

Living as a Catholic in the Age of AI: Thoughts on the Emerging Catholic Doctrine on AI

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AI

What comes to your mind?

Key definitions: “intelligence” based on data

Artificial intelligence (AI): using computers to reproduce behaviors that would be considered intelligent in humans.

Machine learning: form of AI **based on (mostly) inductively inferring patterns from data.**

Deep learning: specific form of machine learning using “deep” neural networks.

Generative AI: form of deep learning that generates text, images, videos, audio, and other forms of data.

Large language models (LLMs): generative AI models that receive and generate text.

Multimodal models: generative AI models that receive and generate multiple forms of data.

“Narrow” AI vs. “general” AI.

“Model” is not the same as “chatbot.”

“AI” is a moving target – ambiguous terminology, fast developments, lots of hype, money involved.

Catholic Social Teaching 101

“[R]ich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and **living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society**” (USCCB). Seven themes, including:

- Life and dignity of the human person
- Option for the poor and vulnerable
- The dignity of work and rights of workers
- Care for God’s creation

Pope Leo XIII → Pope Leo XIV

“Pope Leo XIII in his historic [1891] Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* [On the Condition of Labor] addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour.”

Pope Leo XIV, Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to the College of Cardinals (10 May 2025)

Living as a Catholic in the age of AI

We are all responsible for what we do with AI

“Although responsibility for the ethical use of AI systems begins with those who develop, manage and oversee them, those who use them also share in this responsibility.”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Message of the Holy Father, signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, on the occasion of the AI for Good Summit 2025 (10 July 2025)

Human intelligence is embodied and relational. Humans are the moral agents

“Although advanced AI systems can ‘learn’ through processes such as machine learning, this sort of training is fundamentally different from the developmental growth of human intelligence, which is shaped by **embodied experiences, including sensory input, emotional responses, social interactions, and the unique context of each moment.**”

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, *Antiqua et Nova*: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence (14 January 2025)

In our day to day

Do not substitute your social skills and interactions with AI.

Take time to process your social interactions and emotional responses. For example, pray the *examen* and go to spiritual direction and therapy.

When using AI, ask yourself and other reliable sources whether AI is designed to do what you are asking it to do.

AI has to be used in the service of human dignity and the common good

“There is, however, the risk that AI will be used to advance the ‘technocratic paradigm’, which perceives all the world’s problems as solvable through technological means alone. Within this paradigm, human dignity and fraternity are frequently subordinated in the pursuit of efficiency, as though reality, goodness, and truth inherently emanate from technological and economic power. Yet **human dignity must never be violated for the sake of efficiency**. Technological developments that do not improve life for everyone, but instead create or worsen inequalities and conflicts, cannot be called true progress. For this reason, **AI should be placed at the service of a healthier, more human, more social and more integral development.**”

Pope Francis, Message of the Holy Father to the World Economic Forum 2025 (14 January 2025)

In our day to day

Discern which AI tools to use, how often, and for what tasks.

Do not sacrifice your human dignity, or the human dignity of others, by pursuing efficiency through AI. For example:

- Do not let AI add more speed, busyness, and stress to your life
- Do not share private information about you or others with AI tools

Resist the idea that technology, particularly AI, is the right solution to all problems.

We have to preserve our humanity as we use AI

“All of us are **called to grow together, in humanity and as humanity**. We are challenged to make a qualitative leap in order to become a complex, multiethnic, pluralistic, multireligious and multicultural society. We are called to reflect carefully on the theoretical development and the practical use of these new instruments of communication and knowledge. Their great possibilities for good are accompanied by the **risk of turning everything into abstract calculations that reduce individuals to data**, thinking to a mechanical process, experience to isolated cases, goodness to profit, and, above all, a denial of the uniqueness of each individual and his or her story.”

Pope Francis, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 58th World Day of Social Communications (24 January 2024)

In our day to day

When using AI, take time to (double) check the information provided by the AI, the biases embedded in the information, and your biases.

Use AI in a way that supports skill development.

Do not assume that interacting with AI will not change you. Be aware and be intentional.

We cannot treat AI as a human or as a God

*“[T]he presumption of substituting God for an artifact of human making is idolatry, a practice Scripture explicitly warns against (e.g., Ex. 20:4; 32:1-5; 34:17). Moreover, AI may prove even more seductive than traditional idols for, unlike idols that ‘have mouths but do not speak; eyes, but do not see; ears, but do not hear’ (Ps. 115:5-6), AI can ‘speak,’ or at least gives the illusion of doing so (cf. Rev. 13:15). Yet, it is vital to remember that **AI is but a pale reflection of humanity**—it is crafted by human minds, trained on human-generated material, responsive to human input, and sustained through human labor. AI cannot possess many of the capabilities specific to human life, and it is also fallible. **By turning to AI as a perceived ‘Other’ greater than itself**, with which to share existence and responsibilities, **humanity risks creating a substitute for God. However, it is not AI that is ultimately deified and worshipped, but humanity itself—which, in this way, becomes enslaved to its own work.**”*

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, *Antiqua et Nova*: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence (14 January 2025)

In our day to day

Do not humanize AI.

