

The 2024 Peace Message:

*Artificial Intelligence and Peace*

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Sala Stampa, 14 December 2023

The Message for the 57th World Day of Peace identifies the challenges that new technologies pose for building a fairer and more fraternal world.

Pope Francis sees artificial intelligence as a "sign of the times": a distinctive characteristic of the present day, changing constantly and forecasting greater transformations in future. The expression "sign of the times" indicates a new human reality that emerges from what's going on around us, which the Church interprets in the light of the Gospel, and in which we recognize the good news of God's Kingdom coming towards us. Various judgments may ensue: some positive, some negative; sometimes grateful and laudatory, sometimes disappointed and even denunciatory.

As a sign of the times, artificial intelligence, no less than any other expression of human ingenuity, requires careful scrutiny to make sure that it really serves the common good, protects the inalienable value of the human person, and promotes our fundamental rights. It is part of the 'human territory', so to speak, that the Son of God took upon Himself at the moment of the Incarnation: He assumed human nature and made everything human His own, with the exception of sin. Christ's humanity is not partial, and so the Church insists on applying the same lens of the common good and human dignity to AI as it does to anything else.

Artificial intelligences already exert huge influence and will increasingly do so. We cannot foresee, hardly imagine, the new applications and their impacts on personal and social life, politics and the economy, culture and the environment. Since we do not know where artificial intelligence will take the human family, everyone needs to be better informed about developments as they occur, to speak up and take responsibility.

The Holy Father, no luddite, takes positive note of the contribution made to humanity by scientific and technological progress. These achievements have proven valuable in the service of human persons, their dignity and rights.

At the same time, we should not liken techno-scientific progress to a 'neutral' tool such as a hammer: whether a hammer contributes to good or evil depends upon the user's intentions, not the hammer-maker's. AI-based digital technologies, on the other hand, 'build in' the individual and social values of their makers; subsequently they also reflect the values of their users. Pope Francis decries the 'technocratic paradigm', an unscrupulous use of technology, driven exclusively by lust for profit and vested interests. If the technocratic paradigm is the only rule that governs AI, it will end up causing outrageous collateral damage: inequalities, injustices, tensions, conflicts. Thus, artificial intelligence poses challenges that "are technical, but also anthropological, social, educational and political."

We are most afraid of artificial intelligences for purposes of war. Besides being ever more sophisticated and destructive, they remove human responsibility from the scene of battle. Finally, no one pulls the trigger or drops the bomb, just an algorithm.

Artificial intelligence can also threaten social justice. In the world of work, for example, "knowledge machines" and robotics are wiping out more and more jobs, with major increases in poverty.

As for information, there are new ways to distort both words and images, deliberately to misinform and manipulate, and these seriously endanger civil order and democratic government.

Education, the Holy Father emphasises, is fundamental: forming those who design algorithms and digital technologies to be more responsible themselves; and training everyone, especially young people, to use new technologies consciously and to think critically about their impacts, especially on the poor and the environment.

The supervision and regulation of new technologies is required in all phases, from conception to marketing and actual use. We have only ourselves (humanity) to blame for destructive outcomes and unfavourable repercussions. To govern the development and use of artificial intelligence responsibly, effective regulations are needed within States as well as multilateral agreements and binding treaties. As Pope Francis says regarding the climate crisis, here too "a different framework for effective cooperation is required ... to

consolidate respect for the most elementary human rights, social rights and the protection of our common home" (*Laudate Deum* 42).

The 2024 Message implores not only the usual addressees – heads of state, political authorities, leaders in civil society – to exercise co-responsibility at this moment in history, but everyone else too. Don't leave it to the owners and the developers. All must pay attention and choose well, if we are to hand down a better, more peaceful world to the generations to follow.

A serious reflection on artificial intelligence, together with the urgent theme of peace – is it surprising? Christ was most concerned about the human condition and our most fragile siblings – the very same major hallmarks of Pope Francis's teaching in words and deeds. No wonder, then, that he would have us begin the year by having us deeply interrogate perhaps the highest-stake gamble of our future.

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To help receive this message, understand its theme and explore its implications, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is making multimedia aids, information material and theological reflections available. Today I'm happy to launch the video presentation of Pope Francis's Message entitled "Artificial Intelligence and Peace".