

***Imitatio Christi* in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Some Ethical Considerations**

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Abstract

In an era of rapid evolution and extensive impact of artificial intelligence, morality is under a constant critical scrutiny, and new ethical structures are required to evaluate technological advancements and how they integrate human values and the gospel message. This study offers a moral perspective on the development and use of artificial intelligence rooted in imitatio Christi (imitation of Christ), the foundation for Christian discipleship and morality. The identity, life, teachings and ministry of Christ, characterised by unconditional love, truth, compassion, justice, humility, and so on, offer rich insights that can serve as a template for an ethically tolerable design of artificial intelligence and interaction with it. This paper critically examines contemporary ethical discussions regarding artificial intelligence emphasizing the flaws of algorithmic designs as they concern the significant issues of dignity, accountability, truth, and relationality. We posit that imitatio Christi represents the theological and ethical basis for evaluating the contributions of artificial intelligence to human happiness at least, from a Christian perspective. This interdisciplinary

study challenges both theologians and technologists to contemplate how moral principles rooted in Christ's logic of love may shape the future of artificial intelligence in ways that uphold and safeguard human dignity.

Keywords: *Imitatio Christi*, Artificial intelligence, Morality, Discipleship, Communion.

1. Introduction

Christian believers often encounter obstacles in forming and preserving their moral identity amidst the unparalleled technological progress in society. The digital revolution, beyond transforming our mode of communication is gradually challenging our moral values. Artificial intelligence, social media, and virtual reality create novel ethical dilemmas that first-century disciples could never have anticipated. Against this background, Christians are faced with some core questions: How does one preserve a unified moral identity in the face of rapid technological innovations that have continued to revolutionize contemporary society in almost all its aspects? What ethical principles should guide Christians' engagement with artificial intelligence? Could it become the 'new master' that is constantly winning disciples today and what are the implications for the Christian faith?

When combined with *sequela Christi* (following Christ), the concept of *imitatio Christi* gives more than just a collection of moral precepts; it serves as the basis for forming one's identity in the difficult reality of today. Realising this objective requires new and creative thinking to understand one's moral experience in terms of truth and Christ's teaching and example.

This study employs an inductive-interpretative method, which integrates biblical exegesis, historical analysis of the Christian tradition, philosophical theories, and applied ethics. Undoubtedly, applying first-century disciple-making models to today's contexts runs the risk of application without contextual considerations. Through the mediation of conscience, which considers the impact of social, cultural, religious, and political influences on the

interpretation of reality in the light of truth, it is possible to continually imitate and follow Christ in the face of the new ethical challenges presented by artificial intelligence without losing one's moral identity.

There is an emphasis on the ancient religious concepts of *imitatio Christi*, *sequela Christi*, and Christian discipleship, which have a strong biblical basis to highlight how they can provide insight into a moral response to the development and application of artificial intelligence and inspire the formation of individuals' consciences and moral identity in today's complex world. We show that these ageless theological ideas are still relevant and significant for Christian moral formation in the twenty-first century by placing them within the framework of current ethical issues.

2. *Imitatio Christi*: A Biblical Perspective

The Old Testament does not mention "disciple and discipleship". The covenantal relationship between God and his people at different stages of their journey with him from Egypt to the Promised Land and their journeys to exile and their return present a paradigm of command, obedience, and imitation. The call to discipleship is fundamentally a divine initiative which entails an invitation to hear or listen to God's word. God is not only the origin of the process but also the one who vivifies and guarantees it by his fidelity.

Obedience, which is intended as faithfulness, concerns the attitude of those who are called into the covenantal relationship. The proof of one's disposition to learn comes from an attentive listening to God's voice, often communicated through the law and the prophets. Those who responded to God's invitation to a covenantal relationship were also called to replicate the instruction and obedience structure as a way of perpetuating it from generation to generation.

The instruction, obedience and imitation paradigm is evident in the call of Abraham and the invitation to embark on a journey to an unknown land followed by God's promise of blessing and protection (Gen12:1-3). Abraham's response to the call that was

characterised by high degrees of uncertainty and apprehension, at least from a human perspective, is quite instructive. He not only obeys God's voice and gives a positive response to the invitation, but he brings with him his family and possessions, thereby inserting them into the covenantal relationship (Gen 12:4-5). God extends the scope of his invitation by extending it to his chosen people with the call of Moses.

