Martha and Mary Versus Artificial Intelligence: AI's Implications for Religious Life

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Abstract

In the glorious tradition of Roman Catholic Church, the consecrated persons have distinguished themselves as paragons of sanctity and service leading a life defined by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Yet, the current landscape of religious life presents an unprecedented situation fraught with challenges and possibilities. This article explores the multifaceted impact of AI on the lives of consecrated persons, examining both the potential threats and opportunities it presents. AI yields rich fruits such as automation of repetitive tasks, better communication, greater availability of time, personalization of services and effective outreach. At the same time, it raises some ethical concerns like data privacy, erosion of human interaction, and the potential for bias in decision-making. The rise of AI provokes some hard questions about the future role and purpose of consecrated life in a technologically advanced society. Against the backdrop of Martha-Mary episode, an humble attempt is made to figure out the salient features of humans in contrast to those of AI so that the consecrated persons can not only pioneer novel paths of religious ministry anchored on unique human traits but also harness the capabilities of AI for a fruitful Christian ministry.

Keywords: Jesus, Mary, Martha, Artificial Intelligence, Human Connection, and AI in religious Ministry

Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary stands as a significant event in the Lukan gospel. On that extraordinary occasion, Martha busies herself with preparations to host Jesus with a feast of food and drinks. However, Mary wisely chooses to sit beside Jesus listening to His words and pondering over them. Martha emerges as a symbol representing the performative aspect of human life where good deeds matter more than being good whereas Mary embodies the contemplative dimension of human existence where silence and contemplation take precedence. Jesus lauds and favours Mary's behaviour and mildly rebukes Martha who is ensnared in works and worries. This study argues that artificial intelligence (AI) is likely to take over a large chunk of mundane activities represented in Martha while AI can pose no challenge to the contemplative dimension of human beings embodied in Mary. Thus, AI comes as a blessing in disguise. Eliminating the inauthentic structures and expressions prevalent in contemporary religious life, it can steer the religious towards more relevant, authentic and contemplative expressions and pathways of religious life.

Biblical Background of Martha-Mary Episode

St. Luke narrates the story of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary in Chapter 10:38-42. It happens on his poignant journey to Jerusalem to embrace his death, seemingly the culmination of his courageous prophetic actions. It is instructive to note that Marth-Mary episode is immediately preceded and contrasted by the parable of Good Samaritan. The latter stresses the horizontal aspect of evangelization where care of one's neighbour is called for particularly the wounded and downtrodden. The episode of Martha-Mary highlights the vertical dimension of one's religious life where undivided attention to the word of God is absolutely necessary.

At the time of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary, Martha bustles caring and sharing whereas Mary swiftly sits at the feet of Jesus drinking the nectar of divine words. This sight disturbs Martha and she pleads with him to release Mary for domestic help. Jesus shocks Martha not only by turning down her just request but also by mildly scolding her for her overly concern with the domestic work. The shock element in this story serves to etch its message forcefully into our hearts.

Luke emphasizes the service aspect of the Kingdom of God in the parable of Good Samaritan where the priest and Levite woefully fail in their cardinal duty of taking care of the robbed and wounded person.

Such a neglectful and apathetic behaviour elicits in us strong feelings of guilt and indignation. The kind, timely and healing deeds of the Samaritan raise him to the status of a hero overshadowing the roles of the Priest and Levite. Jesus heartily lauds the kind deeds of the Samaritan whereas Martha fails to secure the same amount of appreciation from Jesus. This contrast highlights the unique preeminence of human beings – our openness to the divine or our self-transcendence. This is evident in Jesus' proclamation that Man does not live by bread alone (Mt 4:4). Mary is focused on the divine embodied in the person of Jesus whereas domestic labour renders Martha overstretched and incapable of falling at the feet of Jesus who shines like a sun in her house and whose words impart abundant life and everlasting peace.

