Vatican

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Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, participates (far right) in a panel discussion on "Harnessing AI for the Future of Work" during the AI Action Summit at the Grand Palais in Paris Feb. 10, 2025. The summit brought together global leaders to establish scientific foundations, solutions and standards for a more sustainable AI. (CNS/ courtesy of France Diplomatie - MEAE)

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Ways must be found to ensure artificial intelligence benefits everyone and protects the environment, given the high amounts of energy consumed by data centers, Pope Francis told leaders at a global meeting on AI.

There is also a great need to secure and safeguard a place for "proper human control over the choices made by artificial intelligence programs," he said in a written message to French President Emmanuel Macron, who was co-hosting with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi the "Artificial Intelligence Action Summit" in Paris Feb. 10-11.

"I am convinced that, lacking such control, artificial intelligence, albeit an 'exciting' new tool, could show its most 'fearsome' side by posing a threat to human dignity," he said in the message, released by the Vatican Feb. 11.

Heads of state, government leaders, experts, entrepreneurs and representatives from nongovernmental organizations from nearly 100 countries were invited to the Grand Palais to seek to make sure the science, solutions and standards of AI truly serve the public interest. Representing the Vatican at the summit were Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister, and Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance spoke Feb. 11 and outlined the U.S. administration's AI action plan which he said would include safety precautions but would avoid "an overly precautionary regulatory regime while ensuring that all Americans benefit from the technology and its transformative potential."

"AI, I really believe, will facilitate and make people more productive," he said. "It is not going to replace human beings. It will never replace human beings."

"The AI future is not going to be won by hand-wringing about safety, it will be won by building — from reliable power plants to the manufacturing facilities that can produce the chips of the future," he said.

The new opportunities posed by the AI revolution, Vance said, "will never come to pass if over-regulation deters innovators from taking the risks necessary to advance the ball. Nor will it occur if we allow AI to become dominated by massive players looking to use the tech to censor or control users' thoughts."

Vance criticized European and other international rules regarding AI, particularly "the massive regulations it created about taking down content and policing so-called misinformation."

In the U.S., he said, "We can trust our people to think, to consume information, to develop their own ideas, and to debate with one another in the open marketplace of ideas."

According to the French president's official website, the summit's aims included: sharing best practices and challenges of AI technologies; reducing the "digital divide" and fostering open access to "independent, safe and reliable artificial intelligence for the many"; developing a more sustainable AI ecosystem given the current "untenable trajectory when it comes to energy use"; and ensuring "global governance of artificial intelligence is effective and inclusive."

In his message to Macron, Francis wrote that the summit represented an example of "a healthy politics that situates technological innovations within a greater project that seeks the common good."

"Artificial intelligence, I believe, can become a powerful tool in the hands of those scientists and experts who cooperate in finding innovative and creative solutions that promote the eco-sustainability of the earth, our common home, while not overlooking the high consumption of energy associated with the operation of artificial intelligence infrastructures," the pope wrote.

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He encouraged "all stakeholders," including the poor, the powerless and others, to participate and be part of the regulation of artificial intelligence.

"I trust that the Paris summit will work for the creation of a platform of public interest on artificial intelligence so that every nation can find in artificial intelligence an instrument for its development and its fight against poverty, but also for the protection of its local cultures and languages," the pope wrote.

"Only in this way will every people on earth be able to contribute to the creation of the data employed by artificial intelligence, so that the latter will reflect the true diversity and richness that is the hallmark of our human family," Francis wrote.