The same paradigm characterises the relationship between Samuel and Eli (1 Sam 3:1-10), Elijah and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:1-14). In the ensuing drama that preceded Elijah's going up to heaven in a whirlwind, we see Elisha's closeness to him and his unwillingness to let him go. As Elijah was being taken up into heaven in a whirlwind, he shouted, "My father! My father!" He did not call him master, but father which signifies a filial relationship or bond between them (2 Kgs 9-10). Elisha did not only see himself as a prophet's servant but also as a son. This filial relationship has implications for the vision of discipleship in the contemporary world that often suffers from a trust deficit. It is an invitation to a sincere and true relationship that fosters fraternal love and friendship rooted in mutual trust, reciprocal respect, communion, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Another relevant context of command, obedience, and imitation is the familial or generational dimension as seen in the *Shema* in the book of Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord, is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up".¹

Israel is called to imitate the lawgiver who gives the command in the heart by transmitting its content into the heart of her children for their meditation as a way of rediscovering their purpose and

¹ Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 191.

mission in the covenantal relationship established by God. The modalities of welcoming such an invitation or obeying such a command is explicitly stated: 'with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength'. The command is inscribed not on tablets but on the heart, from where obedience and fidelity to the law giver emerge.

In the New Testament, the Greek word "mathétés" which means disciple, occurs several times. A disciple is a pupil or learner who is undergoing a pedagogical process under the tutelage of a master. The starting point for a conceptual understanding of discipleship is not the disciple himself but the Master. Contrary to the common practice in Jesus' time when disciples chose their master and followed him, he calls and chooses his disciples, thus indicating a paradigm shift, one that has consequences both for the identity and mission of disciples (Jn 15:16).

The master calls his disciples for a specific reason and mission (Mk 3:13-19). In other words, discipleship is a call (which is the basic requirement) to realise one's identity in Christ. Jesus chooses only twelve men from among his numerous followers for a specific mission but first, he teaches and trains them and sends them out to make disciples of all nations (Mtt 28:19).

The expression 'follow me' (Matt 4:19, 8; Mark 1:17, 2:14; Luke 5:27, 9:59; John 1:43, 21:19) which was used by Christ on several occasions in the gospels is not merely an instruction but also an invitation to journey with him. A disciple is not someone who goes before the master but one who follows him. One of the notable characteristics of disciples in the school of Jesus is that they maintain their identity and commit themselves to a lifelong process of recognising the Lord as the Master, and learning and interpreting their experiences in the light of Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6) through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who brings them to the complete truth (Jn 16:13).

The objective of a disciple is not to become a master but to be like him and imitate his humility, attitude of service, hospitality, compassion, loving-kindness, and mercy (Mtt 10:24; 23:11, Lk 6:40, Jn 13:13). A defining moment in the discipleship enterprise is the

declaration of Jesus, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learnt from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15).

The transition from a pedagogical paradigm to a more personal model of relationship underscores the importance of friendship (rooted in profound love) not only as the natural consequence of such a relationship but also as the context for authentic discipleship. As Gula notes, “When we turn to Jesus to know what discipleship requires for the sort of persons we ought to be and the sort of actions we ought to perform, we meet a man whose whole life was caught up in the ‘Abba’ experience of divine love.”¹ The discipleship experience is a continuous insertion of oneself into the divine life, not considered in abstract terms but a participation through experience and sharing in the life of the Trinity. It is marked by a progressive invitation to become sons and daughters in the Son who is united to each person by the mystery of his incarnation.²

The idea of discipleship is prominent in Pauline writings. In his admonition to the Philippians, he says, “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). Here presents union with Christ in mind and heart as the summit of discipleship. Attaining such a lofty goal requires a free and humble acceptance of St. Paul’s invitation to the Ephesians to “be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.” (Eph 5:1-2). The concept of imitation must not be simplified to mean photocopying or an irrational response to the Lord’s invitation that is based purely on faith; rather, it requires a reason illuminated and informed by a faith approach.

