# Pope Leo XIV urges ethical stewardship of AI amid deepfake threats to faith and trust



In today’s digital landscape, the intersection of technology and faith presents both profound opportunities and significant challenges. At the forefront of this phenomena is the alarming rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology, which are reshaping perceptions of truth and trust in unprecedented ways. As society becomes increasingly reliant on digital platforms for communication, finance, and even spiritual engagement, the potential for both enriching experiences and dangerous misunderstandings looms large.

AI has heralded a new era of technological advancement, introducing tools that enhance our lives through efficiency and connectivity. Yet, the rapid emergence of deepfakes—highly realistic but fraudulent audio and visual content—has created a crisis of authenticity. Incidents have already demonstrated the catastrophic impact of these technologies; for example, a finance professional was swindled out of $25 million after being misled by a deepfake video that convincingly portrayed a senior executive. Such breaches of trust extend beyond finance into the realm of public discourse, where misinformation can sway elections and shift public opinion.

This ethical dilemma has not gone unnoticed by leaders within the Church. Recently elected Pope Leo XIV, acknowledging the complexities posed by AI, emphasised the need for responsibility and ethical stewardship. During his inaugural address, he stated, “Artificial intelligence, with its immense potential, requires responsibility and discernment so that it can be used for the good of all and benefit all humanity.” This call reflects the Church's deep-seated commitment to human dignity, reinforcing that technology should empower rather than diminish the personal worth of individuals.

The sheer scale of our digital interconnectedness highlights an ironic truth: while over 5.35 billion people are online, a genuine human connection often feels elusive. The deluge of information can lead to mental health challenges, social fragmentation, and a breakdown in authentic communication. In this context, the Church is advocating for a reconceptualization of dialogue, as seen in the upcoming 59th World Communications Day on June 1, 2025, which encourages participants to “share with gentleness the hope that is in your hearts.” This theme challenges individuals to transform hostility into constructive conversations, where truth is communicated with compassion rather than accusation.

Furthermore, the ethical implications of AI and deepfake technology are particularly concerning. These tools are adept at distorting reality, undermining trust not just in the media but within faith communities as well. The Church posits that technology, without a moral compass, can easily lead to technocratic temptations, wherein efficiency is revered over empathy and solidarity. Additionally, there is a pressing risk that AI could exacerbate existing social inequalities, leaving vulnerable populations even more marginalised—a demographic that the Church has always sought to uplift.

Pope Francis has voiced similar concerns, urging global leaders to implement stringent oversight mechanisms regarding AI. Striking a balance between innovation and ethical responsibility, he warned against allowing machines to dictate human fate, asserting that we must retain control over technology to preserve human dignity. His views were reinforced during discussions at influential forums, including recent G7 summits, where he advocated for a robust ethical framework governing the use of AI.

In light of these developments, the Church is called to not merely resist the tide of technology but to embrace it as a tool for fostering deeper encounters with the divine. Initiatives like the “AI Jesus,” which provided a digital confessional in Switzerland using AI technology, have garnered both intrigue and criticism. This experiment challenged participants to reflect on their relationships with both machines and the sacred, exemplifying the complex interface between faith and technology.

As we navigate this new terrain, the imperative for discernment and digital wisdom becomes ever more pressing. The proliferation of deepfake technologies and the ubiquitous nature of misinformation necessitate a vigilant community that champions truth and ethical engagement. Pope Leo XIV’s recent remarks underscore the Church's resolve to rise to these contemporary challenges not with timidity but with hope and courage. By fostering an environment conducive to meaningful dialogue, grounded in principles of charity and compassion, the Church can indeed model a more humanised approach to communication in the digital age.

