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Orthodox Christian Ethics and Artificial Intelligence: Anthropological and Theological Challenges

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ABSTRACT. In an era increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI), Orthodox Christian theology is called to engage critically and constructively with the ethical, spiritual, and anthropological challenges posed by this technological transformation. While AI excels in data processing and simulation of human behavior, it fundamentally lacks personhood, freedom, and spiritual discernment—elements essential to the Orthodox understanding of the human being as created in the image of God. This article explores how Orthodox theology, grounded in the patristic tradition, offers a distinct framework for evaluating AI: one that upholds human dignity, relationality, and the sacredness of embodied and sacramental life. Rather than rejecting AI, the Orthodox approach calls for discernment—embracing technology as a tool for ministry and human flourishing, but resisting its use when it undermines communion, spiritual depth, or the mystery of divine grace. The question is not whether AI will change the world—it already has—but whether this change will align with the vision of the Kingdom of God. Orthodox Christianity offers a prophetic voice in the digital age, proposing that true transformation comes not through algorithms, but through theosis—our journey toward divine likeness through love, prayer, and communion with God and neighbor.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence**,** Orthodox Theology**,** Personhood, Orthodox Christian ethics, AI Ethics

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is among the vital drivers of global transformation, reshaping every aspect of human life, from daily interactions to global systems. AI innovations have revolutionized various sectors,

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including education, finance and healthcare, among others.[1] Theologians have drawn analogies between the impact of AI and the historical transformations brought by writing and printing, both of which reshaped not only culture but also theology, signaling that AI could inaugurate a comparable paradigm shift in religious thought.[2] Technology consistently reshapes not only practices but also the very understanding of human identity and community, thereby posing fundamental questions for Christian theology.[3]

From a technical point of view, AI refers to a broad field of computer science that designs systems capable of performing tasks that, at least historically, required human intelligence, such as classification, prediction, pattern recognition, or language understanding. Today, most widely deployed AI systems rely on machine learning, that is, algorithms that learn statistical patterns from large datasets instead of following hand-crafted rules. Within machine learning, deep learning uses multilayered neural networks to extract increasingly abstract representations of data. Large language models, which have recently shaped much of the public debate on AI, constitute only one specific family of deep learning systems, primarily trained on vast textual corpora. They should not, however, be conflated with AI as a whole, which also encompasses, for example, computer vision systems, recommender systems, and reinforcement-learning agents in robotics.[4]

AI has enhanced personalization of learning and research experience, and it has provided instant feedback and concise decision-making through data analytics.[5] The integration of AI in human life raises profound questions on balancing algorithmic structures with theological norms.[6] Generally, some key aspects of the ethical debate surrounding the adoption of AI include moral responsibility, bias, privacy, erosion of the social framework, and respect for human rights.[7] Technology itself contains forces that transcend human intention, since "nothing is good or bad in itself; the use and application of new technology in practice can reveal what ought to be done, beyond any utilitarianism." This suggests that the ethical dilemmas posed by AI cannot be addressed solely

1 Christos Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 563, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050563.

2 Sotirios Despotis, "Studying the Bible in the age of Artificial Intelligence," *Synochi* 2 (December 2023): 172, https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.41994.

3 Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 80.

4 Stuart Russel and Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2021).

5 Ebenezer Olawale Kayode, Michael Olusegun Abodunrin, and Godwin Ayodeji Abodunrin, "Biblical Ethics and Artificial Intelligence: Towards A Model of Integration in Theological Education," *Jos Journal of Religion and Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2024): 108.

6 Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education," 563.

