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Transforming hearts, one byte at a time

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE is no longer a distant concept confined to science fiction; it is actively shaping our culture, influencing how we execute tasks, and even affecting how we process information—how we come to learn and believe.

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“ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE is an extremely powerful tool, employed

in many kinds of human activity: from medicine to the world of work; from culture to the field of communications; from education to politics. It is now safe to assume that its use will increasingly influence the way we live, our social relationships and even the way we conceive of our identity as human beings.” Pope Francis delivered these words to leaders of the G7 Summit in Puglia, Italy last June 14. It struck a chord with me that he focused the message of this historic speech on Artificial Intelligence, describing it as both exciting and fearsome.

Ahead of the summit, during the Minerva Dialogues, the pontiff challenged a gathering of scientists, digital experts, ethicists, and theologians to use AI responsibly in order to promote human dignity and the common good. Moreover, in his message for the 58th World Day of Social Communications, he once

again urged its ethical use to enhance human communication and relationships.

Confession and Commitment

As a GenX Catholic creative, I initially harbored reservations about using AI. Questions arose: “Can a machine truly claim to be intelligent?” “Will AI replace humans?” “Can it transcend the higher intelligence attributed to a Divine Being?” These doubts are quite normal at the onset of any new technology, someone explained. Similar reactions occurred with the advent of the internet, broadcast TV, and even the printing press.

My worries eased when I encountered these words, paradoxically, aided by ChatGPT: “Artificial intelligence arises precisely from the use of this God-given creative potential,” Pope Francis told world leaders.

“From this perspective, I firmly believe that the advancement of artificial intelligence and machine learning can shape our future positively. Since God’s original intent for all creation is inherently good, we can view technologies as tools entrusted to us.”

Rather than resisting, I realized that my time would be better spent actively engaging with these tools, exploiting their positive aspects while articulating their limitations and ethical issues. We have the power to shape AI, and not merely be shaped by it.

As I foray into the realm of artificial intelligence and explore its relevance in my mission as a Christian, essential questions arise:

- What do we need to know about AI—its use, benefits, and challenges?

- How can we harness it for our ends?
- How do we educate others to use it ethically?
- How can we remain fully human and guide this to serve a good purpose?

I found answers during the National Catholic Social Communications Convention held at the Aquamarine Recreation Center in Lipa, Batangas City. The digital conclave that took place from August 5-8, 2024, was an assembly of over 300 Catholic minds: influencers, social communicators, media professionals, leaders, and curious souls like me. Its theme: “AI: Authentic Influencers for an Empowered Church.”

We weren't just attendees; we were pilgrims on a quest. Our goal? To decode the enigma of AI and how it intersects with evangelization. The Church, ever mindful of its mission,

urged us to fully grasp the situation—a reminder that our mission extends beyond mere observation.

From Conflict to Convert

Gen AI represents a new era—a time when AI systems possess human-like cognitive abilities. These systems understand context, reason, and seamlessly interact with users. A familiar example of generative AI is ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), a chatbot that uses vast data and machine learning algorithms to generate human-like responses.

As I explore Gen AI, I discover its potential to significantly enhance church social communication.

Imagine a tool that assists in drafting homilies, doctrinal classes, and Bible studies. It efficiently handles routine administrative tasks, freeing up staff time for more impactful work. It even creates compelling content—

inspirational quotes, event updates, and creative visuals—for consistent online presence and engagement.

As a newcomer to AI, I find that learning about it is akin to unlocking my mind to God's boundless abundance—an invitation to explore endless opportunities and creative ways to learn, live, and share my Catholic faith with others.

Wisdom of the Heart and Human Connectivity

From the awe-inspiring talks, I discovered two essential concepts that can guide me as I navigate the digital world: the wisdom of the heart and the importance of human connections.

Pope Francis, in his 58th World Communications Day message, reminded us to seek deeper spirituality and interiority as we navigate AI's transformative

landscape. He emphasized that while machines possess limitless data capacity, only humans can truly make sense of that data. The wisdom of the heart—the ability to integrate our decisions, vulnerability, and nobility—is uniquely human.

Bishop Joey Rapadas echoed this sentiment during a homily, emphasizing that AI lacks the depth and compassion of human understanding. It cannot replace the pulse of compassion—the heart that listens, experiences, and shares—the heart that brings Christ’s message to life.

In a panel discussion titled “Pixels of Progress,” Martin Gomez, a tech start-up founder, delivered a striking message: “Only the human heart can communicate with a human heart. That’s why Jesus has a human heart. This is what makes a person an

Authentic Influencer formed in His image.”

And Edwin Lopez of EWTN Asia Pacific added, “To be authentic is to be vulnerable. You cannot give empathy without connecting to your vulnerability. The heart-to-heart journey is crucial in our quest for authenticity.”

In the closing Mass of the annual convention for social communicators, Bishop Marcelino Maralit, Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Social Communications, left us with these words: “It is God who will give us the prompts, the inspiration to know Him. And when we know Him, we will see who we are meant to be and what we are meant to do—our mission and call to holiness.”

With those words, he underscored that while AI may be a promising new tool in evangelization, genuine

human connection with God and fellow believers remains irreplaceable. The heart of our faith lies in personal encounters—with God and with one another.

Forging ahead

While the convention may have ended, our mission—to approach AI with depth and purpose as Catholic influencers—has just begun.

Providing authentic witness in the digital world, producing content that educates, inspires, and challenges, and speaking truth with charity all require integral human and spiritual formation. After all, one cannot give what one does not possess.

Formation also ensures that we understand the ethical implications of AI: transparency, inclusion, impartiality, accountability, accuracy, and security, among others. Ongoing training equips us to continuously navigate this transformative field

while upholding principles rooted in faith and Catholic social teaching. It enables us to critically engage with AI's impact on media, communication, and evangelization. Moreover, it equips us to recognize and combat misinformation, ensuring that media content remains truthful.

Lastly, as we continually learn about AI, content creators can explore innovative ways to use the platform exhaustively, creating compelling content. But this challenge isn't merely about mastering new technology; it's about living our mission as media apostles—showing the richness of faith, especially in ordinary life, to foster genuine connections. With this, we can ignite a digital revolution, transforming hearts one byte at a time.

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