3. *Imitatio Christi*: Theological Understanding and Development

St. Augustine described Christ as the perfect example of virtue in whom authentic humanity is renewed and discovered and the

² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (04 March 1979), n. 13.

mediator who reconciles humanity to God.³ Through Christ's kenosis (self-emptying), which the mystery of incarnation speaks to and which finds its highest expression in the Paschal mystery, the sin of Adam is removed, thus ushering in new life, new creation and a renewed human-divine relationship.

In the same vein, St. Thomas Aquinas considers imitation of Christ the foundation of perfection for Christian believers who are called to embrace unconditional love of God and of neighbour while persevering in the life of grace and sacramental encounters with the Lord⁴, especially in the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist and reconciliation.

Tillmann argued that following Jesus is the foundational norm of Christian morality.⁵ Christ calls his disciples to follow him and makes himself, life, teachings and sacrifice the normative reference point in making moral decisions. Bearing witness, which is a significant part of Christian discipleship, speaks to the practical dimension of faith and morality. Thus, a theoretical acceptance of Christ as the Master who calls is not enough. There is a need to follow him in the complex realities of daily life as individuals and communities⁶ through the process of discernment.

Furthermore, the hermeneutical continuity between Jesus' person and word sets the tone for theological and ethical construal of Christian moral life.⁷ The inseparability of Jesus and his word on the one hand, provides a background for a more profound (though imperfect) understanding of the Lord, and on the other hand, brings to the fore the normative significance of Christ for discipleship. In

³ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I, Ch 11-14.

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.186 a. 5.

⁵ Fritz Tillmann, *The Master Calls: A Handbook of Morals for the Layman* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 3.

⁶ Daniel Harrington and James Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Illinois: Sheed & Ward, Chicago, 2002), 54.

⁷ Klaus Demmer, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, trans. Roberto Dell'Oro (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 62.

the same vein, Bonhoeffer speaks of conformity to Christ as an essential component of discipleship since, in the Christian context, there is no authentic discipleship without Christ.⁸

As evident in the New Testament, imitating Christ goes beyond formulating new norms;⁹ rather, it is predicated on a profound understanding of oneself in relation to Christ since it is only in the mystery of Christ that human beings are illumined.¹⁰ In other words, a lively faith that seeks understanding becomes the basis for a new paradigm of relationship with God and the world. Thus, *imitatio Christi* and *sequela Christi* are both complementary, not mutually exclusive, and they demand a new way of relating with the Lord and of interpreting one's faith and moral experiences in the light of Christ.

Imitatio Christi is not a blind following of Jesus or an invitation to mimic the Lord or simplify the intricacies of reality by asking 'what would Jesus do'? Also, *sequela Christi* focuses more on asking what a disciple who assumes Christ's word and deeds as the norm of moral life would do based on his or her personal encounter with him. Turning to Christ as a *conditio sine qua non* for moral decision making entails a process of discernment of his attitude and logic of life, which shape his interaction with the Father and humanity.¹¹ Gula states rightly that:

Discipleship is a matter of answering the invitation of Jesus to take an adventure to live under the reign of God as he did. To regard Jesus Christ as the norm of the moral life is to enter the way of discipleship. Living as a disciple necessarily entails forming a Christian imagination and converting our loyalty to God in Christ into a way of life.¹²

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 51.

⁹ Demmer, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, 65.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (07 December, 1965), n. 22.

¹¹ James Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 269.

¹² Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 189.

4. Discipleship, Communion, and Synodality

Jesus established a “new family” of disciples who “define themselves not only in relationship to Jesus but also in relation to fellow Christians.”¹³ The redefining of family, which has anthropological underpinnings concretely expressed in solidarity has moral implications for interpersonal relationships, challenges the absolutisation of biological ties, and creates a community united by shared commitment to God’s kingdom.

Jesus described those who do God’s will as his brother and sister and mother (Mk 3:35). The life of the early Church reflects the communal dimension of discipleship, which necessitated the study and sharing of God’s word, breaking of the bread and communal prayers. The witness of the disciples who had all things in common in Acts 2:42-44 attracted the attention and commendation of the Gentiles in Antioch, who described them as Christians (Acts 19:26).

