

Speech at CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO-PONTIFICE FOUNDATION

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Mobilizing Conscience, Rebuilding Law: A New Architecture for the Common Good Delivered at the Second Plenary Session - Panel Discussion on: How to Build New Frameworks for Multilateralism and International Law

Your Eminences, Excellencies, distinguished panelists, and friends,

We gather this afternoon in the shadow of a profound paradox, one that Pope Leo XIV masterfully illuminates in **Magnifica Humanitas**. The Holy Father reminds us that multilateralism, international law, and the great conventions of the past century are not mere bureaucratic structures. They are, in his words, “emblematic achievements” of the human spirit—monuments of a global conscience forged in the painful aftermath of total war. They represent the moment humanity chose the arduous path of dialogue over the brutal reflex of destruction.

And yet, as we sit here today, we must candidly acknowledge a painful reality: the fabric of this multilateral framework is fraying before our very eyes. We are witnessing not just a temporary gridlock in diplomacy, but a deep, systemic crisis of multilateralism.

We gather at an uncomfortable, dangerous crossroads in global history. The international frameworks built to secure peace and human rights are fracturing under the weight of geopolitical conflict and economic fragmentation. Our plenary session poses a mandatory challenge: *How to Mobilize Conscience and Action to Build New Frameworks for Multilateralism and International Law*.

Notice the sequence of that prompt. It does not ask us to begin with treaties or bureaucratic reform. It demands that we begin with **conscience**. It recognizes a profound truth laid out by St. John Paul II thirty-five years ago in *Centesimus Annus*: that the crises of our socio-economic and political systems are, fundamentally, crises of an ethical and spiritual nature.

If our international legal frameworks are failing today, it is not because we lack brilliant legal minds. It is because the underlying moral consensus, the shared recognition of human solidarity—has been replaced by a transactional, self-interested realism.

The Epochal Shift: AI as the New Industrial Frontier

Today, this moral vacuum is being rapidly filled by a technological revolution. We are living through what the Church has identified as a truly epochal change, mirrored in the Holy See’s landmark document *Antiqua et Nova* and the magisterial teachings on human dignity. Just

as the Industrial Revolution reshaped human labor in the 19th century, the rise of Artificial Intelligence is reshaping human thought, international law, and global sovereignty today.

AI is not just a tool; it is a cognitive amplifier. In our quest for a renewed multilateralism, AI presents itself with a radical duality. It is simultaneously an extraordinarily **enabler** of global cooperation and an existential **challenge** to human conscience.

AI as the Enabler: Scaling Solidarity

As an enabler, AI provides humanity with unprecedented capabilities to serve the common good and strengthen international law.

- **Predicting and Mitigating Global Crises:** Through predictive analytics, AI can forecast climate disasters, track pandemic outbreaks, and model complex resource distribution before crises devastate vulnerable communities. It enables the United Nations and humanitarian networks to act preventively rather than re-actively.
- **Democratizing Knowledge and Justice:** AI can translate legal barriers instantly, bridging linguistic divides in international courts and making human rights frameworks accessible to marginalized populations who were historically locked out of the global legal architecture.
- **Verifying International Compliance:** Machine learning can analyze satellite data and financial streams to monitor environmental degradation, trace illegal arms shipments, and track corporate supply chains. It offers multilateral bodies a powerful mechanism to enforce transparency and hold bad actors accountable.

When guided by moral discernment, AI can be a magnificent instrument of connection, helping us realize the vision of a deeply interconnected, supportive global community.

AI as the Challenge: The Weaponization of the Algorithm

Yet, when decoupled from conscience, AI poses a terrifying challenge to the very foundation of international law and human dignity.

- **The Rise of Stateless Totalitarianism:** We are witnessing the concentration of immense algorithmic power in the hands of a few tech monopolies and authoritarian regimes. These entities operate outside the bounds of traditional state sovereignty, creating automated echo chambers that poison public discourse, erode truth, and reduce human interaction to data points to be monetized.
- **The Erasure of Accountability:** When AI algorithms are deployed to manage migration borders, automate financial sanctions, or optimize warfare through lethal autonomous weapons, we introduce a soul-less machine into decisions of life and death. A machine operates purely on pattern recognition; it lacks the capacity for *intellectus*—the intuitive grasp of truth, equity, and mercy. If an algorithm determines who eats, who is excluded, or who is targeted, international law collapses because accountability is dissolved into a line of code.

- **A New Technocratic Slavery:** If left unregulated, AI risks creating a deep global caste system. Developing and vulnerable nations will be reduced to passive consumers of algorithmic content or data-extraction fields for wealthy nations, entrenching a new form of digital colonialism that shatters the principles of solidarity and the universal destination of goods.

Moving from Conscience to Institutional Action

Conscience without action is merely sentimentality. To ensure that AI acts as an enabler of peace rather than a catalyst for polarization, our moral conviction must translate into concrete institutional reform across three fronts:

1. **A Binding International Treaty on AI Ethics:** We must join the Holy See's urgent call for a comprehensive global legal framework—an "algor-ethics" codified into international law. We must demand a global ban on lethal autonomous weapons and strict regulations against automated discrimination in judicial and economic systems.
2. **Recentering Human Responsibility:** Our legal frameworks must establish a non-negotiable principle: technological innovation must never substitute for human moral discernment. The human person must remain at the center and at the controls of every algorithmic decision affecting human dignity.
3. **An Architecture of Inclusion:** Multilateral institutions must ensure equitable access to technological development. True multilateralism means that the benefits of AI are shared globally, enabling developing nations to build their own capacities rather than compounding their vulnerabilities.

The Unique Task of the Centesimus Annus Foundation

My friends, this is precisely where the members and stakeholders of the Centesimus Annus Foundation have a unique, indispensable role to play. We are a community of leaders, thinkers, and practitioners anchored in a living spiritual tradition.

Our task is to inject the vocabulary of the soul back into the rooms of policy, finance, and technology. We must explicitly reject the false dichotomy between efficiency and ethics. There is nothing more practical today than recognizing that a fractured world cannot sustain itself on automated greed.

Let us use this panel and the debate that follows to map out an international order where technology serves humanity, and where law is rooted firmly in justice. Let us remind global leaders that true sovereignty is measured not by the power of our algorithms or the size of our markets, but by our capacity to protect the vulnerable, uphold truth, and guarantee peace.

Thank you very much.

Javier Arias - PRESIDENT ELEC (European League for Economic Cooperation)