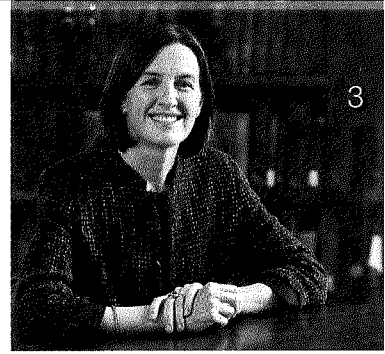


From the Vice Chancellor



In *Laudato Si*, the recent encyclical on the environment, His Holiness Pope Francis made the observation: *"The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called 'rapidification'"* (para 18). His Holiness, while accepting that change is desirable, points out that the rapidity of the changes we are facing contrasts with 'the naturally slow pace of biological evolution' and is not 'necessarily geared to the common good'.

While I have never heard this word 'rapidification' before, it strikes me as the perfect description of our 21st century world, particularly in developed countries such as Australia. In recent discussions with staff at Notre Dame, the most common answer to the question "aside from money, what do you wish to have more of?" – was time. We rush from one thing to the next – be it physical rushing, such as from place to place; mental rushing, from issue to issue, or a combination of the two. In the workplace particularly, we tend to rush from one task to the next, meeting to meeting, one email to the next – rarely pausing in between. While there are times and circumstances when speed of action and decision making is good and/or necessary (such as emergency situations), it would seem to me that there are clear signs in society that the consequences of the constant rapid pace of life are not all good. We have rising levels of stress, anxiety and other mental health issues. We have burn out. We have websites, apps, books and magazine articles offering us ideas and lessons on how to get a 'work-life balance', how to 'switch off', how to 'de-clutter our lives' and, more recently, how to practise the technique of mindfulness.

The intensified pace of our life is, undoubtedly, a consequence of the incredible scientific and technological revolution which has occurred over the last decades. However, to 'blame' technology for the downsides of that revolution would be to ascribe to technology a power it does not possess. We humans, individually and as a society, have the capacity to set the boundaries for our use of technology. When we properly exercise our dominion over technology and behave as its master it can improve our lives in nearly every endeavour. But it can, when we use it indiscriminately, become our master.

It is the way we engage, individually and as a society, with the scientific and technological advances that has intensified our pace – not the technology itself. And we,

individually and as a society, have the responsibility to set the bounds, to contextualise and to make sure that our essential humanity and dignity are preserved and enhanced – not undermined. It is imperative in this age, when we are rightly focusing on innovation and addressing our needs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, that we do not do this to the exclusion of everything else.

In addition to engaging in and with science and technology, we must continue to emphasise the other dimensions of human ingenuity – as can be found in areas such as the arts, the humanities and the great religious traditions – all of which made their own distinctive and often irreplaceable contributions to the development of the civilisation we live in today.

It is in this respect that a Catholic university, such as ours, has a special place. It is fundamental to our essence as a Catholic university that we not only foster the pursuit of all areas of human ingenuity, but that we also try to integrate them so that they serve the common good and build up peace within us and between us. Even though *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is now 25 years old, and predates widespread use of the internet, mobile phones, social media and many of our students, its words continue to resonate:

"In the world today, characterised by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic University assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need: its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person." (para 7).

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