Etymologically, the Greek word *koinonia* and the Latin concept of *communio*, (which translate to communion) underscore a relationship that is profoundly built on love, unity, and solidarity. The concept of communion cannot be dissociated from other related concepts such as relationship, fellowship, and shared life among Christ’s faithful. Communion must not be understood in abstract terms but in relation to its descriptive function, which highlights the Church not only as an institution but also as a living entity, the body of Christ made up of human beings who recognise their common origin, patrimony, and their identity as co-heirs with the Son. Indeed, as St. Paul says, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:3-6).

The idea of the Church as communion is a vital novelty that brings to the fore the desire of the Second Vatican Council for a renewal of ecclesiology. The descriptive function of communion necessarily leads to a reflection on its hermeneutic function, which

¹³ Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 51.

constitutes the interpretative key for understanding the ethical implications of *koinonia* that finds its ultimate justification in the logic of Christ, namely, unconditional love.

The vision of the Church as communion emphasised by the Second Vatican Council has Trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological, soteriological, Eucharistic and anthropological dimensions. It is a communion that is offered as a gift of self by the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Church also shares in the same communion and becomes its expression through its sacramental life that serves the Paschal mystery and through which it is perpetuated in the liturgy, especially in the Holy Eucharist.

Having been reborn in the waters of baptism, the womb of the Church, every baptised person recognises his or her union with Christ, with the brethren, and indeed with the Christian community united by Christ. This is vital for the right understanding of humanity and the anthropological implications of one's identity as a being with and for others, which finds its clearest expression in the person of Christ. As noted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,

If the concept of *communion*, which is not a univocal concept, is to serve as a key to ecclesiology, it has to be understood within the teaching of the Bible and the patristic tradition, in which *communion* always involves a double dimension: the *vertical* (communion with God) and the *horizontal* (communion among men). It is essential to the Christian understanding of *communion* that it be recognised above all as a gift from God, as a fruit of God's initiative carried out in the paschal mystery. The new relationship between man and God, that has been established in Christ and is communicated through the sacraments, also extends to a new relationship among human beings.¹⁴

It is impossible to speak of a community without communion or vice versa, at least from a theological or faith perspective, since

¹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion (28 May 1992), n. 3, accessed on May 25, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communionis-notio.en.html.

communal living also entails a shared life of faith among believers. The concept of *communio* naturally excludes every form of individualism and narcissism, which unfortunately continue to characterise interpersonal relations not only on an individual but also on the global level. Experience has shown that globalisation, community, and communion do not always coincide.

Without prejudice to the objective of globalisation, namely, to improve the interconnections or interdependence among nations in the areas of communication, trade, investments, science and technology, almost every nation enters such relationships with an individualistic mindset that sometimes propels their desire to dominate others without any realistic commitment to building a community, intended as a web of relationships that is built on reciprocal love, mutual trust, and shared vision and from a Christian perspective, on Christ.

Although Jesus' invitation to his disciples to follow him was directed to them as individuals and their response was also individual, participation in the enterprise of discipleship finds its profound expression in a communal or ecclesial context. As the International Theological Commission states, "In this ecclesiological context, synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission."¹⁵ The decision to follow Jesus presupposes an interior disposition to do so by uniting oneself to every baptised person. It is an invitation to be together on the way, to walk together or to journey with Jesus and others since Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (*Jn* 14,6), and being a disciple implies being a follower of the Way (Acts 9,2; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,14.22).¹⁶

¹⁵ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (17 October 2015), n. 3, accessed on May 15, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html.

¹⁶ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, n. 6.

Synodality does not seek to subsume the identity or individuality of the travellers; rather, recognising the importance of the general intended as the People of God, “it expresses the concern to hear the voice of every stratum of the mystical body of Christ, such that the general does not suffocate the particular, even as the particular is cognisant of the aim and destination of the general.”¹⁷

5. Artificial Intelligence and Contemporary Society

Artificial intelligence (AI) traces its beginnings to the late 19th century with Ada Lovelace’s design of the archetypal algorithm for Charles Babbage’s systematic engine that later evolved into the computer. In the mid-20th century, Alan Turing’s research marked a turning point in the history of artificial intelligence. His central argument was that a machine could be considered intelligent as long as it can trick human beings into believing that it is human.¹⁸

