Opinion
Guest Voices



The X-62A VISTA aircraft, an experimental AI-enabled Air Force F-16 fighter jet, takes off on May 2, 2024, at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif. (AP/Damian Dovarganes)



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November 24, 2026
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Last month, Pope Leo XIV urged governments to take "concrete steps toward banning lethal autonomous weapons" and warned that decisions affecting human life must remain subject to "effective, informed and responsible human oversight."

The pontiff was unequivocal: Artificial intelligence, he argued, must be "disarmed."

At the fall meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, bishops voted on Nov. 18 to update their guidelines for ethical investing, the first update since 2021. The revised guidelines include a section on AI.

The USCCB will "not invest in companies that design, develop or manufacture AI technologies that fail to safeguard the dignity of the human person," the guidelines now state. Specifically, the guidelines prohibit investing in companies that develop technology designed for "high-risk military, security, or immigration enforcement" as well as autonomous weapons systems "capable of selecting, tracking, and engaging targets without human control and oversight."

Applying those guidelines may prove tricky, as companies are not always transparent about how their technology is actually used.

An examination of U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filings and investment disclosures reveals that at least six Catholic-branded exchange-traded and mutual funds hold shares in Palantir Technologies, the American software company whose Gotham platform advertises an "AI-powered kill chain."

At the time of writing, those funds held approximately $14 million in Palantir shares, based on their latest available reporting dates. Some of the actively-managed funds have more than doubled the stake in Palantir over 2026, despite the growing

controversy around autonomous weapons.

Although their holdings represent a mere fraction of Palantir's estimated $350 billion market value, these investments pose substantial ethical questions. The USCCB's investing guidelines apply only for its own investments, but many of the funds advertise their services as compliant with the USCCB.

"Many dioceses, eparchies, religious communities, and Catholic organizations have independently chosen to apply these guidelines to their own policies on corporate responsibility and we welcome this, but the USCCB is not a governance organization with oversight of these entities," Chieko Noguchi, the USCCB's spokeswoman, said in a statement. "As such, we do not review or certify any other organization's investment strategy or adherence to the guidelines."

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Palantir's heavily-marketed Gotham software turns drone feeds, satellite imagery and intelligence into military targets, helping commanders decide where to strike and whom to kill.

The company is also one of the key developers of the Maven Smart System — a military targeting platform responsible for the first known civilian casualty of an AI-assisted strike. According to reporting from Airwars and The Independent, a 20-year-old Iraqi college student named Abdul-Rahman al-Rawi was killed "unintentionally" in a U.S. airstrike in February 2024.

The U.S. Central Command's chief technology officer told Bloomberg the strikes were aided by Maven's "machine-learning algorithms."

Central Command later walked back this statement by claiming it had "no way of knowing" which strikes involved the use of machine learning.

Ingvild Bode, an expert on military artificial intelligence at the University of Southern Denmark, has warned that AI-assisted targeting can turn human operators in the so-called "kill chain" into passive supervisors rather than decision-makers with human agency. She notes that military personnel may have as little as 10 seconds to approve a lethal strike — not allowing enough time to verify the strike intelligence, question the algorithm's targeting recommendation nor assess any potential civilian

harm.

Palantir's AI military ambitions are well documented. In 2025, it signed a software contract worth up to $10 billion over 10 years with the U.S. Army as well as a five-year partnership that could be worth up to 750 million pounds ($983 million) with the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence.

The company also has a strategic partnership with Israel's Ministry of Defense to offer AI support to its military operations.

Palantir's chief executive officer, Alex Karp, has been largely unapologetic about the company's involvement in the conflict. Speaking on the "All-In" podcast in September 2025, Karp said its application had been "very precise and deadly and I support that." Though he added, "I'm clearly not in favor of Palestinian innocent people being killed," he also claimed that Israel's ratio of civilian to combatant casualties was "better than anyone has ever had in the history of humanity."

Between Oct. 7, 2023, and Oct. 9, 2026, some 74,370 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip, according to the United Nations, citing the Gaza Ministry of Health,

Even Palantir's own Gotham promotional material raises questions of civilian harm. Its military targeting interface displays civilian container ships, including the identifiable MSC Rifaya, alongside warships, missile sites and fighter jets. Although this does not mean civilian vessels are treated as legitimate targets, their inclusion raises concerns about how the software distinguishes civilian infrastructure from military objectives.

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Other military technology companies identified in the quarterly SEC filings linked to Catholic funds include U.S. defense contractors Science Applications International Corporation, CACI International, BigBear.ai and L3Harris Technologies Inc.

SAIC has described a cloud-based U.S. Air Force command-and-control system "shortening the kill chain by 85%." CACI similarly promotes technologies designed to accelerate military targeting and engagement, "empowering warfighters with speed."

L3Harris, the eighth-largest defense contractor in the world, has integrated AI technology into its sensor and imaging systems. It also worked alongside Palantir and other defense contractors to produce Titan, the "U.S. Army's first AI-defined vehicle."

Catholic-branded products with published Palantir and military technology holdings include the Global X S&P 500 Catholic Values ETF, the Knights of Columbus Large Cap Growth Fund and the Knights of Columbus U.S. All Cap Index Fund. Others include the SEI Catholic Values Equity Fund, the MoA Catholic Values Index Fund and the Catholic SRI Growth Portfolio.

L3Harris holdings are concentrated in the Ave Maria Rising Dividend Fund.

Contacted by email, spokespersons for Global X and the S&P Global referred us to the company's screening methodology, which allows for investments in "military contracting" if the level of involvement is less than 50%.

It declined to comment on how specific companies were evaluated in its methodology.

A media officer for the Hirtle & Co., which manages the Catholic SRI Growth Portfolio, said: "Based on our screening data, approximately 4.99% of Palantir's revenue is attributable to activities classified as military weapons, below our 10% exclusion threshold." However, the company recognizes that military AI is an "evolving area" and said it will update its screening appropriately based on the latest USCCB guidelines.

Attempts to reach the other fund managers went unanswered.

The changes adopted by U.S. bishops should compel other Catholic organizations to consider their own investments.

These questions stand in even starker relief following Leo's May 2026 encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, where the pontiff warned "that technology, detached from ethics and responsibility, will render decisions about life and death more rapid and impersonal."

"No algorithm can make war morally acceptable," the pope declared. "AI does not remove the intrinsic inhumanity of conflict."

Bernard Prusak, a leading scholar of Catholic social thought and business ethics at John Carroll University, told us that Catholic institutions should "at least think twice" about investing in such companies.

"I don't see a moral or material difference between a company like Palantir that's in the software space, and a company like Lockheed Martin, who's producing the bomb," he said.

"Yes, there is a distinction to be drawn, whether that's a distinction that carries any moral weight. I tend to be skeptical," he added.