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Artificial intelligence as a challenge for Christian Orthodox Ethos

Abstract

This paper explores how Artificial Intelligence (AI) challenges the theological anthropology and moral foundations of the Christian Orthodox ethos. It argues that the rapid technological transformation of human life—especially through generative AI—raises profound questions about human freedom, relationality, and spiritual authenticity. From an Orthodox theological and ascetic perspective, the author warns against the idolization of machines and the loss of the human person's sacredness through digital dependency and standardization. At the same time, he emphasizes discernment (*diakrisis*), vigilance, and an ascetic spirit as necessary tools for maintaining balance between technological progress and spiritual integrity. Rather than rejecting AI, Orthodox ethics should engage it critically, integrating technological advancement into a vision of human existence grounded in love, humility, and communion. The paper concludes that a genuine Christian response to AI is not moral control or technophobia but a renewed commitment to the theology of personhood and the Eucharistic view of life.

Keywords: Orthodox Christian ethos, artificial intelligence, theological anthropology, asceticism, freedom, technology and spirituality

Introduction

The rapid integration of technology into everyday life has profoundly transformed the way we perceive the world, ourselves, and our moral responsibilities. Among the most significant developments of our age is the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which challenges not only social and ethical norms but also fundamental

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theological understandings of human personhood and freedom.

Within the Orthodox Christian tradition, these questions invite reflection on how technological change reshapes the moral landscape of believers and the way the Church interprets the relationship between humanity, God, and creation. This chapter seeks to explore these transformations and to outline an Orthodox theological and ascetic response to the ethical dilemmas raised by AI.

Technological transformation and moral change

The pervasive presence of technology in daily life has profoundly reshaped the way human beings perceive reality and relate to one another. This transformation also affects the moral and spiritual life of believers, including the ethos of the Orthodox Christian community. The rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence—particularly its generative forms—has intensified these challenges, raising questions about autonomy, dependence, and the meaning of human agency.

The recent development of bioethical reflection provides a valuable framework for addressing these issues. Bioethics, especially when informed by the Orthodox theological tradition, offers criteria for evaluating modern dilemmas in light of enduring moral and anthropological principles. Yet, this task requires great care, as the sources of Orthodox moral thought originate in a pre-modern context. Their responsible and discerning application to contemporary technological realities demands both fidelity to tradition and sensitivity to the conditions of the present age.

So, speaking specifically about artificial intelligence, it seems it can fill many gaps in human action and offer new life possibilities. The enhancement of these capabilities, especially in recent years, with the development of *Generative Artificial Intelligence* and its variety of applications, has become particularly evident to the average internet user. Everyone can now “discuss” with an application, get informed, receive instructions, and receive advice on something that concerns them, more or less critical, and so on. However, there are quite a few users of these applications, who, after the initial impression, along with the interest and usability of the new features,

feel embarrassed and not infrequently a feeling of fear or even a dystopian feeling.

Theological and anthropological concerns

From a strictly theological (and at the same time anthropological) point of view, the issues raised are generally as follows:

- Man is created to be completed in the relationship and communion with God, his fellow man, and the world around him. Cognitive ability and functionality are essential and not negligible in human everyday life, but they cannot be a central feature of existence, as our destination exceeds them. The human person is a much broader dimension than his intelligence.
- Freedom is an equally fundamental element of human individuality. Many factors that can limit it lie within the constraints of dependence on technological products and the standardization that can result from symbiosis with machines. At least, do we become the objects/components of a technological reality instead of subjects/users?
- Increasing technical possibilities creates illusions of omnipotence and favors the deepening of our self-centeredness. Thus, the sense of moderation in realizing human desires is lost. The distinction between the desirable, the feasible, and the beneficial becomes blurred¹. At the same time, the Eucharistic reception of life is degraded and ultimately discredited.
- The blurring of the boundaries between man and machine undermines the human image and its relationality. The virtuality offered by digital environments adulterates the authenticity of life, and man's alienation from his wider environment is reinforced.
- Trust in a machine's prompts makes it a novel idol. Moreover, to what extent are an algorithm's decisions/advice ethical? How much empathy, compassion, and transparency can they bring to the table? Does a directed consciousness retain its sacredness?
- The looming autonomy of digital systems (for the sake of se-

¹ Cf. "I can do all things, but not everything is beneficial", 1 Cor. 6:12.

curity and greater efficiency) is a pessimistic outlook for the extent of human autonomy.