Now, more than ever, the Church's calling is to offer guidance amidst the cacophony of modern life—inviting believers and seekers alike to reclaim their connection to truth, community, and ultimately, faith.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.indiancatholicmatters.org/ai-and-deepfake-challenges-for-the-church/), [[2]](https://www.apnews.com/article/36d29e37a11620b594b9b7c0574cc358)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.indiancatholicmatters.org/ai-and-deepfake-challenges-for-the-church/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-francis-tells-g7-that-humans-must-not-lose-control-ai-2024-06-14/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.apnews.com/article/36d29e37a11620b594b9b7c0574cc358), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/vatican-says-ai-has-shadow-of-evil-calls-close-oversight-2025-01-28/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.apnews.com/article/66268027fbcf4b48972d1d62541f0b16), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/9805fec11681adbf88d3a7c73bdf47de)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.indiancatholicmatters.org/ai-and-deepfake-challenges-for-the-church/), [[5]](https://erlc.com/resource/how-deepfakes-erode-trust/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/vatican-says-ai-has-shadow-of-evil-calls-close-oversight-2025-01-28/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-francis-tells-g7-that-humans-must-not-lose-control-ai-2024-06-14/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.apnews.com/article/36d29e37a11620b594b9b7c0574cc358), [[3]](https://www.apnews.com/article/66268027fbcf4b48972d1d62541f0b16)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.indiancatholicmatters.org/ai-and-deepfake-challenges-for-the-church/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/vatican-says-ai-has-shadow-of-evil-calls-close-oversight-2025-01-28/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.indiancatholicmatters.org/ai-and-deepfake-challenges-for-the-church/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.apnews.com/article/36d29e37a11620b594b9b7c0574cc358> - Pope Leo XIV, the first American pope and an Augustinian, unveiled his vision for the papacy by identifying artificial intelligence (AI) as one of humanity’s most pressing challenges. In his first formal audience with the cardinals who elected him, Leo emphasized continuity with Pope Francis, notably pledging to uphold the inclusive mission laid out in Francis' 2013 statement "The Joy of the Gospel." He reaffirmed support for the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and Catholic social teaching. Leo highlighted the ethical concerns associated with AI, drawing parallels to Pope Leo XIII’s advocacy on social issues during the industrial revolution. On his first outing, Leo visited the Madonna sanctuary in Genazzano and later prayed at Pope Francis’ tomb. He retains his episcopal motto and coat of arms promoting unity in the Church. Elected swiftly on the fourth ballot of a diverse conclave, Leo garnered overwhelming support. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, a former contender, praised his leadership and insight. Pope Leo appears poised to guide the Church through modern challenges with a focus on social justice, empathy, and dialogue.
3. <https://www.apnews.com/article/66268027fbcf4b48972d1d62541f0b16> - An avatar named "AI Jesus" was tested in a Catholic chapel in Lucerne, Switzerland, in an experiment that explored people's trust in machines and the divine. For two months, visitors could confess their problems and concerns to a computer screen inside a confessional and receive responses based on Scripture. Over 900 conversations were recorded, with most participants finding the experience moving or thought-provoking. The project, which used OpenAI technology, explored themes such as true love, suffering, and contemporary religious issues. Although the project received criticism and was considered by some as blasphemous, it sparked deep interest in the modality of connecting the spiritual with technology. The initiative also allowed for reflection on the potential role of AI in religion. However, no immediate plans are expected to repeat "AI Jesus" until after further consideration.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-francis-tells-g7-that-humans-must-not-lose-control-ai-2024-06-14/> - Pope Francis addressed the Group of Seven (G7) summit, emphasizing the importance of maintaining human control over Artificial Intelligence (AI). He warned that AI, while representing a significant transformation, should be closely supervised to preserve human dignity and life. The pope stressed that no machine should decide human fate or take lives, fearing such dependency on AI would strip humanity of hope and autonomy. He acknowledged AI's potential to enhance knowledge and scientific research but also highlighted its risks, such as increasing inequality and spreading misinformation. The G7 leaders, including those from the U.S., Germany, Britain, France, Italy, Canada, and Japan, along with key invitees from other nations, expressed support for this caution. The G7 committed to developing plans to meet future skills and educational needs in light of the AI revolution. Pope Francis's address underscored the need for ethical and political frameworks to ensure AI is used beneficially and equitably.
5. <https://erlc.com/resource/how-deepfakes-erode-trust/> - As we enter into the 2020 presidential election cycle, deepfakes will continue to gain an outsized role in the news we see, ultimately affecting what we believe. So, what are we to do about them as a society? As I have previously written, deepfakes are simply fake videos produced using highly advanced artificial intelligence (AI) to create extremely realistic and potentially dangerous pieces of content. Deepfake technology has become a hot topic in our communities because of how it can misrepresent reality. This technology is not new though. For example, versions of it have been used for years to create celebrity pornography videos. Face swapping can give the illusion that our dreams are reality by taking the face of one person and placing it on another’s body. Pornography has helped propel these technologies into the mainstream and fostered further innovation. But just as pornography sells us a cheap and distorted version of reality, deepfakes can present the world as some want it to be rather than as it is. The deepfake disillusion can not only harm how we view ourselves and those around us, but can also cause us to question some of the most basic aspects of what is true in our divided world. The aim of a deepfake is to present an alternate reality and sow discord in our society.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/vatican-says-ai-has-shadow-of-evil-calls-close-oversight-2025-01-28/> - The Vatican has urged for stringent oversight on the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), citing concerns over its potential to disseminate misinformation and undermining societal foundations. A new text on AI ethics, approved by Pope Francis and authored by two Vatican departments, highlights the risk of AI-generated fake media, political polarization, and social unrest. Pope Francis has been vocal about the ethical challenges posed by AI, addressing these concerns at events like the World Economic Forum and the G7 summit. The Vatican's document, titled "Antica et nova" (Ancient and new), evaluates AI's impact on various sectors such as labor, healthcare, and education. It emphasizes the need for moral scrutiny and regulation to ensure AI is utilized ethically and responsibly.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/9805fec11681adbf88d3a7c73bdf47de> - Pope Francis called for an international treaty to ensure the ethical development and use of artificial intelligence (AI), warning about the risks of technologies lacking human values such as compassion and forgiveness. His appeal, made in the annual message for World Peace Day, is particularly personal after a fake AI-generated image of him wearing a luxury jacket went viral. This request coincides with the European Union's recent provisional agreement on comprehensive AI regulations. Francis acknowledges AI's potential but underscores the ethical and existential dangers posed by this technology. He also expressed concern about the use of AI in weapon systems, advocating for significant human oversight to prevent the promotion of war. The document also highlighted the negative impacts of automated systems on the classification of individuals and their rights. Finally, he insisted that tech companies should not self-regulate and that the treaty should be negotiated globally to promote positive practices and avoid negative ones.