The juxtaposition of the story of the Good Samaritan with the episode of Martha-Mary seems to be a deliberate and significant act of Luke. He wants to foreclose the possibility of lope sided attention to an important yet single aspect of Christian life at the expense of the other. He performs a balancing act according to Nolland (1993) who notes: "The two accounts mutually qualify one another; the emphasis on practical activity in the Samaritan story keeps us from one-sidely exalting the 'contemplative' life after the pattern of Mary; while the Martha/Mary episode warns that preoccupation with the practical affairs of life, even when apparently given over to the service of the kingdom of God, easily seduces one away from a wholehearted attention to the things of the world." The impeccable behaviour of Mary evokes several passages in the Bible. Mary's choice of "better" part echoes the language of Psalm 73:26-28. It says: "My heart and flesh are pining away: my heart's rock, my portion, God forever! …my happiness is to be near God." "My task, I have said, Yahweh, is to keep your word" (Ps 119:57).

Martha's Struggle with Worries

More often than not, we are troubled by the nagging worries of life. Marth represents this human state of affairs. Luke frequently refers to the human frailty of falling a prey to worries even for silly reasons and exhorts the believers to shake them off through a steadfast trust in the Lord. Nolland (1993) observes: "In response to Martha, Jesus uses the worry language that has already appeared in 8:14 and will recur in 12:22,25,26,21:34. The ordinary affaires of life have trapped her into operating with an earthbound frame of reference." Her life is condemned to the realm of "what shall we eat and what shall we drink" (Lk 12:29).

The worries and distractions of life hinder the progress of our spiritual life, making it difficult to carve out some time to sit at the feet of our Lord, a sacred act that serves as a tremendous source of strength in our life journey through the choppy waters of troubles and tribulations. Nolland remarks: "She [Martha] is not experiencing the peace that should be the lot of the one who experiences in the ministry of Jesus the immediacy of Jesus' presence and provision" (Nolland, 606). It may be noted that AI can go a long way in lightening the burden of human life. It may be pointed out that AI has the capacity to considerably lighten the burdens of human existence.

Artificial Intelligence

Alan Turing (1912-1954) stands out as the most prominent pioneer of AI in the modern times. His epoch-making article titled "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" marked a watershed moment in the history of Artificial intelligence. This seminal article profoundly addressed the major challenges and possibilities in the development of AI (Russel & Norvig, 2021, 1796). It is surprising to note that he laid a solid foundation for future development of AI within his short life span of hardly 42 years. Even today his forward-looking thoughts and observations continue to guide the research work in the field of AI. It is in this article that he proposed a novel test to determine whether a machine can achieve human-like behaviour. Later it came to be known as famous Turing Test. John McCarthy (1927-2011), Marvin Minsky (1927-2016), Claude Shannon (1916-2001), John von Neumann (1903-1957), Geoffrey Hinton (born 1947), Yann LeCun (born 1960), and Demis Hassabis (born 1978) are some of the outstanding computer scientists whose significant contributions propelled AI to its current advanced stage. Ada Lovelace (1815-1852), Grace Hopper (1906-1992), Katherine Johnson (1918-2020) and Frances E. Allen (1932-2000) are some of women scientists who are noted for their ground-breaking contributions to the field of AI.

Strong AI vs Narrow AI

AI is generally divided into strong AI and weak AI based on the different goals they seek to achieve. Strong AI is also known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) or Artificial Capable Intelligence (ACI) whereas weak AI is called narrow AI as well (Russel & Norvig, 2021, 31-38) Characterized by adaptability and complexity, strong AI aims at achieving human-level efficiency and excellence in thinking and doing. Strong AI systems mimic human behaviour and actions in various

situations. Using techniques like machine learning, natural language processing and emotion recognition, they can replicate human social cues, communications styles, and decision-making patterns. They can conduct social interactions, understand human emotions and adapt to different social contexts. Strong AI is deployed in customer service chatbots, virtual assistants, or even entertainment robots. Narrow AI excels in specific tasks like image recognition, language translation, or game playing. It is widely used and fast evolving. Some argue that strong AI might emerge from the gradual improvement of weak AI, while others believe it requires a fundamental breakthrough.