- The establishment of digital reality takes place under market conditions. Thus, the will of the citizens, their information, and the importance of human responsibility in their use are missing. Also, liability issues arise secondarily in the event of malfunctions.
- The emphasis on information and the virtual and superficial approach to things leads to shallowness and the associated indifference to knowledge, wisdom, and a deeper view of our world. In this way, however, the sense of mystery and the inexplicable character of life are lost. Digital facilitation and sensationalism cannot exhaust the essence of society and the joy of coexistence.
- The widespread use of Generative AI in schools and universities, with young people's appetite for new technologies, is drastically changing the education landscape (and we have long been searching for a regulatory framework to regulate their use). There are relatively straightforward issues of distorting the pedagogical process for the sake of efficiency, which can reduce the creativity and imagination of pupils and students (Epstein, 2025). On the other hand, voices have begun to be heard pointing out the environmental burden even from the simple use of these applications. This cannot be ignored, given the impact of climate change and the associated increasing problems (Euclea Editorial Team, 2025).
- The most important thing, however, is that society is increasingly "immersed" in a new digital reality, which will determine human relationships. For example, a family sends their child to a camp one summer, but then the child wants to leave. The family (in their desperation) resorts to an application of this kind: it asks what it can do to keep the child in the camp. It receives excellent answers, although we must admit that even if the answers were not so good, it would have been of minor importance, as we know that these applications are in a very early phase of use and are improving rapidly. The point is that people have been served. Still, this facility

opens the way for us to a way of life, where digital applications will have (albeit consultatively) a powerful reason for planning our lives. What will happen, for example, if this technology improves to the point where most of society trusts it for governance as well? That is, if it is decided that the elections could be replaced with a system of literal digital governance, an algorithm would indicate the appropriate persons who would take over the fate of a place. The issues of security, transparency, accountability, and alignment of the values we are now discussing would indeed receive more attention and discussion.

Theological and ecclesial response

Thus, we are in the midst of a new reality, and the immediate question is: What could be a theological and ecclesiastical response to these challenges?

First, we should note that this is a development with an uncertain course: we do not know exactly where we are heading and in what form we will find ourselves tomorrow. However, what we could consider more certain is that new applications will “knock on the door” of our society, but not all of them will enter the market². The filter that will be set pertains to the social mentality, values, prevailing standards, and broader moral patterns of the people who will be called upon to become the “consumers of innovation.”

This fact places the modern citizen, remarkably, the faithful, before specific responsibilities. The most basic of these is the correct information and knowledge regarding the aspects of the new socio-technological landscape. This certainly does not imply IT skills or any digital expertise. It is primarily about avoiding disinforma-

² Social dynamics show that profit does not always guide things in a one-dimensional way, nor that the joy of the new is always sufficient to interpret the reception of technological innovations. There are many more parameters, which usually manifest themselves to a small extent. The issue primarily concerns the importance of addressing essential needs. Specifically, when a large company launches an application, it has likely conducted research, which is both costly and time-consuming, to ensure the application's acceptance. In other words, whether society will accept it is examined in detail. Therefore, many applications were withdrawn – not because someone banned them, but because it was found that there would be no corresponding interest on the part of ordinary people. It is therefore essential to see these usually invisible aspects of developments.

tion, fake news, and conspiracy theories, which overwhelm us today, exacerbate confusion, and ultimately lead to complacency. The better we know something, the more responsible we will be towards it.

Appropriate information and the cultivation of meaningful reflection will contribute to the enhancement of social antibodies and a healthy and beneficial reception of the entry of algorithmic logic into everyday life. In this regard, we must recognize the essential steps the Catholic Church has achieved in this area (such as the “Rome Call for AI Ethics”, in February 2020³). Theology must systematically address the issues of technology, particularly informatics, seeking the essence of their impact on human existence⁴.

In addition, it will be possible to halt the trend that we have been observing lately to intensify regarding the acceptance and dissemination of various conspiracy theories – which (and probably not by chance) go beyond any measure of pessimism, are tempted by catastrophism and ultimately undermine and cancel any message of hope and trust in the divine mercy offered by the joyful message of the Gospel. Since the setting that is being set favors conditions of “self-fulfilling prophecy”: if we “see everything in black”, things will undoubtedly go badly, as no one will be in the mood to act to prevent the unpleasant outcome. On the contrary, believing and affirming God’s love makes us more productive, inventive, and inspired to find the answers to these difficult questions.