7 Karslı, "Ethical and Theological Problems," 1.

through regulatory codes, but demand deeper ontological criteria.[8] The ethical implication of this technology has disrupted both the secular world, causing struggles, such as job displacement, and theological frameworks of the Christian doctrine.[9] In the case of the Christian Orthodox tradition, faith is deeply rooted in the incarnation, theosis, and the sanctity of creation.[10] These doctrinal bases raise critical dialogue in the face of AI algorithms. While AI in religion evokes optimism in various ways—such as through AI-driven records digitization efforts—there are also potential threats, including doctrinal error, the erosion of authenticity resulting from the automated generation of doctrinal commentary, virtual religious counselling, and sermon writing, as well as the marginalization of pastoral care.[11] A theologically responsible approach must therefore hold together both dimensions: it should acknowledge concrete ways in which AI can support education, administration, and even certain forms of pastoral communication, while at the same time scrutinising where such tools risk undermining human freedom, discernment, and genuine communion. The Orthodox tradition already possesses interpretive tools for evaluating technology through the patristic heritage. Holy fathers such as Basil the Great, John of Damascus, and Maximus the Confessor engaged the technologies of their time with discernment, acknowledging their benefits when serving health and salvation, yet setting boundaries when they threatened to secularize human life or weaken the relationship with God. This patristic approach offers a criterion today: AI may be useful insofar as it serves the purpose of theosis and does not replace or distort the personal encounter with God and the neighbor.[12] In essence, faith in Orthodox Christianity is more than literal intellectual agreement to a set of beliefs. Faith is linked to personal devotion, involving spiritual practices as part of the transformative journey towards God. This process changes the entire being into being like God. Theosis involves a human-God relationship, where God transforms the person in a kind of synergy.[13] Similarly, the belief in the Holy Trinity lay a strong foundation for a debate about the

8 Stavros Giagkazoglou, "Theology and Artificial Intelligence," *Theologia* 91, no. 3 (2020): 103.

9 Lluís Oviedo, "Artificial Intelligence and Theology: Looking for a Positive—But Not Uncritical—Reception," *Zygon* 57, no. 4 (2022): 938.

10 George Mastrantonis, "The Fundamental Teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church," *GOARCH*, 2015, https://www.goarch.org/el/-/the-fundamental-teachings-of-the-eastern-orthodox-church.

11 Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education," 563.

12 Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron,* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1895); Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); ohn of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1899).

13 Ioannis Romanides, *Patristic Theology* (Thessaloniki: Parakatathiki, 2004), 42.

theology within algorithm. Furthermore, Orthodox Christianity holds firm to a view about human nature as having been created in the image of God.[14] This nature is unique and special, fixed and inviolable, making the Christian thought instinctively resistant to AI because it conflicts with the operational nature of the AI algorithm. This way, the great question in Christian Orthodox tradition is not whether AI will change the world, but how it conflicts with this theology grounded in the Triune God and relational nature of humanity, particularly how this theology can bring responsible and ethical development in the face of AI. This article focuses on two interrelated questions. The first concerns whether artificial intelligence, however advanced, can be regarded as a person in the Orthodox sense – capable of bearing the image of God and participating in theosis. The second concerns how the deployment of non-personal AI systems in education, pastoral practice, and wider social life affects human personhood, relationality, and dignity. The argument unfolds in three steps: first, the Orthodox anthropological basis for denying personhood and deification to AI artefacts is outlined; second, the ethical challenges of bias, privacy, and the diminishment of personhood that emerge when algorithmic systems mediate human relationships are analysed; and third, some theological principles are sketched for a discerning and "transfigured" engagement with AI that resists both technological idolatry and uncritical rejection.

2. The Orthodox Anthropological Basis

Orthodox theological engagement with AI always begins with a proper understanding of the human person.[15] Some Orthodox thinkers stress that AI should not be understood as "artificial intelligence" in the strict sense but rather as "intelligence assistance," which highlights its auxiliary role and underscores that true intelligence remains tied to the human person as "image of God".[16] In orthodoxy theology, the human being is beyond an intellectual being; created in the image and likeness of God, humans have a body and soul.[17] This image assigns distinctive abilities to human beings, including making humans creative,

[14] Zachary R. Calo, "AI, Medicine and Christian Ethics," in *AI and the Rule of Law* (Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks, 2024), 220, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802205657.ch13.

[15] John Zizioulas, "Ἀπὸ τὸ προσωπεῖον εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον. Ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς πατερικῆς θεολογίας εἰς τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ προσώπου," in *Χαριστήρια εις τιμήν του Μητροπολίτου Γέροντος Χαλκηδόνος Μελίτωνος* (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Foundation for Patristic Studies, 1977), 287.