AI at the Service of Martha

Martha represents the aspect of service (*diakonia*) within the kingdom of God. That may be why Jesus did not dismiss the hosting services of Martha as useless or irrelevant. The mission of the Church is deeply wedded to the service of the humanity. In other words, the church is an outstanding Martha of the whole world, if not the whole universe. Indeed, the establishment of the kingdom of God amounts to a colossal undertaking. The Church is engaged in a wide spectrum of activities for the propagation of the kingdom of God. These endavours span across a vast network of institutions such as hospitals, colleges, schools, social service centers, orphanages, rehabilitation centers, missionary works in far-flung areas and training centres. Majority of religious priests and nuns are employed in these institutions. It is safe to mention that practically 'Martha' outsmarts 'Mary' in the day-to-day activities of the Church. AI can go long way in assisting us to carry out our myriad activities aiming at fulfilling the Christian mission.

Deployment of AI in Religious Ministry

The realm of religious life leaves enormous scope for the deployment of AI. Already primer catholic institutions like research centres, colleges and schools are leveraging its capabilities. As AI is growing in power and versatility, its applications are expanding across various domains. The recent strides of progress in generative AI are sending shock waves all across the globe and it is powering a plethora of digital tools that prove highly beneficial in almost all the domains of human activities especially in the fields of academic, research, teaching and art and literature. Digital chatbots like Bard, and ChatGPT have turned out to be like subject experts, poets, story tellers, artists and more- all rolled into one. They are available around the clock to generate diverse

texts like essays, poems, pictures and what not just at a human prompt. We cannot even imagine what all future surprises AI holds in store for us.

AI is poised to revolutionize the realm of Christian apostolate, potentially transforming the way the religious think, act, and communicate. In the past, lost on our way during a journey, we used to stop our vehicle and seek guidance of local people. Such interactions are no longer necessary as long as Google Maps is at our disposal. Till recent past, students would hasten to consult a teacher in case of any subject-related doubts or confusion. Now powerful chatbots armed with stupendous amount of data have become formidable teachers and they can instantly address any queries at any time. They know no fatigue or boredom. Within the blink of an eye, knowledge can be disseminated from one corner of the world to other. Let us look at some important areas where AI can be profitably employed.

Enhanced Outreach and Engagement

AI can considerably enhance the level of engagement and outreach of religious personal with believers and other beneficiaries of their service. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can ensure 24/7 availability for answering basic questions about faith, providing spiritual guidance, and offering prayer prompts or reflections. This can be particularly helpful for individuals seeking support outside of regular church hours or who feel uncomfortable directly approaching a pastor. Our eccleastical institutions like colleges, schools and social service centres can also successfully deploy AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants to improve their engagement level with their beneficiaries and stake-holders.

Personalization of Christian Ministry

We are living in an age of personalization, if not hyper personalization. In the secular world it is mostly driven by profit motives. Major companies collect the data points like location, purchase history, app usage and media activity to tailor advertisements to our needs and interests. Certainly, targeted advertisements yield better results. Personalization is gaining momentum in the field of education too. Moving away from a one-fit-all policy, educational institutions endeavour to align the teaching-learning process with individual interests and capacities of each student. This results in better teaching and learning outcomes. Similarly, the delivery of Christian ministry can be marvellously

personalized through the utilization of AI. AI algorithms can personalize various activities of Christian ministry catering to individual needs and preferences. This could involve creating customized online courses, designing job orientation programs, providing health care, organizing retreat programmes, generating personalized prayer suggestions, or recommending relevant religious texts based on interests and spiritual goals. Moreover, AI can offer personalized communication. Chatbots powered by AI can answer basic questions on a person-to-person manner, offer spiritual guidance, and connect people with resources within the church community. This can be particularly helpful for those who feel isolated or hesitant to reach out directly. AI-powered sign language interpretation tools can make communication more inclusive for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. The visually challenged persons stand to profit much out of AI which can convert text to speech, making written materials accessible to them.

Targeted Communication

Communication plays a vital role in Christian ministry. Being missionary in nature, the Church cannot exaggerate the importance of communication. AI seems to be the most potent tool at her service. Aided by AI, she can powerfully deliver her message hitting the right target. AI enables pastors to better figure out the demographics and the interests of the congregation so that their communication can be more focussed and effective. Targeted communication can be carried out through sending targeted emails, organizing events aligned with specific interests, or creating content that resonates with different age groups or cultural backgrounds.

