

Artificial Intelligence Ethics: An Abrahamic commitment to the Rome Call

10 January 2023

Address to participants in the “Rome Call” meeting promoted by the Renaissance Foundation

Pope Francis

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I thank Archbishop Paglia for his kind words, and extend my greeting to Rabbi Eliezer Simha Weisz and Sheikh Abdallah bin Bayyah. I likewise greet Mr Brad Smith, President of Microsoft, Mr Dario Gil, Global Vice-President of IBM, and Mr Maximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist of FAO, the first signatories of the Rome Call, as well as the members of the various delegations here present.

I am grateful to the Pontifical Academy for Life and to the Renaissance Foundation, for their commitment in promoting, through the Rome Call, a shared ethics regarding the great challenges that lie ahead in the area of artificial intelligence. After the first signing in 2020, today’s event also sees the involvement of the Jewish and Islamic delegations, who are looking at so-called artificial intelligence with a perspective inspired by the words of the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti. In agreeing on promoting a culture that places this technology at the service of the common good of all and of the care of our common home, you are offering an example to many others. Fraternity among all is the precondition for ensuring that technological development will also be at the service of justice and peace throughout the world.

We are all aware of how artificial intelligence is increasingly present in every aspect of daily life, both personal and social. It affects the way we understand the world and ourselves. Innovation in this field means that these tools are increasingly decisive in human activity and even compelling in human decision-making. I encourage you, then, to continue in this endeavour. I am pleased to know that you also wish to involve the other great world religions and men and women of goodwill so that “algor-ethics” – ethical reflection on the use of algorithms – will be increasingly present not only in public debate, but also in the development of technical solutions. Indeed, every person must be able to enjoy a human and supportive development, without anyone being excluded. We must therefore be vigilant and work to ensure that the discriminatory use of these instruments does not take root at the expense of the most fragile and excluded. Let us always remember that the way we treat the last and least of our brothers and sisters speaks of the value we place upon all human life. We could take the example of asylum seekers: it is not acceptable that the decision about someone’s life and future be entrusted to an algorithm.

The Rome Call can be a useful tool for a common dialogue among all, in order to foster a humane development of new technologies. In this regard, I would reiterate that, “in the encounter between different visions of the world, human rights represent an important point of convergence in the search for common ground. At present, there would seem to be a need for renewed reflection on rights and duties in this area. The scope and acceleration of the transformations of the digital era have in fact raised unforeseen problems and situations that challenge our individual and collective ethos” (Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, 28 February 2020). The accessions to the Rome Call, which have increased over time, are a significant step towards promoting a digital anthropology, with three fundamental coordinates: ethics, education and law.

I willingly express my support for the generosity and dynamism with which you have committed yourselves, and I invite you to continue, with boldness and discernment, in searching for ways that will lead to an ever greater involvement of all those who have the good of the human family at heart.

Upon all of you, I invoke God’s blessing: May God bless all of you, that your journey may unfold with serenity and peace, in a spirit of cooperation. May my blessing also accompany you, and, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!