
Pope Francis: “New technologies must not promote the folly of war.”

“The world has no need of new technologies that contribute to the unjust development of commerce and the weapons trade and consequently end up promoting the folly of war. By so doing, not only intelligence but the human heart itself would risk becoming ever more ‘artificial’”, writes **Pope Francis** in his Message for the World Day of Peace that will be celebrated on 1 January 2024 with the theme: “Artificial intelligence and peace.” “The most advanced technological applications should not be employed to facilitate the violent resolution of conflicts, but rather to pave the way for peace”, the Pope remarks in the text with regard to “the serious ethical questions related to the armaments sector.” “The ability to conduct military operations through remote control systems has led to a lessened perception of the devastation caused by those weapon systems and the burden of responsibility for their use, resulting in an even more cold and detached approach to the immense tragedy of war.” “Nor can we ignore the possibility of sophisticated weapons ending up in the wrong hands, facilitating, for instance, terrorist attacks or interventions aimed at destabilizing the institutions of legitimate systems of government”, Francis writes. He exhorts to “adopt a binding international treaty that regulates the development and use of artificial intelligence in its many forms” and guards against “the technocratic paradigm” and allowing algorithms to determine our lives. “Progress in information technology and the development of digital technologies in recent decades have already begun to effect profound transformations in global society and its various dynamics”, writes the Pope, for whom “new digital tools are even now changing the face of communications, public administration, education, consumption, personal interactions and countless other aspects of our daily lives.” Moreover, “from the digital footprints spread throughout the Internet, technologies employing a variety of algorithms can extract data that enable them to control mental and relational habits for commercial or political purposes, often without our knowledge, thus limiting our conscious exercise of freedom of choice.” “In a space like the Web, marked by information overload, they can structure the flow of data according to criteria of selection that are not always perceived by the user”, Francis denounces, for “artificial intelligence ought to be understood as a galaxy of different realities. We cannot presume a priori that its development will make a beneficial contribution to the future of humanity and to peace among peoples.” It is therefore necessary “to act responsibly and respect such fundamental human values as “inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy and reliability”.

“Technological developments that do not lead to an improvement in the quality of life of all humanity, but on the contrary aggravate inequalities and conflicts, can never count as true progress”,

writes the Pope. “Nor is it sufficient simply to presume a commitment on the part of those who design algorithms and digital technologies to act ethically and responsibly”, the Pope highlights the “need to strengthen or, if necessary, to establish bodies charged with examining the ethical issues arising in this field and protecting the rights of those who employ forms of artificial intelligence or are affected by them.” Certain AI devices can “hallucinate”, that is, create statements that at first glance appear plausible but are unfounded or betray biases.” “This poses a serious problem when artificial intelligence is deployed in campaigns of disinformation that spread false news and lead to a growing distrust of the communications media”, reads the Message. Negative consequences of the misuse of AI include “discrimination, interference in elections, the rise of a surveillance society, digital exclusion and the exacerbation of an individualism increasingly disconnected from society. All these factors risk fueling conflicts and hindering peace”, writes the Pope, for whom the ability of certain devices to produce syntactically and semantically coherent texts, “is no guarantee of their reliability”, just as “the vast amount of data analyzed by artificial intelligences is in itself no guarantee of impartiality”:

“When algorithms extrapolate information, they always run the risk of distortion.”

“Fundamental respect for human dignity demands that we refuse to allow the uniqueness of the person to be identified with a set of data”, concludes the Pope, warning against the potential impact on the workplace: “Jobs that were once the sole domain of human labour are rapidly being taken over by industrial applications of artificial intelligence.”

M.Michela Nicolais