The term artificial intelligence was coined by John McCarthy in 1956 who described it as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs.” Several descriptions of the concept have underscored the ability of computer systems to learn, analyse, predict, and react to inputs. Rouhiainen describes it as a “software or a computer program with a mechanism to learn. It then uses that knowledge to decide in a new situation, as humans do.”¹⁹

The word “artificial” does not mean fake but rather emphasises how robots may mimic some characteristics of human intelligence, such as recognition, decision-making, and problem-solving, not as embodied consciousness but through data processing and

¹⁷ Francis Adelabu, “Together they Walked: The Aqedah, Midrash and Synodality,” *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 39 (2025): 196.

¹⁸ Martin Musiol, *Generative AI: Navigating the Course to the Artificial General Intelligence Future* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2024), 28.

¹⁹ Lasse Rouhiainen, *Artificial Intelligence: 101 Things You Must Know Today About Our Future* (USA: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 18.

algorithms to produce outputs. This development is deliberately and gradually encroaching on every facet of human existence in an effort to overthrow anthropocentrism.

The level of dependence of human beings on artificial intelligence could gradually shape the human-divine relationship and overturn the idea that only God can know human beings more than themselves, invite them to follow him, and solve all problems.²⁰ The proposition that ‘intelligent machines’ can do as much introduces a new perception of artificial intelligence as the ‘posthuman god’ or ‘the new Master’ who is able to make disciples of its users. Consequently, for human beings to fully maximise their potential in the face of rapid technological changes symbolised by artificial intelligence, they would have to transcend the limits of their humanity and take the exit to the posthuman future.²¹

Posthumanism represents the epistemic or philosophical undertone of artificial intelligence. It jettisons the restricted descriptions of human beings, the imbalance between the human and non-human life, and the supremacy of humans over other species. Posthumanism promotes a vision of interactions between human and non-human life in a way that leads to a change of language and description of human beings in mechanical terms as technologically codified entities and the attribution of human qualities to machines.²² An exaggerated vision of human-machine relationships could suggest the inadequacy of speaking of solidarity explicitly in human terms, at least from a posthuman perspective.

Undoubtedly, artificial intelligence has transformed the practice of medicine, especially in the aspects of diagnosis, monitoring of treatment plans and recovery progress, facilitating patient-doctor relationships, simulation of surgical interventions, and data

²⁰ Francesca Ferrando, “The Posthuman Divine: When Robots can be Enlightened,” *Sophia* (2019): 646.

²¹ Kathleen N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Ltd, 1999), 284.

²² Rossi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 41.

management. These innovations correspond to the vocation and responsibility of healthcare workers to be “guardians and servants of human life.”²³ However, care must be taken not to employ artificial intelligence in such a manner that seeks to place decision making of healthcare and medical procedures on ‘intelligent machines’ or replace human contact, the human values of compassion and love which patients often require as they confront loneliness that is usually associated with sickness.

The contributions of artificial intelligence to the rapid transformation of the educational system cannot be overemphasised. The unprecedented quick access to several academic resources and data, learning systems and tools, virtual tutors, global community, language translation, and so on continue to affect human life and development positively. However, experience has shown that over-reliance on technology and data stored and reproduced by artificial intelligence could hinder human creativity, rapid spread of misinformation, and violation of privacy, especially through unauthorised access to data, leaks, and breaches.

Without ignoring the positive impact of artificial intelligence on human development, it must be noted that its praiseworthy contributions are not devoid of ethical concerns. Artificial systems continue to threaten human dignity, limit human creativity and question the distinct place of human beings in creation by imitating certain aspects of human functioning. There is also the danger of isolation, bullying, domination, and fake news through the use of social media and an attempt to equate or replace interpersonal relationships with virtual relationships. From a Christian perspective, the idea of *imitatio Chisti* serves as an interpretative key for assessing the ethical concerns often associated with postmodern scientific and technological innovations.

²³ Dicastery For the Doctrine of the Faith, Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence *Antiqua et Nova* (28 January 2025), n. 71, accessed May 21, 2025. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rcddf_doc_20250128_antiqua-et-nova_en.html.