AI can augment the power of communication appropriately targeting different age groups, and ethnic communities. It can personalize visuals based on user preferences, demographics, or even facial expressions during presentations. Sermons can be made more attractive and engaging with visuals that adapt to the needs of each individual, making the message more impactful. AI can personalize visuals based on user preferences, demographics, or even facial expressions during presentations. sermons become breath-taking with visuals that adapt to the needs of each individual, making the message more impactful. AI comes to the aid of preachers and speakers. It can analyze scripture, homilies, and theological texts to generate original content that aligns with a pastor's style and message. This can save time and provide fresh perspectives. Additionally, AI can facilitate the creation of interactive

Bible studies incorporating quizzes, polls, and discussions, ensuring that learning becomes both engaging and enjoyable. AI excels in generating infographics and presentations. It can convert text into visually colourful infographics and presentations, thereby facilitating the comprehension of complex concepts. The power of communication can be further accelerated to higher level of appeal and engagement through interactive experiences. Using AI and VR/AR technology we can develop immersive and interactive experiences conducting virtual tours of historical sites, creating interactive Bible stories and offering personalized prayer experiences.

Urban Christian communities are mostly multi-lingual which underlines the urgency of a multi-lingual outreach. Today AI technology seems to mirror the Pentecost event, where the Holy Spirit worked the miracle of making the message of apostles comprehensible to people in their native tongues. AI translation tools can make sermons and materials accessible to wider audiences, overcoming language barriers. We feel tempted to call AI a Digital Spirit.

Automation of Repetitive Tasks

Automation is sweeping across all job sectors. Its implications extend to religious life and ministry too. Several priests and nuns are engaged in professions involving repetitive nature. Such jobs are easily susceptible to automation. AI has the potential to automate various administrative, repetitive tasks currently undertaken by religious figures. This could include scheduling appointments, managing records, financial transactions, inventory management, translating texts, handling basic inquiries and security and access control. The time, thus freed up by automation, can be utilized by the religious to sit at the feet of Jesus.

Data-Driven Performance

AI analysis of data could provide valuable insights into the needs and challenges faced by religious communities. Analysing the date of membership, engagement and demographics, AI can help the religious understand the community better. Accordingly, they can tailor religious services, outreach programs, and communication strategies to specific needs and preferences. Moreover, AI can be utilized for sentiment analysis. Analyzing social media data, surveys, or website interactions through AI-powered tools, religious leaders can understand community sentiment and concerns. This enables them to address relevant issues and tailor messages accordingly. Similarly, AI can be used to analyze

website traffic and engagement data to understand what content resonates with different audiences. This can help optimize content creation and distribution for better outreach impact. In addition, AI proves useful in enhancing internal operations like translation and transcription, data management, and the prediction of management needs for buildings and equipments.

AI at the Feet of Mary

Mary represents the contemplative dimension unique to human beings. In the face of AI displaying human-like capabilities in domains like natural language processing, the question of human uniqueness comes into sharp focus. Mary's sublime behaviour of sitting at the feet of Jesus, absorbed in his life-giving words, point to certain human traits that are unique to human beings and foreign to AI. As long as AI is created in the image and likeness of humans, it can sit only at the feet of humans (Mary, a symbol of it), not at the feet of Jesus (God incarnate). It is worth exploring the unique human capabilities that lie beyond the access of AI.

Firstly, Physical embodiment is unique feature of human beings. Artificial intelligence is confined to chips, whereas human intelligence is diffused throughout the entire human body. In other words, all the humans are amazing instances of embodied intelligence. Artificial intelligence is not merely chips; rather it is created through the interaction between chip and data and algorithms. All the same the level of unity found between human body and human intelligence is lacking in AI. AI operates using digital information processed on physical hardware like computer chips. Its intelligence stems from algorithms, software, and data, all existing in the digital realm. Moreover, AI's software can be separated from its hardware. But never can human intelligence be separated from human body. They exist in an organic and absolute unity. The human brain serves as the primary hub for intelligence, processing information, and initiating thought processes. However, intelligence extends beyond the confines of the brain. The nervous system, hormones, and even the gut microbiome contribute to cognitive abilities and overall well-being. Furthermore, our myriad experiences, emotional states, and interactions with the world and society mould our intelligence in ways that are difficult to replicate in AI. Humans exist in the physical world, interacting with it through our bodies and senses. We can learn and adapt through embodied experiences, something current AI largely lacks. This enables us to

acquire proficiencies such as manipulation, navigation, and embodied cognition, tasks that pose considerable replication challenges for AI. Of late AI experts have realized the crucial role human body plays in human intelligence. Foerst notes:

> It is impossible to abstract intelligence from bodily features and bodily conditions; consequently, the researchers call their new direction *Embodied AI*. Intelligence, so their creed says, cannot be implemented on disembodied machine. On the contrary, intelligence emerges only in bodies and is dependent on bodily features and conditions… human intelligence can emerge only in a body that is as human like as possible (Forest, 1998:100).