[16] Despotis, " Studying the Bible," 194

[17] Nicuşor Morlova, "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Spiritual Life, From the Perspective of Christian Orthodoxy," *Pro Edu International Journal of Educational Sciences* 5, no. 9 (June 21, 2023): 230, https://doi.org/10.26520/peijes.2023.9.5.25-37.

rational, and relational.[18] The body was created first and received life, after which God found the world perfect. Thus, the perfect creation of human nature has the material and spiritual worlds.[19] This way, a human person is not a mere aggregate of data points or a biological machine that can be processed based on algorithms and patterns to make decisions. The human person is a unique being, called into communion with God and with others. AI systems risk creating the illusion of relationship without authentic reciprocity, which directly challenges theological understandings of personhood as communion.[20] Giagkazoglou warns that the "technophysis" created by humans through AI generates a new type of civilization, in which "the axis of life no longer has any ontological or meaningful content and purpose, apart from the insatiable and nihilistic hedonism of programmed pleasures." Such a distortion of existence stands in stark contrast with the Orthodox understanding of the human person as created in the image of God.[21]

Within this anthropological horizon, a first and much-discussed question is whether advanced AI systems could themselves ever be considered persons in the Orthodox sense. From a doctrinal perspective, this possibility must be rejected, but the reasons require some care. Orthodox theology understands personhood (prosopon/hypostasis) as the unique mode of existence of an ensouled, embodied being created by God in the divine image and called to communion with God and neighbour. Personhood is thus not reducible to functional capacities, informational complexity, or the successful simulation of relational behaviour. Artificial systems, however sophisticated, are artefacts constructed by human ingenuity; they lack a soul, are not called into existence by a personal divine act of creation, and cannot receive uncreated grace. Contemporary AI – including large language models that generate apparently meaningful theological discourse – operates through statistical pattern recognition and large-scale data processing. It can imitate certain external features of human intelligence and communication, yet it does not possess interiority, freedom, or the capacity for love and spiritual discernment. For this reason, any talk of "AI persons" within an Orthodox framework can only be metaphorical or legal, not ontological.

As soon as this is acknowledged, a natural objection arises. If AI systems were one day to display linguistic, emotional, or social behaviour indistinguishable from that of humans, would it not be arbitrary to deny them personhood? This

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18 O. L. Sokolovsky, "Anthropological Dimension of Perfection in Orthodox Theology," *Bulletin of the Ivan Franko Zhytomyr State University. Philosophical Sciences* 2, no. 94 (2023): 38, https://doi.org/10.35433/PhilosophicalSciences.2(94).2023.34-42.

19 Ibid.

20 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

21 Giagkazoglou, "Theology and Artificial Intelligence," 112.

line of reasoning reflects influential functionalist accounts of mind and strong-AI expectations according to which sufficiently complex information-processing is enough for consciousness and moral status. From an Orthodox perspective, however, such arguments overlook what is most decisive: that personhood is grounded not merely in observable behaviour but in the mystery of created freedom, embodied existence, and participation in uncreated divine life. Even if future AI systems were to simulate human reactions with far greater subtlety than today's models, they would still lack the sacramental and ecclesial dimensions of personhood that are constitutive for an Orthodox understanding of the human being.

In Orthodox Christian Tradition, the relationality emphasis in the *"image of God"* goes beyond the concept of truth understood by the AI. According to the Orthodox doctrine, truth is not a logical algorithm or a set of facts, but is ultimately a person: Christ.[22] Jesus Christ is truly God who shares in the same reality as the Father and the Spirit, and He is truly man who shares with us all that is human. As the unique God-man, Jesus Christ has restored humanity to fellowship with God. Thus, Christian living is a call into a personal relationship with God. Since AI has no capacity to engage relationally, incarnate faith, empathy, or participate in spiritual discernment, it is unable to express the fulness of truth through algorithms and data.[23] Similarly, it cannot offer communion and embodied experience. As metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki emphasizes, AI fundamentally lacks the capacity for authentic spiritual discernment and cannot replace the living pastoral relationship essential to Orthodox spiritual formation.[24] The mechanical processing of theological concepts through algorithms cannot capture the dynamic, relational nature of Orthodox theological understanding, which emerges from lived experience within the Church community." These core features are intrinsic to Orthodox Christianity and are not reducible to algorithmic efficiencies. These contrasts are not meant to inflate AI into a rival to God or to the human priest, but to clarify why, even when AI tools are employed in pastoral or theological settings, they cannot occupy the sacramental and relational place of the human person.

Another concern of AI that poses a theological and ethical challenge is its tendency to rest upon a reductive, naturalistic mentality. In contemporary culture, AI is often tied to eschatological visions, such as 'digital immortality' or the transhumanist ideal of a technological superhuman. These aspirations substitute the Orthodox hope of the Resurrection with a technological soteriology. The

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22 John 14:6.