6. *Imitatio Christi* in an Era of Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Considerations

The call to *imitatio Christi* amidst the complexity of the world and the polychromatic interpretation of reality is rooted in the assertion of Jesus that though his disciples were in the world, they were not of the world (Jn 17:14-16). Christian discipleship and the corresponding task of witnessing do not occur in a vacuum but in the concrete world where good and evil co-exist. Artificial intelligence can facilitate Christian discipleship and offer new opportunities for witnessing through the use of social media platforms, internet and virtual assistants for catechesis, and so on.

Beyond viewing artificial intelligence as a tool, it is one of the horizons in which Christians are called to bear witness to Christ by their conduct of life, which manifests in their use and interaction with it, searches, comments, and relationships with other users. As Pope Paul the VI taught in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”²⁴ An uncritical engagement with artificial intelligence that boasts of the capacity of its intelligent computations and simulations could demean faith in God who reveals himself as the Creator and Redeemer God and propose the explanation of mysteries in computational terms. From a theological and ethical perspective, artificial intelligence can be understood within God’s creative plan and used to foster it. Scientific and technological innovations are human beings’ way of participating in God’s creative work and obeying his commandment to care for creation as custodians (Gen 1:28). According to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith:

Scientific inquiry and the development of technical skills are part of the ‘collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation’. At the same time, all scientific and technological achievements are, ultimately, gifts from God. Therefore, human

²⁴ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (08 December 1975), n. 41.

beings must always use their abilities in view of the higher purpose for which God has granted them.²⁵

A contemplative attitude that employs discernment as a hermeneutical key for understanding the potential and limitations of artificial intelligence is required for a successful realisation of one's call to *imitatio Christi* in a technologically mediated world. The design of artificial intelligence, which pretends to create truth and sometimes manipulates facts, violates human dignity and contradicts the sanctity of life, does not foster authentic human progress. Science and technology have God as their ultimate source and must always be "at the service of human persons, contribute to the pursuit of greater justice, more extensive fraternity, and a more humane order of social relations, which are more valuable than advances in the technical field."²⁶

Although the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence tools raises serious concerns that require critical and ethical considerations, a more progressive approach would be to advocate for responsible use of such innovations by believers. To this end, formation of conscience rooted in a profound study of Scripture and adherence to the magisterium is necessary for attaining moral clarity in one's use of artificial intelligence. As Pope Benedict XVI notes, "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."²⁷

7. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, artificial intelligence has contributed immensely to human living, growth, and development in almost all sectors of life. In fact, it is a testament to human creativity, which is often provoked by a need to respond to challenges that confront human

²⁵ Dicastery For the Doctrine of the Faith, Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence *Antiqua et Nova*, 31.

²⁶ Dicastery For the Doctrine of the Faith, Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence, n. 38.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), n.1.

beings. Without prejudice to the positive contributions of artificial intelligence, it is vital to also highlight the negative ways it could shape human lives in a manner that endangers their faith and morality. The idea of *imitatio Christi* constitutes a vigorous moral basis for confronting the challenge of maintaining one's moral identity in a complex world. The moral dimension of discipleship transcends a mere adherence to rules; rather, it seeks to influence believers' relationship with Christ and the world.

Today, believers continue to face the challenge of putting into practice the ideals of Christian discipleship in the 21st century that is overtly characterised by technological advancement. As Harrington and Keenan acknowledge, "It is neither possible nor useful to imitate Jesus' lifestyle in all its details or to try to put into practice all the concrete instructions that he gave to his first followers."²⁸ As contemporary society continues to experience the proliferation of competing value systems, the ancient practice of *imitatio Christi* offers not an escape from complexity but a path through it. As Harrington and Absalom propose, being a disciple of Jesus means modelling one's life, thoughts, words, actions, and everything after the example and teaching Jesus.²⁹

The emergence of artificial intelligence does not undermine the value of *imitatio Christi* and *sequela Christi* as a faith response and ethical guide for Christians' interaction with it; rather, it offers them a new avenue (though not without its challenges) to be transformed by their personal encounter with Jesus and become instruments of transformation, who engage with technology in the light of Christ.

²⁸ Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 53.

²⁹ Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 78.

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