

Listen to science to understand the world's changes and its polycrisis

3 March 2025

Message to participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life “The end of the world? Crises, responsibilities, hopes”

Pope Francis
3 March 2025

Dear Academicians,

It is always a pleasure for me to address the women and men of science, as well as those in the Church who cultivate dialogue with the scientific world. Together you can serve the cause of life and the common good. And I warmly thank Archbishop Paglia and the collaborators for their service to the Pontifical Academy for Life.

In this year's general Assembly, you have proposed to consider the question that is today defined as “polycrisis”. It relates to some fundamental aspects of your research activity in the field of life, health and care. The term “polycrisis” evokes the dramatic nature of the historical juncture we are currently witnessing, in which wars, climate changes, energy problems, epidemics, the migratory phenomenon and technological innovation converge. The intertwining of these critical issues, which currently touch on various dimensions of life, lead us to ask ourselves about the destiny of the world and our understanding of it.

A first step to be taken is that of examining with greater attention to our representation of the world and the cosmos. If we do not do this, and we do not seriously analyze our profound resistance to change, both as people and as a society, we will continue to do what we have always done with other crises, even very recent ones. Think of the Covid pandemic: we have, so to speak, “squandered” it; we could have worked more deeply in the transformation of consciences and social practices (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, 36).

And another important step to avoid remaining immobile, anchored in our certainties, habits and fears, is to listen carefully to the contribution of areas of scientific knowledge. The theme of listening is decisive. It is one of the key words of the entire synodal process we have undertaken, and which is now in its implementation phase. I therefore appreciate that your way of proceeding reflects its style. I see in it the attempt to practice in your specific sphere that “social prophecy” to which the Synod was dedicated (Final Document, 47). In the encounter with people and their stories, and in listening to scientific knowledge, we realize that our parameters regarding anthropology and culture require profound revision. This was also the origin of the intuition of the study groups on certain topics that emerged during the synodal process. I know that some of you are part of them, also valuing the work done by the Academy for Life over the past years, work for which I am very grateful.

Listening to the sciences continually offers us new knowledge. Consider what we are told about the structure of matter and the evolution of living beings: there emerges a far more dynamic view of nature compared to what was thought in Newton's time. Our way of understanding “continuous creation” must be re-elaborated, in the knowledge that it will not be technology that saves us (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 101): endorsing utilitarian deregulation and global neoliberalism means imposing the law of the strongest as the only rule; and it is a law that dehumanizes.

We can cite as an example of this type of research Fr. Teilhard de Chardin and his attempt – certainly partial and unfinished, but daring and inspiring – to enter seriously into dialogue with the sciences, practising an exercise in trans-disciplinarity. It is a risky path, which leads us to wonder: “I ask whether it is necessary for someone to throw the stone into the pond – indeed, to end up being ‘killed’ – to open the way”. [1: Quotation from B. DE SOLANGES, Teilhard de Chardin. *Témoignage et étude sur le développement de sa pensée*, Toulouse 1967, 54] Thus he launched his insights that focused on the category of relationship and interdependence between all things, placing homo sapiens in close connection with the entire system of living things.

These ways of interpreting the world and its evolution, with the unprecedented forms of relatedness that correspond to it, can provide us with signs of hope, which we are seeking as pilgrims during this Jubilee year (cf. Bull *Spe non confudit*, 7). Hope is the fundamental attitude that supports us on the journey. It does not consist of waiting with resignation, but of striving with zeal towards true life, which leads well beyond the narrow individual perimeter. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, hope “is linked to a lived union with a ‘people’, and for each individual it can only be attained within this ‘we’” (Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, 14).

It is also because of this community dimension of hope, faced with a complex and planetary crisis, that we are

urged to value instruments with a global reach. We must unfortunately note a progressive irrelevance of international bodies, which are also undermined by short-sighted attitudes, concerned with protecting particular and national interests. And yet we must continue to commit ourselves with determination for “more effective world organizations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty, and the sure defence of fundamental human rights” (Encyclical Letter Fratelli tutti, 172). In such a way, a multilateralism is promoted that does not depend on changing political circumstances or the interests of the few, and which has stable effectiveness (cf. Apostolic Exhortation Laudate Deum, 35). It is an urgent task which regards the whole of humanity.

This vast scenario of motivations and objectives is also the scope of your Assembly and of your work, dear members of the Academy for Life. I entrust you to the intercession of Mary, Seat of Hope and Mother of Hope, “as we, the pilgrim people, the people of life and for life, make our way in confidence towards ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev 21:1)” (Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Evangelium vitae, 105).

For all of you and for your work, I impart my heartfelt blessing.

Rome, from “Gemelli” Hospital, 26 February 2025

Francis