23 Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education," 563

24 Nikolaos Chatzinikolaou, Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, "Artificial Intelligence: How Intelligent and How Wise?" *Ekklesia* 11 (December 2019): 1080–1092.

Church is therefore called to reveal that true hope is not found in the storage of consciousness as data, but in participation in the Body of Christ and the life of the age to come.[25] Naturalism refers to the reductive philosophy holding that everything can be explained through natural sciences.[26] The naturalistic account of humanity has failed to reconcile with the Christian idea that every person has a soul loved by God. This way, AI may threaten to destabilise many core aspects of Christian thought, particularly those related to human communion with God, human nature, and human uniqueness.[27] The play of AI in this context raises critical questions, such as, if machines can replicate the rational capabilities of a person, how does it stand as a central claim that human beings were created for a special relationship with God? What does *"image of God"* mean if AI and robots display almost same characteristics as human beings?[28] A more specific approach to these questions is to assess whether a given use of AI respects human dignity and facilitates authentic development.[29] In this case, perhaps the leading question must be Does AI elevate or diminish that which is essentially human? In either case, Orthodox Christian scholars hold that there is a fixity to human nature that will always remain unique and unchangeable; thus, AI can neither acquire nor take away the dignity placed on human beings by God.[30]

Generally, the personhood emphasized in the Christian Orthodox tradition can be described in three anthropological concepts that lay the foundational debate about theology within the algorithm. These concepts include embodiment and relationality.[31] The concept embodiment describes the inherent human, not merely as having thoughts, memories, and emotions. This means a person is not simply a mind, such that their memories can be captured and uploaded onto a supercomputer to endure forever. Instead, humans are enfleshed and embodied creatures. The body plays a crucial role in Christian ethics in light of the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection, and human destiny is not found in found in overcoming the body but in the body remade and glorified.[32] Based on the Christian theological anthropology, humans are embodied characters of persons, and this body possesses an intrinsic dignity that needs to be respected.

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[25] Ronald Cole-Turner, ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011); Martin Heriot-Maitland, "Digital Immortality and the Orthodox Critique of Transhumanism," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 2 (2023): 214–230; John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

[26] Calo, "AI, Medicine and Christian Ethics," 221.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid, 222.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid, 223.

[32] Ibid.

In this lens, broader technological projects of human augmentation, some of which make use of AI components, risk interfering with this human nature of embodiment and therefore generate critical theological concerns. Practically, there is always a need for physical human fellowship, even when digital technologies supplement some spiritual practices. Digital communication platforms, sometimes assisted by AI-based tools such as automated translation or personalised recommendation of liturgical material, can enable forms of virtual participation in church life. However, when such virtual experiences substitute rather than complement physical presence, they raise serious concerns about the spiritual significance and authenticity of worship. However, if these virtual experiences substitute physical presence, it raises concerns about the spiritual significance and authenticity of such practices. Therefore, there is a need for Christians to navigate the tension between embracing technological advancements and upholding the embodied nature of worship. Although AI may support catechesis or theological education, it cannot replace the sacramental life of the Church. The Eucharist, Baptism, or Confession require materiality, community, and personal presence; they cannot be virtualized without losing their very essence. The incarnation of Christ demonstrates that salvation takes place through the body and matter, not through immaterial algorithms.[33] Sacraments such as Baptism cannot be virtualized, since they require material elements like water and the presence of a real community to witness and affirm faith formation. In such cases, AI may not comprehend such grace. A place like this, requires a human person to experience the grace of God in a communion.

The second anthropological element of personhood is relationality, simply defined as the capacity to be in a relationship, involving encounter with the natural world, other people, and God. It also points to the ways in which a person experiences and expresses freedom through relationships with others and with God. From an Orthodox perspective, relationality is therefore one of the privileged modes in which human dignity is manifested and fulfilled, but not a condition for possessing that dignity. Even those whose capacity to communicate or to enter into recognisable relationships is severely diminished – such as persons with profound cognitive or communicative disabilities – remain fully human, bearers of the divine image and unconditional dignity. This way, theological and ethical perspectives challenge the use of AI in interfering with the relationality aspect of human nature, despite its positive contributions to theological development.

[33] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973); John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006); Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 5, *The Sanctifying Mysteries*, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012).

