

CATHOLIC FAITH & AI

Resources for technology, pastoral practice, and lived discipleship



**A Catholic Primer on
Artificial Intelligence**
Formation Guide


Pauline
MEDIA STUDIES

A Catholic Primer on Artificial Intelligence

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CORE INSIGHTS

Understanding AI in Light of Faith

Artificial intelligence (AI) raises fundamental questions about how we live, choose, and remain human in a rapidly changing world. It is already woven into everyday life, shaping how we communicate, decide, create, and relate—often without our noticing it. For the Church, engaging AI is not simply about understanding a new technology, but about discerning how these tools quietly form our habits of attention, our relationships, and our sense of moral responsibility.

Because AI can influence how we listen, judge, and respond to one another, it raises deeper questions about what it means to remain fully human in a digital age.

This primer approaches AI through a pastoral and theological lens, inviting Catholics neither to fear technology nor to trust it uncritically, but to evaluate its use in light of the Gospel. The central concern is not how intelligent machines may

become, but whether our use of them helps us grow in wisdom, attentiveness, and communion, and in our capacity to recognize the image of God in one another.

What Is Artificial Intelligence—and What It Is Not

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to tools and systems that perform tasks resembling certain forms of human intelligence, such as recognizing patterns, offering suggestions, generating language or images, or



guiding the actions of machines in complex environments. These systems operate by identifying patterns in large amounts of information

according to human-designed rules and goals. Because AI can imitate aspects of human communication and creativity, it is easy to overestimate its capabilities or attribute to it qualities it does not possess. Human intelligence, by contrast, is relational in a moral and personal sense, grounded in freedom, meaning, and purpose. AI can assist human work and extend human capacities, but it cannot love, forgive, or discern good from evil.

For this reason, AI must always remain a tool placed at the service of the human person and the community, never a substitute for human judgment, conscience, or relationship.

Levels of Artificial Intelligence

To better understand AI, it can be helpful to distinguish between different levels of development. Some of these systems already shape daily life, while others remain theoretical and speculative.

ChatGPT

Gemini

Perplexity

Claude

Midjourney

Dall-E



Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI)

Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) is the form of AI in use today. ANI systems are designed for specific tasks rather than general understanding. Familiar examples include voice assistants; conversational tools that generate text; systems that generate images or music; recommendation engines used by online platforms; and navigation or self-driving technologies. While these tools can feel flexible or conversational, they remain limited to particular functions and do not possess general intelligence.

- **Generative AI** refers to a category of ANI that generates new content—such as text, images, or music—by learning patterns from large amounts of existing data.
- **Large Language Models (LLMs)** are a type of generative AI focused on language. Tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini can summarize information, respond to questions, and generate written material that resembles human conversation.

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) refers to a hypothetical form of AI that could learn and adapt across

many different domains, applying knowledge flexibly rather than task by task. AGI is often imagined as a system able to move between multiple activities that today require separate tools—for example, a single system or machine that could learn mathematics, write a short story, compose a symphony, diagnose a medical problem, and plan a trip—without being specifically programmed for each task in advance. Predictions about when AGI might emerge vary widely, with some suggesting timelines of one to five years and others placing it much further in the future.

Artificial Superintelligence (ASI)

Also belonging in the realm of theory and debate, Artificial Superintelligence (ASI) would exceed human intelligence across nearly all areas. It is often described as a system capable of outperforming humans simultaneously in scientific discovery, strategic planning, creative work, and problem-solving—for



example, generating new scientific theories, designing complex social or economic systems, and making far-reaching decisions with speed and scope beyond human capacity. ASI could operate and improve itself with minimal or no ongoing human direction or oversight. Put simply, AGI refers to human-level general intelligence across domains, while ASI refers to intelligence that would exceed human capabilities in nearly every respect.

