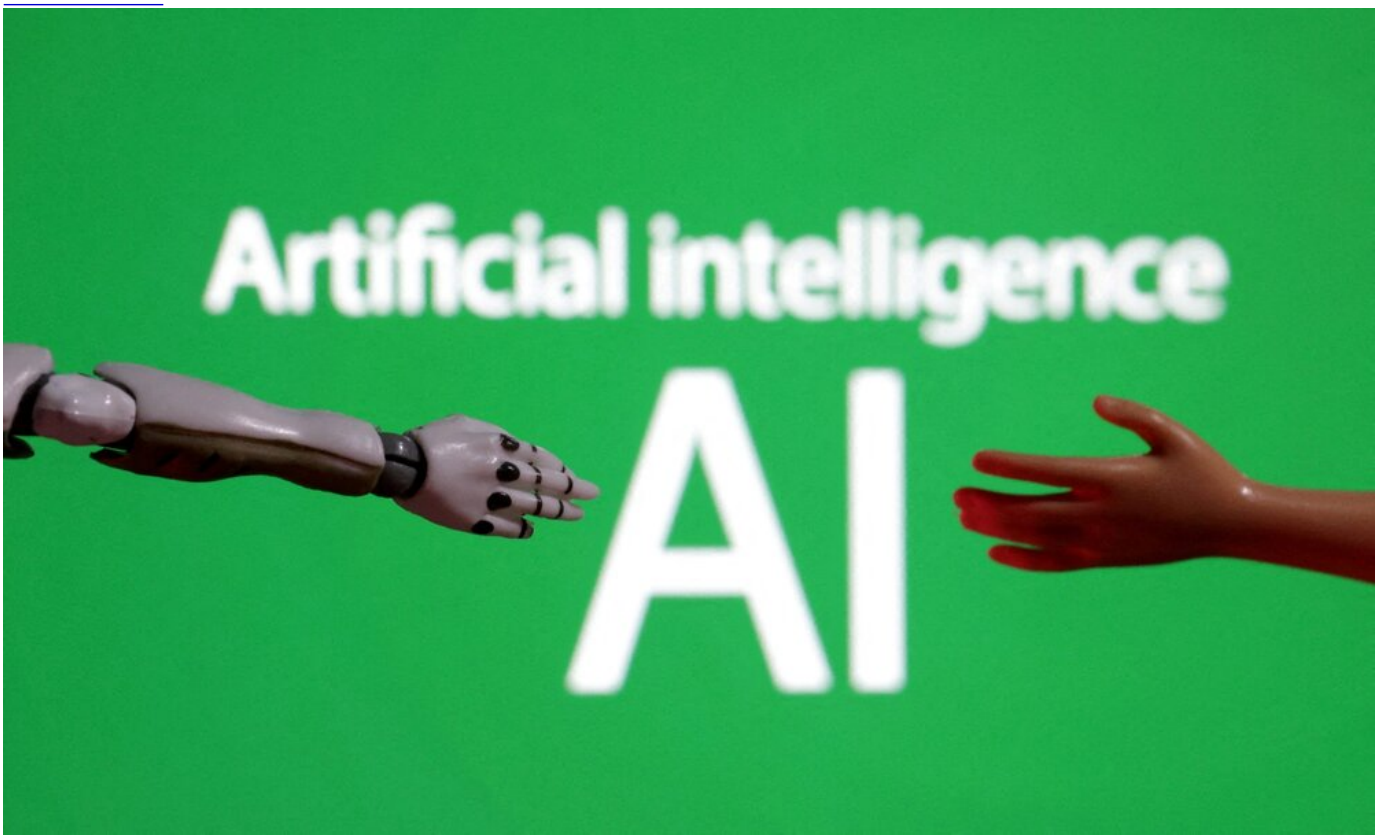
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The words "Artificial intelligence AI" are pictured with a miniature of a robot arm and a toy hand in this Dec. 14, 2023, illustration. (OSV News/Reuters/Dado Ruvic)



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Bishop Paul Tighe, a top official at the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education, is urging caution on artificial intelligence — warning that its hidden environmental costs, impact on jobs and broader social risks can’t be overlooked.

Speaking at a European theology congress in Dublin Aug. 23, Tighe, who is the secretary of the dicastery, highlighted AI isn’t the silver bullet — it comes with a price, starting with the environment.

Tighe highlighted more attention needs to be paid to the "actual environmental cost of AI" as he warned against "techno optimism" promoting AI as the means of tackling the environmental crisis.

Speaking to OSV News after his address, "Theology and Mission in an Age of Artificial Intelligence" to the Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology at Trinity College, the Irish prelate said that "addressing climate change requires a human response and a change in our patterns of consumption and use."

He said American professor of theology Noreen Herzfeld had drawn his attention to the fact that cloud technology "is not a metaphysical reality."

"The cloud is wires, power, a huge energy consumption, so that AI itself has a very significant cost in terms of energy, in terms of water to cool the plants, and even in the use of some raw materials extracted from very vulnerable parts of our world. We need to be attentive to the actual environmental cost of AI itself."



Bishop Paul Tighe, a top official at the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education, poses while speaking to OSV News following his address, "Theology and Mission in an Age of Artificial Intelligence" to the Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology at Trinity College Dublin Aug. 23, 2025. (OSV News/Sarah Mac Donald)

He told the gathering of theologians from across Europe that while the industry admitted that AI would result in reduced employment, insufficient attention was being paid to the commercial inequalities which are likely to emerge as AI becomes more pervasive and the social cost of fewer people in work.

"My concern is that a lot of people are saying there will be significant loss of employment. They say don't worry about that because AI will generate such wealth that we will be able to share that wealth and give people benefits without them having to work," he told OSV News.
"But that is a very unilateral way of thinking about work."

Work in Catholic tradition — and beyond it — Tighe said, is a "place where we find meaning, purpose, identity and value to express our dignity and creativity. I would be concerned that something could be lost there."

Another factor he highlighted is that traditionally, work for many people is "the primary place of socialization, where you grow and learn with others in a community." AI and digitalization, he underlined, are contributing to the fracturing of working relationships; people no longer have a job but a task and compete with others to do that task.

According to Tighe, who was ordained for the Archdiocese of Dublin in 1983, AI and the social issues that it gives rise to — will be a priority for Pope Leo XIV.

"He has very clearly put it at the top of the agenda in terms of his choice of name and the link with Rerum Novarum, and he explicitly said that reading the signs of the times this is something that we need to engage with," the bishop said.

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He added that pontiff's training as a mathematician gave him a feeling and a competence for these types of issues.

He revealed in his address that a dialogue between the tech companies and the Vatican has been taking place on AI and other technological developments.

AI, he said, is forcing us to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life, about the value of life, about where we want to go as a society, and what society is.

Tighe told OSV News that the dialogue with tech companies has been "intensifying" and that "an element of trust has emerged which means that people know we are trying to search together for the best outcomes and for the best possibilities. In that context, the trust itself permits a more open dialogue."

There is "still a commitment and a desire to have that conversation" which has involved Vatican departments such as the Pontifical Academy for Life, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, and the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

"But there hasn't been a cohesive Vatican approach. I think it would be very helpful if Pope Leo were in a position to put a structure there for engagement internally and with external stakeholders."