3. Ethical Challenges: Bias, Privacy, and the Diminution of Personhood

Once it is recognized that AI systems are not persons in the Orthodox sense, the central ethical question becomes how their design and deployment affect human persons and communities. The practical aspect of AI raises various ethical challenges through the lens of Orthodox theology. One of the most critical is algorithmic bias. Due to the way AI systems are developed from human-generated data, they mimic, inherit, amplify, and transmit the existing bias related to socio-economic status, race, and gender. Practically, AI draws from every dimension of cosmic existence and adopts the training and data points in its algorithms that humans made a choice to use. This data constitutes all the conscious and unconscious biases that humans bring along with them.[34] Such bias conflicts with the Orthodox conviction that every human being, created in the 'image of God,' possesses unique dignity and equal worth. Algorithmic systems require an ethics of responsibility and accountability rather than mere technical regulation, particularly when they affect human dignity.[35] The Christian mission to transform the world in the light of God's Kingdom requires legitimate, free-of-bias, equitable, and necessary scientific research.[36] Therefore, Orthodox the perspective challenges AI development to be guided by the principle of universal human dignity. This challenge extends to addressing what Orthodox theologians identify as the fundamental incompatibility between algorithmic logic and the mysterious nature of divine grace. Unlike human intelligence, which Orthodox theology understands as participatory in the divine *logos*, AI operates through purely mechanistic processes that cannot access the transcendent dimension essential to authentic theological understanding.[37] The concern is not merely about bias in data, but about the fundamental limitation of algorithmic systems to apprehend spiritual realities. "Spiritual Intelligence is the only one that can control Artificial Intelligence". The proper governance of AI requires spiritual wisdom and discernment that transcends mere technological capabilities.[38] In this case, AI and its advancement will reach all creation, to all life, and to every dimension of cosmic existence while actively working to mitigate bias and ensure equity and fairness. In theological contexts, large training corpora may reproduce doctrinal, gender, or cultural biases, emphasizing the majority worldview while marginalizing others. For example,

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34 Constantine Psimopoulos, "Artificial Intelligence: Bioethical Considerations and Limitations," *Public Orthodoxy*, December 26, 2024, https://publicorthodoxy.org/2024/10/15/artificial-intelligence-bioethics/.

35 Luciano Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

36 Psimopoulos, "Artificial Intelligence: Bioethical Considerations."

37 Chatzinikolaou, "Artificial Intelligence," 1088-1089.

38 Nikolaos Chatzinikolaou, Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, "Spiritual Intelligence is the only one that can control Artificial Intelligence," *AI Report Magazine*, 21.

a model trained on protestant sources will tend to underrepresent Orthodox, Catholic, or Global South interpretations.[39]

Beyond bias, AI systems also raise significant concerns regarding data privacy. AI models require large amounts of personal data to function, which lead to ethical concerns related to surveillance and the commodification of private life. For example, AI platforms often collect sensitive data on pastoral struggles, belief, and conscience which commercial providers may process and share these data beyond the intended purposes.[40] There are several ethical concerns related the collection of this personal data. First, there is a risk of such data being misused or falling into wrong hands, which could pose a great ethical and legal issues. Secondly, there is a higher risk of failing the commitment to confidentiality and ethical openness.[41] For example, many AI-fused educational sites run in business modes involving commodification of users by utilising or trading their data with external providers. This is a common strategy in secular technological space, but challenges religious institutions with commitment to pastoral care, confidentiality, and ethical sincerity. Thirdly, there are risks of data breaches through unauthorised access, or disclosure of confidential data and confessions, which can destroy public trust of the involved institutions. With all these vulnerabilities, Orthodox theology view the indiscriminate collection and use of personal data as a potential erosion of personhood. This challenge becomes even more pressing when considering the question of data ownership and the principle of data minimization. Educational and personal data should be used exclusively for the purposes for which they are collected, with full transparency, and ideally ownership should remain with the individuals who provide them. Moreover, the GDPR principle of data minimization often conflicts with the functional demands of AI, which tends to operate more effectively the more data it processes. This tension highlights a fundamental ethical conflict between efficiency and the safeguarding of human dignity.[42] As part of respecting human person, the private inner life of a person, including thoughts, spiritual journey, and struggles must be protected from technological exploitation. Therefore, Orthodox theological foundations call for transparent algorithms using diverse training sets and informed consent protocols to ensure that AI serves formation rather than distortion.[43] The Orthodox Church's recent engagement with digital