Theology and Ethics: A Framework for Discernment

AI invites us to reflect on what it means to be human. Our Catholic tradition reminds us that progress must always serve communion, justice, and love. Pope Francis has warned:

“We need to ensure and safeguard a space for proper human control over the choices made by artificial intelligence programs: human dignity itself depends on it” (G7 Summit, 2024).

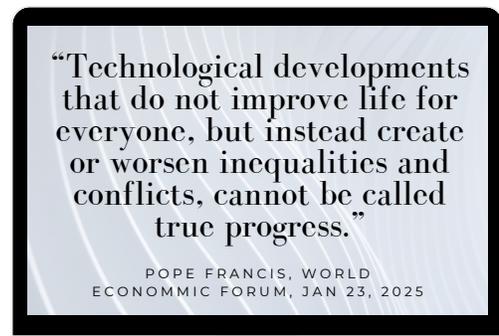
He underscores the need for innovation to remain accountable to human values. In this spirit, the 2025 Vatican document on artificial intelligence, *Antiqua et Nova*, teaches that wisdom—not efficiency alone—must guide the development and use of AI. The Church’s task, therefore, is to form consciences capable of

discerning when technology builds communion and when it undermines it.

Key Principles from Catholic Social Teaching

- **Human Dignity** — Technology must uphold, not reduce, the person. AI should never replace human judgment, conscience, or relational presence, especially in matters that affect people’s lives and livelihoods.
- **The Common Good** — AI should benefit everyone, particularly the poor and marginalized. Its development and use must resist deepening inequality and instead promote shared access, opportunity, and human flourishing.
- **Solidarity** — AI should strengthen our bonds with one another and help bridge the digital divide, ensuring that no community is excluded from the benefits of technological progress.
- **Subsidiarity** — Decisions about technology should involve local communities and real people, not distant or opaque systems. Human oversight and participation must remain central, especially where AI shapes social, economic, or pastoral decisions.

- **Responsibility and Accountability** — The use of AI must remain subject to clear human responsibility. Those who design, deploy, and govern AI systems cannot transfer ethical accountability to machines and must remain answerable for their consequences, particularly when human dignity and the common good are at stake.



Opportunities and Cautions

AI presents the Church with real possibilities for service and ministry, as well as serious risks if its use goes unexamined. The task is neither to resist technological change nor to embrace it uncritically, but to practice discernment: to ask where these tools genuinely support human flourishing and the Church’s mission, and where they quietly erode attention, relationship, or shared responsibility.

Used wisely, AI can extend the Church’s pastoral reach. It holds promise for advances in healthcare,

for widening access to education and formation, and for translating and sharing Church teachings across languages and cultures. In pastoral settings, AI can assist with planning, communication, and creative preparation, freeing time and energy for accompaniment, presence, and mission. It can also encourage collaboration across borders on questions of digital ethics.

At the same time, these tools carry significant cautions. AI can amplify misinformation and bias and flatten human encounter.

In ministry especially, there is a risk that convenience replaces wise pastoral judgment, or that outputs generated by algorithms—systems that identify and reproduce patterns—begin to carry more authority than lived wisdom and human discernment.

Any time saved through automation must be intentionally reclaimed for prayer, reflection, listening, and the slow work of accompaniment. At every stage, the Church must ensure that people guide decision-making and care.

In this light, our use of AI tools must be guided by grace, grounded in discernment, and attentive to human responsibility. Transparency and accountability are not optional, but

moral obligations. AI must be evaluated not by efficiency alone, but by whether it deepens truth, justice, and communion in ways worthy of the Gospel.

FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- What spiritual practices, drawing from the writings and wisdom of the Catholic tradition, help you remain grounded, discerning, and fully human in a digital world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence?
- How can ministries and pastoral leaders discern when the use of artificial intelligence genuinely supports evangelization, formation, and service, and when it risks diminishing human presence, pastoral judgment, or responsibility?
- How can we form younger generations to engage artificial intelligence creatively and ethically, so that their use of these tools reflects the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, a commitment to the common good, and reverence for the dignity of every person?