In other words, human intelligence is physical as much as it is mental and spiritual. All the figures in the Martha-Mary episode display embodied intelligence.

Secondly emotions and moral consciousness are unique to human intelligence whereas AI does not experience any emotions, moral or amoral. That is why killer robots and autonomous weapon systems can ruthlessly kill any number of people without any prick of conscience. whereas emotions and moral values are basic components of human intelligence. In other words, we, humans, are endowed with emotional and moral intelligences. We are social creatures with an innate ability to navigate a variety of emotions and to understand various intentions, and social cues. We can cope with complex social situations, empathize with others, and build meaningful relationships. AI, while making progress in sentiment analysis and social interaction, still struggles to grasp the nuances of human emotions and social dynamics. Human heart is a battle ground of emotions, both positive and negative. Humans love each other; they kill each other, and forgive each other. They laugh, cry and sulk. They revolt against unjust systems; they collaborate in common endavours. All these actions are driven by emotions and moral values. They constitute an integral aspect of human intelligence whereas AI is driven by algorithms that are basically mathematical in nature. It looks ironical that even when chatbots like Bard and ChatGPT compose lovely poems highly charged with emotions, they experience no emotions at all; their poems are not at all spontaneous outflows of emotions recollected in tranquillity; they generate poems and other splendid literary pieces based on complex algorithms and statistical analysis of massive datasets of text and code. They analyze patterns and identify relationships between words, phrases, and even

emotions expressed in those texts. The texts they are trained on contain a wide spectrum of human emotions, experiences, and expressions. They process this data only mathematically, not emotionally. Since the emotional nuances are inherently embedded within the datasets, they learn to identify and even replicate these emotional patterns in their own generated text poems and stories. Their literary endavours are mathematical feats rather than the works of human hearts and imagination.

Mary's posture, seated at Jesus' feet, depicts a tapestry of noble emotions, an experience beyond the reach of even the most powerful AI systems, which can merely simulate but never truly feel. She is definitely overwhelmed by the presence of Jesus in her own home. This shows the profound connection humans experience in the face of *Mysterium tremendum.* Jesus' presence leaves in her heart a deep sense of profound mystery, majesty, and intensity that evokes feelings of reverence, fear, and fascination. This is an instance of sublime spiritual experience that lies beyond the realm of AI. So, AI can never sit at the feet of Jesus as Mary does. It can sit at the feet of Mary helping her to be more available for the irruption of the divine into her life. Moreover, Mary is finding unalloyed peace and joy in the presence of Jesus; her demeanour reminds us of the impassioned plea of the psalmist for the experience of God. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God" (Ps 42:1). Jesus makes her lie down on the green pastures of his abiding presence and leads her to the still waters of his lasting peace and joy (Ps 23:2). These intense feelings of peace and joy emanating from Jesus' presence led Mary to forsake her responsibilities to help Martha; rather she devotes herself solely to the joyous experience of being with Jesus. Her restless heart finds its ultimate rest in Jesus – a realm of human restlessness that vanishes only at a divine touch, again a realm that lies beyond the access of AI. Humans must seek solace at the feet of God to satisfy the yearnings of their hearts, whereas AI, devoid of genuine emotional experiences, needs not have to sit at the feet of any God. But it has to sit at the feet of humans who like Martha are worried about so many mundane works and who, like Mary, yearns for divine experience.