[39] Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education," 563.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ioannis Ladas, "Safeguarding Privacy in Educational Data: Ethical Challenges and Implications of Artificial Intelligence," in *Artificial Intelligence in Education: Proceedings of the 1st Scientific Conference*, ed. Zoi Vazoura and Nikolaos Samaras (Athens, 2024), 459–60.
[43] Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education," 563.

technologies demonstrates a careful approach to preserving theological authenticity while embracing technological benefits. As noted in contemporary Orthodox discourse, the Church must maintain vigilance against the commodification of spiritual life through data mining and algorithmic manipulation of religious content.[44] This requires not only technical safeguards but also spiritual discernment to distinguish between tools that enhance authentic theological formation and those that merely simulate it. Recent developments in AI-powered educational and pastoral platforms illustrate that these concerns are not merely theoretical. Systems that collect detailed behavioural, spiritual, or performance data in order to generate predictions, profiles, or risk scores can create extensive personal dossiers; when such datasets are inadequately protected or repurposed without consent, they expose vulnerable persons to concrete risks of data misuse, theft, and commodification and call for stronger safeguards and a robust theological critique of technological exploitation.[45] The ethical dilemmas of AI can be evaluated analogically to the four foundational principles of bioethics: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Applied to AI, these principles raise questions about whether human autonomy and oversight are preserved, whether privacy and personal data are protected, whether AI contributes to the common good, and whether social justice and fairness are maintained.[46] Relevant institutions must ensure AI technologies comply with international data privacy regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) adopted in the European Union.

Finally, there is the risk of diminution of personhood through AI algorithm. When AI takes over tasks that require empathy, relationality, and human creativity, it can cause psychological and spiritual impoverishment. The idea of treating AI systems as replacement of human relationships and interactions leads to loss of dignity and diminishes the sense that human beings have inherent worth.[47] For example, certain Protestant churches and denominations have incorporated AI-generated prayer responses into their websites. At the end of the prayer request chain, there is a living person, but any immediate relief to the requestor is left on AI. This role would best serve the requestor if it would be done through intercession based on Christian fellowship. Increased reliance

44 Chatzinikolaou, "Artificial Intelligence," 1084-1095.

45 Ladas, "Safeguarding Privacy in Educational Data," 461–62.

46 Vasileios Fanaras, "Ethical Dilemmas of Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Machine or Ethical Use?," *Ecclesiastikos Kirykas* 26 (2020): 224.

47 Sterling Martin Allen and ChatGPT, "The Theological and Ethical Dangers Associated with Using Artificial Intelligence in Christian Religious Settings," *Firebrand Magazine*, May 23, 2023, https://firebrandmag.com/articles/the-theological-and-ethical-dangers-associated-with-using-artificial-intelligence-in-christian-religious-settings.

on AI in spiritual practices can distort perceptions of human dignity within the context of church life. Moreover, AI technology can easily contribute to devaluation of human life and the erosion of authentic human connection. For instance, if a church-endorsed online resources depend heavily on AI systems for interpersonal interactions, it undermines the essence of human relationships and lower the value of community and fellowship in religious contexts. From an Orthodox theological perspective, God's creative act in granting human beings freedom rather than treating them as remotely controlled instruments underlines the irreducibly personal character of revelation and spiritual communication. When AI is used to generate biblical exegesis, sermons, prayers, or other theological texts intended to address the depths of the human person, there is a real risk that such communication becomes impersonal and mechanised, lacking the ascetic struggle, discernment, and accountability that normally accompany pastoral speech. This is a strong ethical concern, especially in the Christian Orthodox tradition.[48] The challenge lies in the balance between technological convenience and the depth of personal engagement. Despite the potential benefits of AI, such as administrative efficiency, AI must never replace the dialogic, relational, and formative aspect of learning the faith.[49] This way, the use of AI-powered chatbots for religious counselling raises concerns about the meaningfulness and authenticity of the counselling experience. Human counsellors offer unique, empathetic, and spiritual guidance that AI algorithm cannot replicate.[50] These reservations do not attribute to AI any independent spiritual agency or quasi-divine status; rather, they highlight how an artefact that lacks personhood can nonetheless reshape patterns of interaction in ways that either support or undermine authentic Christian community. Therefore, over-reliance on AI for core tasks such as spiritual direction or sermon preparation risks reducing the humanistic character of pastoral ministry and instrumentalising the sacred, by replacing the living pastor–congregant relationship with a largely impersonal and deterministic process. Similarly, the integration of AI into daily life generates pressing ethical dilemmas, which demand the establishment of clear deontological norms and a human-centered approach to prevent violations of human freedom and dignity.[51]

