

**Human Enhancement:  
Moral, Religious and Ethical Aspects from a European Perspective**

***What Can We Learn From Those Who Have Gone Before?***

Presented by:

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

With heart felt appreciation and joy, I welcome you to this conference and trust that you will find meaning and challenge in the discussions taking place regarding our role in the contemporary practice and future development of Human Enhancement.

In first place, allow me to share with you the greetings of His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew 1<sup>st</sup>.

Human enhancement is a contemporary issue that is as cutting-edge as nanotechnology, instant world-wide communication, and the revelations of the Human Genome Project. It is also as old as the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Since the Garden experience, ‘knowledge’ has been used to tempt humanity with the power to be like God. At other times, God has revealed knowledge to humanity leading to important interventions in many areas of human suffering. How can we better understand the increasingly complicated moral, spiritual, and ethical questions that are emerging with advances in science, technology, and medicine? According to His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, we first need “reconciliation”.

Thus, it is vital that we proceed with these discussions precisely this week because our world needs to hear how today’s issues can be illuminated by an ancient and ever present Divine wisdom. There is an often-quoted observation from the early twentieth century that you will quickly recognise: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense*, volume 1 of *The Life of Reason*, 1905). Let us remember the past with the expectation of moving into the future guided by a sober realisation and a hopeful heart: A sober realisation that good intentions can have dire consequences, and a hopeful heart that actions we take now have the potential to preserve life and effectively alleviate a multitude of human suffering.

As we look to history to inform our future, I would like to begin with the events of the Garden of Eden. There are fundamental truths found in Genesis chapters 2–3 which provide some interesting concepts for consideration. First, I can’t help but notice that God planted two significantly named trees in the Garden: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil. “Out of the ground, the LORD God made to grow [...] the tree of life in the midst of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2,9). In an ontological reading, like the one performed by Annick de Souza, moral categories of “good” and “evil” do not exist. They are understood as being “accomplished” as opposed to being “not yet accomplished”. The Garden in Eden is understood as the inner space of the human being, in whose heart stand the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The two trees are distinct but not separated. In the tree of life—the symbol of God’s desire for the human being—the sap goes down from God to the human being; in the tree of the knowledge—the symbol of the human being’s desire for God—it goes up from the human being to God. The accomplishment of the human being is the fruit of the encounter of these two desires; of the cross-fertilisation between life and knowledge. Herein lies the first key to forming recommendations regarding human enhancement: the pursuit of knowledge must be balanced and molded from a reverence for the mysteries of life.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

We, as citizens of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are in a unique position. Global satellite communication and digital technologies put more information at our fingertips than the mind can conceive. The Biblical accounts of our predecessors, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the latest medical journal can all be accessed in a matter of minutes. Therefore, we certainly have the resources to “open science for new dimensions of understanding” and, perhaps, prevent “the worse” from occurring. One barrier I see to this accomplishment is an inherent bias toward contemporary understanding. Why limit ourselves to knowledge that is emerging in our lifetimes? Let us endeavor to put aside any arrogance that would dismiss the wisdom of the Bible, the Church Fathers, and all of history because we believe our generation is better educated. Has modernity truly provided us with definitive knowledge? I also have a similar concern for the Church and spiritual leaders. In various faith circles, there is oftentimes a bias against anything new. For example, if the Church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century had dialogued about Galileo’s hypothesis, that is that scripture and his concept that the earth revolved around the sun were not in disagreement, they may have recognised the truth and reformed their position that the earth was the center of the universe. Misunderstandings on the part of the Church and the polemical writings of the scientist led to the unfortunate conflict and eventual sentence against Galileo which held him under house arrest for the remainder of his life. It is understandable that when you are approached in a demeaning or aggressive way that you want to respond negatively. However, the Biblical mandates for studying to show yourselves approved, long suffering, and brotherly love could have changed the course of action against Galileo. From this tragic event in Church history we can learn not to allow ourselves to become offended at the suppositions of another to the point that we refuse to explore the possibilities of the unfamiliar, and find areas of agreement. Let us take the time to fully understand the ideas and values of those who have gone before us and integrate that knowledge into our contemporary discoveries. This level of information creates for us the greatest opportunity to develop recommendations that respect the contributions of the “tree of life” and the “tree of knowledge”.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Once we have a broad-based and open-minded review of ancient and contemporary ideas, we still must take one more step. That step is one where we acknowledge our inability to really know how one form or another of human enhancement will impact humanity for all posterity, and compels us to seek Divine participation in human affairs. We must go back to the Garden and weigh the choices Adam and Eve weighed. They were in the physical presence of God daily, in constant communication and communion with the Holy One who embodies knowledge and Who created all knowledge. Yet, based on the word of a serpent—who like them was also a created being, they traded their intimate knowledge of the uncreated Creator for the prospects of another kind of knowledge. We are all created beings trying to convince ourselves and others that one form of knowledge is better than another and should be pursued. But, we cannot unilaterally accept these assumptions. We must seek the Divine within the light of our existing knowledge and humbly pray for guidance.

Where Divine guidance will lead us on these issues, I do not yet know. However, based on the previous examples I have shared with you from my heart, I have the following thoughts about what our recommendations must take into consideration:

- A pursuit of knowledge which is balanced and molded from a reverence for the mysteries of life, with a full understanding that issues of knowledge and life are interconnected and in their very essence cannot be separated.
- An acknowledgment that humanity is composed not merely of physical components, but consists also of a soul, mind, emotions, and spiritual attributes which, like life and knowledge, cannot be separated from the whole being.
- A recognition that we are all created beings and as such are capable of being deceived when desiring to increase our knowledge.
- The reality that we cannot know all things, but can be enlightened by examining ancient and contemporary knowledge in an integrated manner.
- The power of prayer and meditation in guiding us to make recommendations that will benefit humanity over time.
- A sobering recognition of our humility in making these recommendations.
- A comfort in the knowledge that there is forgiveness for humanity when they miss the mark.

The time has come for us to explore, deliberate, and seek the Divine. During our discussions and reflection, we must create an environment where we are all free to honestly express our ideas and concerns. Likewise, we must endeavor to restrain ourselves from judging the possibilities of human enhancement issues from a position of fear, ignorance, or offense. Let us be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves in our work here this week. I have great faith that if we take all these lessons from scripture, tradition, and history into consideration, we will draft statements that will bring balance, wisdom, and appropriate cautions to future implementation of these technologies.

Concluding my introduction, I would like to quote His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew 1<sup>st</sup>:

“Christians must remember that Church is called not to conform to but to transform this world.”  
(*Encountering the Mystery*)