Christian concept of work, and what influence it exercises on legislation and administration. The people have welcomed, and rightly so, technological progress, because it eases the burden of toil and increases production. But also it must be admitted that if such a way of thinking is not kept within right bounds, the human and Christian concept of work necessarily becomes distorted. Likewise from this distorted concept of life, and hence of work, men come to consider leisure time as an end in itself, instead of looking upon it and using it as reasonable rest and recreation, bound up essentially with the rhythm of an ordered life, in which rest and toil alternate in a single pattern and are integrated into a single harmony.

23. More evident still is the influence of the "technological spirit" applied to work, when Sunday loses its unique dignity as the day devoted to the worship of God and to physical and spiritual rest for the individual and the family, and becomes instead merely one of the free days in the course of the week, which can even be different for each member of the family, according to the greater profit one hopes to derive from such a mechanical distribution of material and human energy, or when professional work becomes so dependent on, and subordinate to the "efficiency" of the machine and of the tools of labor that the worker is rapidly exhausted, as though one year of working at his trade were to use up the energy required in two or more years of normal life.

## **. . . ON THEIR PERSONAL DIGNITY AND ON WORLD ECONOMY . . .**

24. We refrain from showing more at length how this system, inspired exclusively by technological considerations, contrary to what was expected of it, causes a waste of material resources, no less than of the principal sources of energy—among which certainly man himself must be included—and how in consequence it must in the long run prove a costly burden on the world economy. We cannot, however, omit calling attention to the new form of materialism which the “technological spirit” introduces into life. It will be sufficient to indicate that it empties life of its meaning, since technology affects the combined spiritual and material values connected with his nature and personal dignity. Wherever technology reigns supreme, there human society will be transformed into a colorless mass, into something impersonal and without substance, and this contrary to the clear designs of nature and of the Creator.

## **. . . ON THE FAMILY**

25. Undoubtedly, large portions of humanity have not yet been touched by such a “technological concept of life”; but it is to be feared that wherever technological progress penetrates without safeguards, there the danger of the aberrations censured above will not be long in showing itself. And with particular anxiety we consider the danger threatening the family, which is the strongest principle of order in society. For the family is capable of inspiring in its members innumerable daily acts of service, binds them to the home and hearth with the bonds of affection, and awakes in each of them a love of the family traditions in the production and conservation of useful goods. Wherever on the contrary the technological concept of life penetrates, the family loses its personal bond of unity, is deprived of its warmth and stability. It remains united only to the extent that is demanded by the exigencies of mass production, which is being pursued with more and more insistence. No longer is the family a work of love and a haven for souls; it is rather a desolate depot, according to the circumstances, either of manpower for mass production, or of consumers of the material goods produced.

## **THE 'TECHNOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF LIFE' A PARTICULAR FORM OF MATERIALISM**

26. The "technological concept of life" is therefore nothing else than a particular form of materialism in as far as it offers a mathematical formula and utilitarian calculations as the ultimate answer to the question of existence. Because of this, modern technological development, as if conscious of being lost in darkness, is showing uneasiness and anxiety, experienced especially by those who engage in the feverish search for industrial methods ever more complicated, ever more hazardous. A world guided in this way cannot be said to be illumined by that light, nor animated by that life which the Word, the splendor of God's glory, (*Hebr.* 1, 3) by becoming man, has come to communicate to men.

## **GRAVITY OF THE PRESENT HOUR, ESPECIALLY FOR EUROPE**

27. As Our eyes constantly scan the horizon in anxious search of some enduring signs of brightening (if not of that full light of which the Prophet spoke), there meets them instead the grey vision of a still unsettled Europe, where the materialism of which We have spoken, instead of solving, only aggravates its fundamental problems. These problems are intimately connected with peace and order in the whole world.

28. In truth, materialism does not threaten this Continent more seriously than other regions of the world. On the contrary We think that countries which have been overtaken late and unexpectedly by the rapid progress of technology are more exposed to the dangers alluded to, and more vitally disturbed in their moral and psychological equilibrium—the reason being that imported development, not flowing with a constant motion but proceeding by discontinuous jumps, does not meet with any strong walls of resistance, of counterpoise, of adjustment, either in the maturity of individuals or in the culture of tradition.

29. Nevertheless, Our grave fears for Europe are stirred by the repeated disappointments which the sincere desire for peace and a relaxation of tension cherished by these nations has for years met with; this is also due to a mate-

rial approach to the problem of peace. We are thinking particularly of those who judge that the question of peace is technological, and consider the life of individuals and nations from a technico-economical standpoint. The materialistic idea of life threatens to become the rule of conduct of certain busy peace agents, and the mainspring of their pacifist policy. They think that the secret of the solution lies in bringing material prosperity to all nations through constant increase in productivity and in the standard of living. A hundred years ago, another similar formula aroused the absolute confidence of statesmen: with free trade, lasting peace.

### **THE RIGHT ROAD TOWARD TRUE PEACE**

30. But no materialism was ever an apt means to establish peace. For peace is above all an attitude of the mind, and only secondarily an harmonious equilibrium of external forces. So it is an error of principle to entrust peace to a modern materialism that corrupts the essence of man and stifles his personal and spiritual life. Experience induces the same distrust, for it proves that the costly distribution of technical and economical forces more or less equally between two parties causes reciprocal intimidation, from which would result a peace based on fear, not that peace which is security for the future.

