Vatican
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Figurines with computers and smartphones are seen in front of the words "AI Artificial Intellig

Figurines with computers and smartphones are seen in front of the words "AI Artificial Intelligence" in this Feb. 19, 2024, illustration. (OSV News illustration/Reuters/Dado Ruvic)



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A new Vatican document sounds the alarm against allowing artificial intelligence to be controlled by only a few powerful corporations and pleads for a "moral evaluation" of how and when such technologies are utilized.

"The concentration of the power over mainstream AI applications in the hands of a few powerful companies raises significant ethical concerns," it cautions. "This lack of well-defined accountability creates the risk that AI could be manipulated for personal or corporate gain or to direct public opinion for the benefit of a specific industry."

The document, "*Antiqua et Nova*: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence," was released on Jan. 28 as a joint project between the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

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While the 25-page text acknowledges the transformative power of AI and enumerates a number of areas in which new technologies can be harnessed for social improvement, it cautions against any developments that could lead to dehumanization.

Although AI is now widely utilized by hundreds of thousands of businesses and governments around the world, the levers of its control remain in the hands of only a few major tech giants.

"AI cannot currently replicate moral discernment or the ability to establish authentic relationships," the document states, adding that "AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it."

The document's release is the Vatican's latest salvo calling for concern for human dignity to be at the center of discussions on the future of AI technologies.

Last June, Pope Francis became the first pontiff to ever address the annual "G7" summit of world leaders, where he dedicated his remarks to examining the far reaching consequences of AI.

In 2024, the pope dedicated his World Day of Peace message to the theme of AI, where he called for a binding international treaty to regulate its development and warned that it could lead to a "technological dictatorship" if not properly regulated. And in recent years, the Vatican has partnered with a number of leading big tech firms such as Cisco, IBM and Microsoft to emphasize the need for ethical decision-making in relation to AI development.

"The commitment to ensuring that AI always supports and promotes the supreme value of the dignity of every human being and the fullness of the human vocation serves as a criterion of discernment for developers, owners, operators, and regulators of AI, as well as to its users," the latest document states. "It remains valid for every application of the technology at every level of its use."

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> — New Vatican document, *Antiqua et Nova*
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Included in the text is an extensive reflection on how AI could both aid and hinder economic development and the labor market, healthcare, education, privacy and security and the environment.

The guiding principle throughout the text is that "AI should be used only as a tool to complement human intelligence rather than replace its richness."

In an interview with Vatican News, Bishop Paul Tighe — secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education — said the document is neither an all-embracing stance toward AI nor is it a completely cautionary approach.

"I hope it takes a middle ground, not embracing any of the apocalyptic visions. Neither is it trying to imagine that this is going, of itself, to resolve all human problems," stated Tighe.

"It's trying to see the potential and celebrate the extraordinary achievement that AI is," he continued. "It's a reflection on humanity's capacity to learn, to innovate, to develop, which is a God-given capacity."

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