TO THINK ABOUT

“The ‘wisdom of the heart’ can illuminate and guide the human-centered use of this technology to help promote the common good, care for our common home, advance the search for the truth, foster integral human development, favor human solidarity and fraternity, and lead humanity to its ultimate goal: happiness and full communion with God.”

—*Antiqua et Nova*, no. 116.

“The question is not only what AI can do, but who we are becoming through the technologies we create.”

—Pope Leo XIV, Message for the 60th World Communications Day, Jan. 24, 2026.

PASTORAL TOOLBOX

- **The Purpose Check.** Before using an AI tool in daily life, pause to ask: What human need is this meant to serve? Does this tool support relationship, presence, and understanding, or risk replacing them? Who benefits most from its use, and who might be overlooked or harmed?
 - If the purpose is unclear or misaligned with human dignity and genuine human connection, the use of the tool should be reconsidered or limited.
 - **Example:** *Before using AI to draft an email or message to a family member or friend, consider whether adding a personal note, a question, or an invitation to talk might better support real conversation and relationship.*
- **Reclaim Time for Mission.** When AI tools assist with drafting, organizing, or planning, intentionally reinvest the time saved into: prayer and spiritual preparation, listening and accompaniment, formation and community-building.
 - Used this way, AI can help shift energy away from administration and toward the relational heart of ministry.
 - **Example:** *If AI helps prepare a lesson plan or meeting agenda more quickly, use the extra time to check in personally with a parishioner, student, or volunteer rather than moving on immediately to the next task.*
- **Expand Access and Inclusion.** Communities and ministries can explore using AI to: translate materials across languages and cultures, adapt resources for different learning styles or abilities, widen access to formation for those who are homebound, underserved, or geographically distant.
 - When guided by pastoral wisdom, these tools can help the Church extend welcome and participation without losing the primacy of human encounter.
 - **Example:** *Use AI-assisted translation tools to offer parish announcements or formation materials in multiple languages, then invite those communities into shared gatherings, meals, or in-person conversations.*

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Prayer for Wisdom in AI Use

God of wisdom and wonder, you have entrusted us with minds that imagine, hands that create, and hearts formed for love and communion.

As we reflect on the gifts and challenges of artificial intelligence, grant us the grace of discernment.

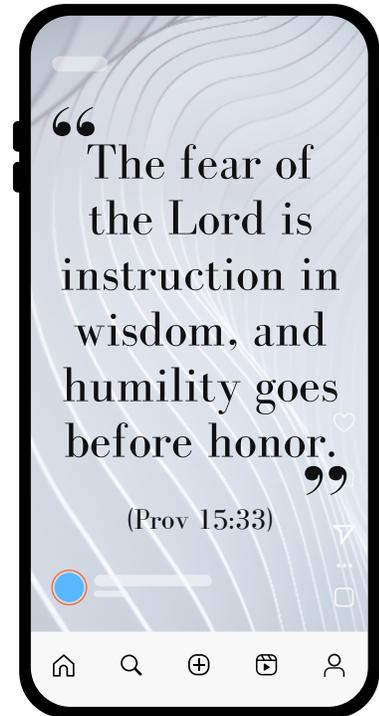
May we use every tool we create not for domination or distraction, but in service of human dignity, justice, and the common good.

Keep us rooted in what makes us fully human: the capacity to listen, to love, to forgive, and to recognize your image in one another.

Teach us to reclaim time gained through technology for prayer, reflection, accompaniment, and growth in discipleship.

May your Spirit guide our choices, so that innovation serves wisdom, efficiency serves compassion, and every advance draws us closer to communion with one another and with you.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education, *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*, Introduction by Ricky Manalo, CSP, (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 2025).

Pope Francis, [Address to the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence](#), Borgo Egnazia, June 14, 2024.

Builders AI Forum: <https://www.baif.ai>