It is indeed true that our instinctive and reflexive first reaction to the incomprehensible and to what causes us embarrassment (in this case, the digital reality) is rejection. For the essence of our spirituality, however, this remains another temptation: to decide that our digital artifacts are to blame for the suffering we observe in our lives. This, however, would amount to an evasion, an anachronistic and reactionary flight from reality, which in practice would not keep pace with galloping technological development.

In other words, we must acknowledge that this is essentially a

³ See. <https://www.romecall.org/>.

⁴ On a more positive note, assessments such as those of the pioneer of Informatics, Alan Perlis (1922-1990), who in a concluding epigram on his experience with programming, wrote that “a year of dealing with artificial intelligence is enough to believe in God.” *Epigrams in Programming*, 79, <https://www.cs.yale.edu/homes/perlis-alan/quotes.html>.

bet, in which technology will help us, but it will also make things more difficult for us. Let's look at a relevant example: for several years, we have had a new form of technology, videoconferencing, available to a broader audience. The corresponding platforms have been developed, making it relatively easy for someone to use them and make a call where the face of their interlocutor is visible, their voice is heard, they can transfer a file, and so on. In some cases, where it is challenging to meet and communicate, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic or due to a long distance, this is a beneficial option. In general, however, face-to-face or physical communication is preferable. There is no need to resort to these applications when we can communicate directly. Maintaining personal contact and close communication with others is often within our own control.

We mentioned above the importance of the value and depth of personal relationships. However, at this point, it is also worth noting that things are not entirely one-dimensional or straightforward, and a multifaceted examination is necessary. For some lonely people, for example, these technological possibilities are an essential outlet and solution in their daily lives. They communicate more through social media than in conventional ways; of course, there are many reasons for this. On the other hand, we must recognize that in non-technological times, environments, or communities, the function of the relationship has not always been established. Meeting the other person is also an achievement; we must strive to build it.

Therefore, as the Apostle James says, it will be crucial to be as objective as possible, see the issues to their full extent, and slow in anger, rage, and condemnation⁵. We must think, reflect, and wonder what pushes people to use these means, then reflect on our intervention. This is not always easy, but it is always what it deserves.

Returning to the issue of the church's attitude towards the digital landscape, we can examine the hypothesis, which does not seem at all remote, of implementing a "digital confessor". In other words, a program that will be loaded with the Canon Law of our Church, numerous special patristic texts, and the capability to project

⁵Cf. *James*, 1:19.

holograms. After all, generative artificial intelligence has already reached a level that offers specialized and accurate answers to many intellectual issues. Therefore, someone who would not want to have a physical confessor, who, for his reasons, finds it difficult to have a personal relationship with a real spiritual person, should turn to the counseling program. In fact, with the help of projecting a hologram, this experience could become even more realistic.

At this point, we could say that even a true spiritual father, a natural confessor, who does not create with his spiritual children the relationship dictated by the Gospel and our tradition, that is, fatherhood, mercy, love, sacrifice, but works bureaucratically, operates as we say mechanistically, then he will probably not be different from the digital confessor. As long as he does not look lovingly and compassionately on the other, he will essentially be a religious robot, indifferent to the different human person, indifferent to the joy of God's Kingdom. The relationship with the people who come to find solace and relief will be impersonal, dry, and devoid of warmth, reflecting the coolness of long-suffering, and ultimately prioritizing the Sabbath over humanity.

Accordingly, we can say that a "digital confessor of faith," loaded with all the necessary programs to recognize and repel heresies, will have little value in our ecclesial life. What we live as a Church is the "celebration of relationship;" the truth lies in the relationship with God and the other person; it is not an ephemeral, abstract reality, nor a set of principles. The truth is a person, Christ, as He has told us, and the relationship with Him does not mean possessing the truth, which leads to confrontation and the exclusion of others. In ecclesiastical life, it is more precisely a question of *participation* in the truth, participation in the person of Christ.

But apart from the cases where the way they are used determines their moral quality, in which if we use an application "for the glory of God," to promote good, to help someone who needs us, etc., then we can be sure of their positive use, there are others, in which the technology cannot be perceived as morally neutral, because its use brings dependence, creates standard relationships, makes us lazy, hurried, demanding, etc. In other words, we must

carefully examine those aspects of the human condition that are affected more profoundly and minimally consciously by the systematic use of “smart” technological capabilities. This imperceptible change in our character and habits lies beyond the concerns of the good or bad use of technological means.