Thirdly, human freedom is another prominent feature at play in the Martha-Mary episode. The way both Marth and Mary respond to Jesus' arrival is quite different, an supreme instance of exercise of human freedom. However, AI enjoys little freedom. It operates within

specific parameters dictated by its programming and training data. It is interesting to note that human freedom is inseparably connected with the central concepts of Christianity like eternal life, eternal damnation, original sin and guilt feelings. Even the salvation history is initiated by a consequential act of human freedom in the story of Paradise. So freewill and independent agency are hallmarks of humankind - unique prerogatives that prompt AI to sit at the feet of Mary who embodies humanity.

AI's Implications for Consecrated Life

The consecrated life also comes under the huge impact of AI. There seems to be no profession or areas that remain entirely unaffected by the all-pervasive of influence of AI. The following are the some of the significant changes that can result from a widespread and inevitable adoption of AI in human society.

Job Displacement

Several jobs presently occupied by the consecrated persons are likely to lose out to the onslaught of AI. Most of the job involving repetitive nature are highly susceptible to automation. Religious persons involved in the jobs like data entry and processing, basic accounting and bookkeeping, inventory management, filing and organizing documents, helpdesk roles, packaging and labelling, data analysis and report generation etc. are likely to find themselves jobless in near future.

Catholic ministry finds its strongest foothold in education and healthcare. They offer a wealth of job opportunities. However, these pivotal sectors are not impervious to the wave of automation. The advent of AI-powered robotics technologies heralds a paradigm shift triggering a considerable level of job displacement. Robots are getting smarter and multi-faceted. They can revolutionize the fields of education and health care changing the way we work, bolstering the results we produce and accelerating the speed of the work we perform.

The field of education is poised for a wide spread adoption of robotics teachers. They can take over several tasks traditionally performed by teachers. For example, they excel in personalizing teaching-learning process to the pace, interests and the learning styles of students. This comes as a boon for students with special needs and those who are in need of extra help. Moreover, robotics teachers can transform the learning process usually considered boring and laborious into a joyful experience by adopting story-telling, simulations, and games. This

will boost the level of motivation and engagement of students. A fascinating breed of robots are social robots that can assume human or animal embodiment. They use sensors like cameras and microphones to perceive human emotions, gestures, and body language, adapting their responses accordingly. Such social robots can assist students in developing social skills and emotional intelligence by providing a safe and non-judgmental environment for practicing communication and empathy. Religious educators, including priests and nuns, who lack proficiency in their subjects and communication abilities, confront an uncertain future and run the risk of finding themselves redundant and obsolete.

Health care sector too, once revered for its storied legacy of devout commitment and noble acts of selflessness by the religious, is amidst seismic shifts driven by extensive automation. Surgical robots such as the da Vinci Surgical System can perform minimally invasive surgeries with great precision and dexterity. They may replace some surgical assistants who traditionally assisted surgeons in the operation rooms. Telepresence Robots, fitted with cameras, microphones and displays, enable doctors to conduct virtual consultations, monitor patients, and participate in medical rounds without physically being present. They may replace in-person medical staff, particularly in remote or underserved areas. Rehabilitation robots are capable of providing tailored exercises, track progress, and offer real-time feedback to patients and therapists. They may lead to job displacement for some physical therapists or rehabilitation aides. Delivery robots may take away the jobs of porters and transport staff. Assistive Robots are at the service of the elderly around the clock knowing no boredom and fatigue. They provide relief to the aged and the sick by assisting them with activities of daily living, such as dressing, grooming, and medication reminders. They can go an extra mile by providing social interaction and entertainment. They may reduce the need for human caregivers and companions.

AI-Induced Challenges to Religious Life

The catholic church holds the consecrated life in high esteem. Consecrated persons not only mirror the eschatological dimensions of Christian faith but also play a pivotal role in various church activities. However, there has been a notable shift in the perspectives of the general public, largely due to significant transformations in the landscape of their faith life. Many of the excellent services rendered by consecrated people are either replaced by secular agencies or

taken over by AI-powered agents. Usually, people turn to priests and nuns in their moments of helplessness seeking the power of prayer and emotional support; they consult religious figures in the moments of faith crisis seeking clarity of vision; they avail themselves of the services of the church in the field of education and health care. Now the landscape of church's social action has changed calling for new templets of diakonia. We encounter a competition for services from various agencies characterized by promptness and professionalism. Chatbots, counsellors, and secular agencies can provide accessible support for religious doubts, crisis situations, and financial needs. In addition, new scientific discoveries driven by AI threaten to uproot traditional beliefs, provoking some to question the Church's authority and teachings. Younger generations look frustrated with traditional religious structures and seek guidance elsewhere.

