

Bangalore (India), Feb. 2, 2024.- In talking about Artificial Intelligence (AI) we must reject apocalyptic tones and focus well on the transformation taking place, the benefits and challenges it offers us, in order to wisely illuminate our time. This was emphasized by Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, speaking during the General Assembly of the Indian Bishops' Conference in Bangalore. The Assembly's theme is "Church's response to the current sociopolitical situations in the country and challenges of Artificial Intelligence." Speaking to the 175 Indian bishops about AI, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, underlined the importance of the 2020 "Rome Call for AI Ethics," a document of intent - promoted by the Pontifical Academy - signed by Microsoft, IBM, FAO, the Italian government and since then endorsed by hundreds of universities and research centers and companies.

Archbishop Paglia began his talk by emphasizing the benefits to people and society that AI systems realize, noted what he sees as the challenges to pay attention to in the social change affecting the Church, and then focused on the anthropological dynamics

Today, Archbishop Paglia said, I would not like to speak to you about the "dangers" that many prophets of doom prophesy. "Rather, I would like to draw your attention first of all to the incredible benefits that new technologies, and in particular AI systems, are already bringing to our history. In health care, diagnostics have been resoundingly enhanced by these systems capable of detecting or predicting diseases virtually invisible to the human eye. Developments have been recorded in laboratories and medical education, where digital modeling has made great strides in the training processes of future physicians." Countless then are the applications of AI in the world of agriculture, even and especially in those areas not yet exploited with intensive and, often, destructive practice. If we look at the world of communication and information management, we cannot but be amazed at the ease we have of sharing content, getting hold of refined data, reading texts in other languages.

Rather, the Net and Digital, "are radically changing social structures," and the change affects the Church, including theology. The Internet, at least on a superficial level, "replaces a pyramidal view of society with a horizontal and equal one. Truth is no longer the prerogative of constituted and recognized authorities but is the fruit of a continuous dialogical search among a thousand voices. Social media promote a prominence of individuals (with special attention to women and people living in rural areas)". "We often associate digital transformation with the world of the young, the breakdown in the transmission of knowledge and faith between generations, and easy access to immoral experiences. True but partial: the largest consumers of online porn (for instance in India) are adults between the ages of 25 and 34 (husbands and fathers of children, or rather husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, since 33 percent of users are women). Online gamers (only in India, for instance) are also 59% adults between the ages of 25 and 44. Beware of reducing this to a youth issue, although on the young and very young this 'toxic' exposure can have even more disruptive effects. The second is more theological. The shift from authority to authoritativeness, from instruction to witness (what else are influencers?), from verticality to synodality, are all steps that recover (or at least allude to) evangelical dynamisms. Why consider them only in their destructive sense?"

The underlying issue concerns the emerging vision of man that is of deep concern to the Church. This is why Archbishop Paglia noted that the upcoming General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Feb. 12-14, has the anthropological question as its theme. "If we are concerned about these systems, it is because they emulate some processes that we associate with human intelligence. And that is why we work to mark the difference, as if our humanity resides in this faculty. This is not true: we are not our intelligence alone, and any talk that goes in this direction is reductive. We are also not our data alone. Dataism (a pseudo-religious form that springs from the incredible predictive power of

machine learning systems) wants to reduce us to the (countless) traces we leave behind." But this is not so, because "AI systems, taken in their deepest anthropological challenge, require us to go back to talking about humans and their bodies. The urgent issue is the flesh, and of this issue, if you please, we are experts. We are grounded in the event of the incarnation of the Son of God, in a resurrected body that St. Thomas (evangelizer of India) asks to touch, in the promise of the resurrection of the flesh that we proclaim in the apostolic creed”.

Speaking again about the 2020 Rome Call for AI Ethics, which the Pontifical Academy for Life continues to promote, Archbishop Paglia noted that the qualifying aspect of the document is in calling for "an ethical by design approach. It is naive to think of technologies as neutral. They, like any other human work, bring with them cultures, social constructs, intentionalities, ways of understanding the economy and humanity. The ethical question must be asked at the outset, by design: how do we want to design, make, market these incredible technologies?”.

In calling for international regulation for AI, Archbishop Paglia announced that the "Rome Call for AI Ethics" next July in Hiroshima (Japan) will be signed by leaders of Asian religions. "Because," he noted, "when discussing theological issues, religions are divided, but when the good and the future of humanity is at stake, they are united more than ever”. "Beloved, the great transformations taking place should not frighten us. Rather, they are a call to responsibility that the gospel imposes on us with regard to the human life that inhabits this planet. The memory of Jesus' Easter makes us women and men who take charge of the future."

At the end of his speech, Bishop Paglia added a few words on the topic of family.

"Allow me, however, to add to these reflections a small appendix. Besides being President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, I am also Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for the Sciences of Marriage and Family. Just yesterday I visited the Indian section of this institute, which is based in Changanacherry. I inaugurated a two-day work of family ministry leaders from all the dioceses in Kerala. I thank those of you who are investing people and resources in this project, and I invite everyone to consider this institution for the training of those who are to accompany the families of your churches. Pope Francis wanted to refound this institution to put the family at the center of the Church, broadening its perspective. Indeed, it is no longer thinkable to reduce the family to a moral issue. Talking about the family today means talking about social ties, about attention to the weak (children and the elderly), even about the form of the Church, which is called to be more family-oriented."

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