Resist magical thinking. Always remember what a particular AI tool is designed to do. Keep in mind that AI is good for some things, but not others.

Use AI. Do not let AI use you. Do not change *for* AI.

AI can be used for good. We should engage with it

“Technology is, and has been, immensely beneficial to our human family. We think, for example, of the countless advances made in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 102). In acknowledging the practical benefits of science and technology, we also see them as evidence of the creativity of human beings and the nobility of their vocation to **participate responsibly in God's creative action** (cf. *ibid.*, 131). // From this perspective, I am convinced that **the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning has the potential to contribute in a positive way to the future of humanity; we cannot dismiss it.**”

Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Minerva Dialogues (27 March 2023)

In our day to day

Learn about and use AI.

Discover what AI is good for and put it to good use.

Pray to know if there are ways that you can contribute to God's plan with AI.

Conclusion

Main takeaways

AI can be used for good.

Our humanity is embodied and relational.

AI has to be used in the service of human dignity and the common good.

We are all responsible for what we do with AI.

We have to discern how to engage with AI.

All of this happens in our day to day.

Discuss with the person next to you three things that you
take away **for your day to day**

In 2-3 minutes you can share collectively what you
discussed

Please share with a friend!

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Thank you

Timothy Johnston for welcoming this presentation.

Christina Maimone, Madeleine Pattis, and Mary Beth McCarthy for feedback on earlier versions of this presentation.

Nicole Sotelo for tips on how to present for a parish audience.

All of you for coming.

Resources to continue discerning

General resources about AI

Overview of generative AI: <https://www.investopedia.com/generative-ai-7497939>

Poor working conditions of people training AI:

<https://www.wired.com/story/millions-of-workers-are-training-ai-models-for-pennies/>

Environmental impact of AI:

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/ai-has-environmental-problem-heres-what-world-can-do-about>

Uneven distribution of environmental impact of AI:

<https://hbr.org/2024/07/the-uneven-distribution-of-ais-environmental-impacts>

Protecting your privacy when using generative AI tools:

<https://www.mozillafoundation.org/en/privacynotincluded/articles/how-to-protect-your-privacy-from-chatgpt-and-other-ai-chatbots/>

Understanding “hallucinations”: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/chatbot-hallucinations-inevitable/>

Bias in generative AI: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/dec/bias-ai-amplifies-our-own-biases>

Catholic social teaching

USCCB, Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching:

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>

USCCB, Papal and Vatican Documents:

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/foundational-documents>

What the Vatican has said about AI

I retrieved and reviewed all 97 documents returned by the [search “artificial intelligence” \(exact match\) from the website of the Vatican](#) as of April the 27th, 2026.

- Key Vatican documents on AI: <https://aiandcatholicism.com/documents.html>
- Quotes on AI from the Vatican: <https://aiandcatholicism.com/quotes.html>

Colleen Dulle - [What does the Vatican know about A.I.? A lot, actually.](#) - January 31, 2025

Steven Umbrello - [Lessons from the Vatican's AI Guidelines](#) - February 6, 2025

Catholic perspectives on AI

<https://www.usccb.org/artificial-intelligence>

March 6, 2026 - *National Catholic Reporter* - [The Vatican says AI risks destroying humanity. But one internet ethicist still has hope.](#)

March 12, 2026 - *Vatican News* - [Pope Leo XIV's balanced view of Artificial Intelligence](#)

April 9, 2026 - *Commonweal* - [Almost a Blasphemy](#)

April 16, 2026 - *America Magazine* - [What A.I. has to do with poverty and human dignity](#)

Catholic AI

November 20, 2025 - *National Catholic Reporter* - [The dangers of letting AI represent Catholic teaching](#)

April 3, 2026 - *Commonweal* - [The Rise of the Catholic Chatbot: The pastoral and catechetical applications of artificial intelligence](#)

One of the Catholic chatbots: <https://www.magiscenter.com/magisai> (there are several others, but I do not want to advertise them)

AI in Catholic education from the Alliance for Catholic Education at the University of Notre Dame:

<https://ace.nd.edu/programs/higher-powered-learning/ai-catholic-education>