AI-Powered Opportunities for Consecrated Life

All challenges are pregnant with opportunities as well. As a matter of fact, the Church has confronted numerous crisis situations successfully navigating and adapting to mighty winds of change all throughout her history spanning over two millennia. An AI-driven era presents the religious with an abundance of opportunities. As AI takes over several works of Martha, the Church comes to occupy a better position to rekindle and nurture her contemplative dimensions embodied in Mary's posture at Bethany. With AI freeing up the time religious persons spent for works highly repetitive in nature, they will find more time to devote themselves wholeheartedly for reflections and contemplation. Truly, the present precarious situation calls for the profound reflections of the religious, inspired and informed by Christian deposit of faith, because responsible and benevolent deployment of AI stands in need of well-considered ethical frameworks in the development of which the religious can play a pivotal role. Similarly the present human existence marked by growing stress and strain demands religious persons who have mastered the art of prayer and contemplation and who can delve into the profound depths of human experience that extend beyond the reach and concern of AI. However, the space for religious persons without any significant contributions to the welfare of the society, the spiritual questions of society and the serious scientific discourses appears to be rapidly diminishing.

AI-induced challenges motivate both priests and nuns to figure out their unique strengths and weakness and to cultivate and enhance

their distinct abilities. With secular agencies assuming increasing control over numerous tasks traditionally performed by religious institutions, spiritual leaders must harness the potential of scientific breakthroughs like AI and virtual platforms to pioneer novel paths in religious outreach. The religious can focus on cultivating and nurturing the spiritual intelligence of both individuals and societies through innovative programmes tailored to meet the challenges of our era. This invaluable spiritual ministry can draw upon the abundant religious resources inherent in each faith tradition and equally on the potentialities of cutting-edge technologies. The religions and religious figures that fail to translate the spiritual energies embedded in sacred rituals into virtuous deeds and impactful initiatives aimed at fostering spiritual intelligence of both individuals and societies are at risk of losing their relevance and fading into obscurity. In other words, the religious have to address the sublime task of cultivating the dharma of individuals and societies that find expressions in ethical values, pursuit of equality and justice and a deep-going connection with the divine. In order to realize the ambitious project of catalysing the spiritual advancement of both individuals and nations, the Church needs to invest in training priests and nuns in communication, counselling, and digital literacy. Further she can develop online resources and communities that complement offline interactions and partner with secular organizations to address broader needs while offering spiritual guidance.

Ethical Concerns

The deployment of AI gives rise to some serious ethical concerns. Firstly, AI in the wrong hands may erode the essence of Christian fellowship founded upon genuine interpersonal relationships. As the use of AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants for communication increases, the depth of personal relationships may suffer, resulting in a loss of empathy and authentic human interaction. Secondly, emphasis on using AI for efficiency and outreach might inadvertently shift the focus away from the core elements of spiritual growth, prayer, and contemplation, leading to a more transactional and less personal experience. Thirdly, widespread AI usage may exacerbate existing digital disparities, as not everyone has equal access to technology or the necessary digital literacy skills to engage with AI tools. This could create disparities in access to religious resources and further marginalize vulnerable populations. Fourthly data privacy and security can be compromised. Collecting and storing personal data for AI applications

requires robust security measures and clear information about data usage to maintain user trust and privacy. Fifthly, overreliance on AI could lead to a form of idolatry, where technology becomes a source of ultimate truth and authority instead of God.

Conclusion

Our world faces a "technological tsunami," disrupting traditional beliefs and structures while creating new possibilities. AI, a major disruptor, impacts all aspects of life, including religion. Religious communities must confront the challenges and opportunities of AI, using it responsibly for the betterment of humanity. The story of Martha and Mary exemplifies responsible AI use. AI can assist with tasks like Martha's, freeing up time for reflection and spiritual growth. However, AI cannot replace human qualities captured by Mary's attentive listening. Instead of fearing AI, we should envision a future where its goals align with human and planetary well-being. As technology advances, religious communities must adapt and contribute to shaping a positive future navigating these uncharted territories.

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