31. We must repeat it again and again, and persuade those who are easily deceived by the mirage of a peace consisting in an abundance of temporal goods, that secure and lasting peace is above all a question of spiritual unity and of moral dispositions. This peace demands, under pain of further catastrophes for mankind, that there be discarded that false autonomy of material forces which today are hardly different from war materials. The present state of affairs will not improve, unless all nations recognize the common spiritual and moral ends of humanity; unless they help each other to attain them, and, as a consequence, unless they mutually agree to oppose the cause of division reigning among them in the discrepancy of the standard of living and of productivity.

### **THE UNION OF THE COUNTRIES OF EUROPE**

32. This can and should be done in Europe, by forming the continental union of its peoples, different indeed, but geo-

graphically and historically bound together. A strong encouragement to such a union is the manifest failure of the contrary policy, and the fact that the ordinary people in these countries expect it and consider it necessary and possible. The time, then, seems mature for the idea to become reality. Hence, We exhort to action first and foremost Christian statesmen, deeming it sufficient to recall to them that Christianity always considered it its task to promote every sort of peaceful union between nations. Why continue to hesitate? The end is clear; the needs of nations are obvious to all. If any one asks in advance for an absolute guarantee of success, the answer is that there is a risk, but a necessary one; a risk, but in keeping with present possibilities—a reasonable risk. One must proceed certainly with caution, advance with well-calculated steps; but why distrust at this point the high degree of skill attained by political science and practice? They are sufficiently capable of foreseeing the obstacles and preparing the remedies. The supreme incitement to action is the gravity of the moment through which Europe is struggling; there is no security for her without risk. To demand absolute certainty is to fail in good will toward Europe.

### **GENUINE CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION**

33. With this end ever in view, We also exhort Christian statesmen to action within their own nations. If order does not reign in the internal life of nations, it is vain to expect European union and the security of peace in the world. In times like ours, when mistakes easily become catastrophes, a Christian statesman cannot—today less than ever—aggravate social tensions in his own country by dramatically emphasizing them, neglecting a positive approach to problems, and allowing himself to lose sight of a just estimate of what is reasonably possible. He must have tenacity in putting into practice Christian social doctrine, tenacity and faith in his own principles more than the adversaries show in their false tenets. If during the past hundred years and more Christian social doctrine has developed and borne fruit in the practical policies of many nations—unfortunately not all—those who have come on the scene very late have no reason today to complain that

Christianity leaves something to be desired in the social field, which, according to them, must be supplied by a so-called revolution in Christian consciences. The failure is not in Christianity, but in the minds of her accusers.

34. Thus, the Christian statesman does not serve the cause of national or international peace when he abandons the solid basis of objective experience and clear-cut principles and transforms himself, as it were, into a divinely inspired herald of a new social world, helping to confuse even more minds already uncertain. He is guilty of this fault who thinks he can experiment with the social order, and especially he who is not resolved to make the legitimate authority of the state and observance of the just laws prevail among all classes of society. Is it, perhaps, necessary to demonstrate that weakness in authority, more than any other weakness, undermines the strength of a nation, and that the weakness of one nation brings with it the weakness of Europe and imperils the general peace?

### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE**

35. One must, then, react against the false opinion according to which the reasonable power of authority and of law necessarily opens the road to tyranny. We Ourselves some years ago at Christmas time (December 24, 1944), speaking of democracy, noted that in a democratic state, no less than in any other well-ordered state, authority should be real and effective. Of course, democracy aims at putting into practice the ideal of liberty; but the ideal liberty is only that liberty which is far removed from license, that liberty which joins to the consciousness of one's own rights respect for the liberty, dignity and rights of others, and is conscious of one's own responsibility toward the common good. Naturally, this true democracy cannot exist and thrive except in an atmosphere of respect for God and observance of His Commandments, as well as of the Christian solidarity or brotherhood.

### **CONCLUSION**

36. In this way, beloved sons and daughters, the work of establishing the peace, promised to men in the splendor of Bethlehem's night, will be accomplished in the end by the good will of everyone individually, but it begins in the full-



ness of Truth Incarnate Who dispels darkness from the mind. Just as in creation "in the beginning was the Word," and not created material things, not their laws nor their power and abundance, so in the execution of the mysterious task entrusted to men by the Creator, they must put at the beginning this same Word, His truth, His charity and His grace. This hierarchy of values is what We wished to explain to you, and We urge you to safeguard it firmly. In this history supports us, and you know she is a good teacher. Nevertheless, it would seem that in the face of her lessons, those who do not listen to her and are hence prone to attempt new adventures, are more numerous than the victims of their folly. We have spoken in the name of these victims who still weep over near and distant tombs, and, indeed, have to fear that yet others are being made ready; those who are still living amid ruins, and at the same time see new destruction approaching, those who still are waiting for the return of prisoners and dispersed loved ones, and yet are living in fear for their own freedom. The danger is so great that from the cradle of the eternal Prince of Peace We have had to utter very grave words, even at the risk of provoking still keener fears. But one may always hope that, with the Grace of God, it will be a salutary and efficacious fear, that will lead to the union of nations and thus strengthen the peace.

37. May these Our anxious prayers be heard by the Mother of God and the Mother of men, Mary Immaculate, at whose altars in a special way this year the peoples of the earth kneel in supplication, that with maternal care she may intercede for the world at the throne of God.

38. With this hope on Our lips and in Our heart, to all of you, beloved sons and daughters, to your families, and in a particular way to the humble, the poor, the oppressed, to those persecuted for their loyalty to Christ and His Church, from a heart full of affection We impart Our paternal apostolic blessing.

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