Having a device in our pocket or bag at any time, which helps us easily find many things with the touch of a few buttons, leads to spiritual atrophy, alienates us from the trouble of research, and distances us from what we would call the spirit of exercise (“ascesis”). At the same time, we become impatient and demanding without fully understanding it. This standardization requires speed, efficiency, and two new self-values and ideals of our time. We must pay attention to this and cure it, because it alters essential aspects of our existence.

But how can we cope with the power of this change? There are several ideas, but I believe that most could be summarized in the following narrative: At one point, an abbot of Mount Athos was asked about his attitude towards his monks regarding the Internet. He replied that the Internet is now an undeniable source of knowledge and told the fathers that, as a source of knowledge, you are free to use it with the required attention and vigilance. Of course, we have a rich library in the monastery, but even this does not include everything. However, I ask you to refrain from using the internet on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (traditionally fasting days on Mount Athos), as well as during the Church’s fasting periods.

I think the answer is excellent because it not only provides a practical application of addiction to technology use but also gets to the essence of exercise: fasting, now with special vegetarian products and substitutes, it has become very easy. However, it must also be more than just about food, but also about the entire way of life, with what we call repentance—a conversion of our mentality. Apart from these, a constant feature of the Christian spiritual attitude towards things is the cultivation of an ascetic spirit, an attitude and mentality that liberates man from the commitments caused by everyday life and enables him to follow the path that leads to his authentic destination. What is needed, therefore, is vigilance,

awareness of our situation, and vigilance for the preservation of the person's value —a concept we know from the richness of the Christian tradition. In another perspective, we could say that nowadays, exercise takes on another dimension, that of avoiding enslavement to machines and preserving our humanity and humanness.

Instead, what regulates things is a deeper spirit of seeing the world, relating to it, and therefore of using stuff themselves. We also know that the renunciation of the world is not understood in terms of spatial, local, but tropical. We must pay attention to the spirit of the world rather than the world itself. And this is something that permeates our entire church life: we see, for example, the Fathers in texts on fasting, that it is better to drink wine with prudence than water with foolishness. We also know that a saint of our days, Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia is also called "Saint of Omonia", as he lived for many years in the busiest part of Greece, in the center of Athens, in Omonia – and yet, in this "noise" and polyanthropy, he managed to find his inner peace. Perhaps, then, what is actually required is the integration of the daily life of a saint into our daily life.

Conclusion: Toward an orthodox ethos for the digital age

In other words, we want to say that to meet the already powerful challenges of artificial intelligence and related technologies, we need equally strong intellectual resistance. An ethos eroded by the spirit of "this century" is all too easy to be swept away by the pace of modern developments.

Here, the Christian view of contemporary digital challenges is also summarized. Instead of rejecting Christian teaching, Christian teaching must reactivate the fundamental virtue of discernment to identify what serves the needs of the human person in each case. Instead of the "blind" attachment to artificial intelligence and other technological products, immerse them in the spirit of philanthropy and altruistic contribution.

This attitude amounts to an authentic prophetic witness in our day and contributes to reaffirming the sacredness of the human person. The core of Christian asceticism and its contemplative depth provide the tools for a healthy relationship with today,

preserving tranquility, humility, and an authentic society. Therefore, the spiritually valuable aspect of ecclesiastical presence is maintained for the whole of society, which can serve as a reference point for mitigating the adverse effects of technological penetration on our mentality.

Of course, this is not a question of control or ethics, but rather a constant reminder of the central elements of our humanity, as reflected in the image of God. The responsible attitude perceives technological developments as a pastoral challenge and a spiritual opportunity to highlight the eternal truths of Christian preaching. It is the right moment, “Kairos” in theological language, for the struggle for relationship, unity, and humanity. Persistence is for preserving truth, beauty, and society.

So, it is probably wrong to limit the scope of the debate to simply the question of technology’s good or bad use. The issue always remains our relationship with God and our neighbor, especially the “minor” neighbor, as the parable of Judgment reminds us. To be the first to remember that beyond technological applications, it is worth raising our eyes from the screen and looking a little further, to see that in the real world there are still people who need us next to us, the homeless, the immigrants, the refugees, the lonely, those who beg for a human presence and assistance. But besides that, let’s not forget that behind this whole universe of screens, keyboards, cables, and waves, there are other people who are our brothers and sisters, and our actions affect them in one way or another.

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