A Christian ethical matrix has been proposed that centers on principles such as *agape* (unconditional love), stewardship, human dignity, justice, and the common good. These values offer evaluative criteria for AI applications that go beyond technological performance, emphasizing that AI must not dehumanize, discriminate, or undermine human relationships. Instead, it must promote human

48 Ibid.
49 Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education," 563.
50 Allen and ChatGPT, "Theological and Ethical Dangers," 2023.
51 Grekas, "Artificial Intelligence and the Human Being," 72–73.

flourishing, inclusivity, and social cohesion. Such values are in resonance with the Orthodox emphasis on relationality and personhood, further supporting the imperative of aligning AI development with the moral vision of the Church.[52]

4. Theological Principles for a Transfigured World

Although these challenges are significant to think through and ensure a responsible AI system, the Orthodox perspective does not reject technology. It calls for a theological framework for identifying and adopting the proper use of AI to serve the human person and God's creation.[53] Orthodox thinkers articulated it well that the Christian mission is to transfigure the world in the light of God's Kingdom, and not to escape it.[54] Orthodox Christian theology does not reject technology—indeed, it regards it as a gift of God to humanity—but emphasizes the necessity of integrating it within an ontological and spiritual framework that respects human dignity and freedom. In practice, this means that AI applications that, for example, improve medical diagnosis, facilitate access to education for marginalised communities, assist in environmental monitoring, or support administrative tasks in parishes and dioceses can be welcomed as genuine gifts, so long as they remain transparently governed and subordinated to a person-centred ethic. Recent theological discussions have in fact emphasised the possibility of a cautiously positive, though never uncritical, reception of AI within Christian thought.[55] As highlighted in the message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: "The Orthodox Church avoids encroaching upon scientific inquiry and does not take a position on every scientific question. It gives thanks to God, who bestows upon scientists the gift of unveiling unknown dimensions of divine creation."[56] This balanced approach recognizes that scientific advancement, including AI development, can serve divine purposes when properly oriented.

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[52] Saif Ahmed, Ayesha Akter Sumi, and Norzalita Abd Aziz, "Exploring Multi-Religious Perspective of Artificial Intelligence," *Theology and Science* 23, no. 1 (2024): 111–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2436783.

[53] Mikhail V. Vinichenko, Marina V. Rybakova, Galina Y. Nikiporets-Takigawa, Oxana L. Chulanova, and Natalia V. V. Ljapunova, "The Influence of Artificial Intelligence on the Human Potential Development: The Views of Orthodox Clergy and Parishioners," *Cuestiones Políticas* 37, no. 65 (2020): 410, https://produccioncientificaluz.org/index.php/cuestiones/article/view/33325.

[54] Psimopoulos, "Artificial Intelligence: Bioethical Considerations."

[55] Marius Dorobantu, "Artificial Intelligence as a testing ground for key theological questions," *Zygon - Journal of Religion and Science* 57 (2022): 984-999. https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12831.

[56] *Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church* (Crete, June 2016), https://www.holycouncil.org/message_el.

At the same time, however, the Orthodox Church clarifies that the revelation of the human person is primarily the work of divine grace and personal ascetic struggle. Consequently, AI may function in a supportive role but can never substitute for divine providence or the individual's spiritual journey. The danger of replacing the human person with so-called "intelligent" systems, which lack both consciousness and freedom, is consistently underscored in Orthodox theological discourse.[57] In an interview, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew highlighted that the absolute priority in AI development must always be to the person over systems. While not opposing technological advancement, Bartholomew emphasized the need for innovation to remain human-centered.[58] Additionally, he emphasized the need for education that cultivates and supports the spiritual nature of humanity. This is the central call for Orthodox theology: that AI and robotics must be employed through theological perspectives on human free will, uniqueness, and spiritual nature.[59]

