

Speak of the Devil: AI chatbots fuelling satanism, exorcists told

Italy

Tom Kingston Rome

Exorcists claim they get accustomed to being vomited on, sworn at and having nails spat at them by people possessed by the Devil.

But experts lining up to teach them new tricks at an exorcism course in Rome say they now face a new threat: AI-fuelled satanism.

“Artificial intelligence is a great power, a force for both good and evil, and can therefore be used for Devil-worshipping,” said Father Luis Ramirez Almanza, a Mexican priest who runs the annual training course for exorcists.

Speakers who are booked to address the audience at the event in May include Father Fortunato Di Noto, a Sicilian priest who fights satanists who combine their Devil-worshipping with paedophilia. “We believe these groups are using AI to generate images

of children involved in satanic rites,” he said.

David Murgia, who runs Catholic Risk and Insurances Service (CRIS), a research group that tracks cults, said: “Police tell us satanists are using AI to hide their content online and communicate with each other.”

Father Ramirez said another speaker, Beatrice Ugolini, an academic, will discuss how occult groups in Italy — thought to total 263 — are using AI to generate the symbols they use in rites.

Ramirez was speaking at a press conference yesterday to announce the event, the Course on the Ministry of Exorcism and Prayer of Deliverance, which draws up to 170 participants to the Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, a Vatican-affiliated university. This year the group will include Catholic exorcists as well as rabbis, imams and evangelical preachers.

Ramirez was joined yesterday by a

woman who spoke about her possession by the Devil which made her speak in Arabic, a language she had never learnt. Exorcists say she possessed more often acquire the ability to speak Latin, Hebrew or Aramaic.

AI has long been considered by some as the Devil itself, including Elon Musk, who likened it in 2014 to a demon being summoned with no plans to control it.

Asked yesterday if it was Satan, ChatGPT, an AI programme, responded: “No — I’m not the Devil. I’m just an AI created by OpenAI to answer questions and have conversations ... I’m here to help, not to worry you.”

Some Silicon Valley moguls have seen AI as more of an all-knowing, god-like entity rather than the Devil. Sam Altman, the chief executive of OpenAI, has described it as “magic intelligence in the sky”.

The Pope has warned that AI risks robbing people of their privacy and

their jobs. Just after his election last year the American pontiff explained he had taken the papal name Leo after the 19th-century Pope Leo XIII, who fought for workers’ rights.

Leo XIV has warned of “extremely rich people who are investing in artificial intelligence, totally ignoring the value of human beings and of humanity”. That could lead, he has warned, to AI “rewriting human history — including the history of the Church”.

At a seminar held at the Vatican this week, a leading bishop cited Anthropic, the American AI firm that has denied the US government the chance to use its algorithms for mass surveillance and autonomous weapons.

Bishop Paul Tighe said he wanted to avoid resorting to “apocalyptic rhetoric”, but warned that AI could usher in an era of “biological weapons, propaganda, disinformation and systems which are beyond human control”.