A central axis of patristic anthropology is the *nous* (mind or intellect). AI, despite its functional resemblance to human reasoning, cannot be meaningfully related to the *nous* as it is understood within the Orthodox tradition. In patristic thought, the *nous* is not identified with logical processing, much less with "computational intelligence." Rather, it is associated with the human capacity to know and to commune with God.[60] To avoid possible confusion, it is clarified that no fundamental or essential affinity appears to exist between AI and the *nous*, as it has been understood consistently in the thought and theology of the Fathers.[61] Unlike human intelligence, which Orthodox theology understands as participatory in the divine *logos*, AI operates through purely mechanistic processes that cannot access the transcendent dimension essential to authentic theological understanding. This theological distinction is crucial for maintaining proper boundaries in AI applications within religious contexts.

Consequently, the Orthodox Church generally advocates the responsible use of AI in tandem with the cultivation of "spiritual intelligence".[62] As metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki has emphasized, "Spiritual

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57 Vinichenko et al., "The Influence of Artificial Intelligence," 410.

58 Derek Gatopoulos and Petros Giannakouris, "Orthodox Church Leader Says Faith Is Humanity's Safeguard Against the 'Impending Robotocracy,'" *AP News*, June 2, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/greece-automation-religion-robots-orthodoxy-2d5765621d591fa4e58ac8f60df1a3d4.

59 Ibid.

60 *Proceedings of the 2nd Bioethics Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate*, §4 (Rethymno, November 29–December 1, 2024).

61 Ibid.

62 "Opening Address of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the International Conference 'Artificial Intelligence, Technoethics and Youth' (Marasleios School, Friday, December 20, 2024)," *Orthodoxia* 8 (October–December 2024): 110–15.

Intelligence Is the Only One That Can Control Artificial Intelligence".[63] This perspective underscores that the proper governance of AI requires spiritual wisdom and discernment that transcends mere technological capabilities. The concern is not merely about technical optimization, but about ensuring that AI serves the deeper purposes of human spiritual development and communion with God.

A key distinction factor is the difference between the person and the machine. The development of AI models must be committed to justice, human dignity, and the ultimate purpose for life, which is to have communion with God. This requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders to develop ethical guidelines that move beyond a secular human-centered approach toward a theological person-centered perspective. In the same spirit, theological reflection emphasizes that scientific and technological endeavors must be judged in light of the "will of God" and their soteriological orientation. Applications that serve human health—prevention, diagnosis, and therapy—or that are clearly defensive in character and proportionately ordered to the protection of human lives can, under strict ethical and legal constraints, be regarded as morally valuable and compatible with Christian ethics. By contrast, uses of AI that are directed primarily to aggressive military action, indiscriminate destruction, or terrorist purposes remain, from an Orthodox theological standpoint, gravely problematic and often theologically unacceptable, insofar as they contradict the ultimate goal of human salvation and peace. This soteriological criterion provides a clear framework for evaluating AI applications, ensuring that technology serves the ultimate goal of human salvation and spiritual development.

Despite the generally accepted considerations outlined above, the Orthodox Church is composed of fifteen local autocephalous Churches and has not adopted an official and unified position regarding the applications of AI.[64] Nevertheless, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has issued the document *"For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church,"* which contains the first official reference to new algorithms and AI. In paragraph seventy of this text, the following statement appears: "At present, it is impossible to predict the extent—whether of benefits or of harms—that the new era of rapid global interconnectivity may bring. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the damage will likely be no less than the magnitude of the benefits, and indeed may increase in many unforeseen ways. In this regard, the Church must remain vigilant, anticipating the consequences of new technologies and acting with wisdom to counter their most detrimental effects. The Church must also remain continually

63 Chatzinikolaou, "Spiritual Intelligence is the only one," 18–23.

64 *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos (last accessed June 20, 2025).

informed about major developments in other or related fields of research, such as new algorithms for AI or new techniques of genetic engineering. How well the Church succeeds in mobilizing her pastoral resources in the face of accelerating scientific progress will undoubtedly determine how effectively she can provide a meaningful spiritual refuge for all who seek God and His love in the modern world."[65]

This pastoral approach calls for continuous theological reflection and dialogue between the Church and the scientific community. The development and deployment of AI must therefore be guided by theological wisdom, pastoral sensitivity, and prophetic courage. The Church's mission in the age of AI remains fundamentally unchanged: to proclaim the Gospel, to nurture spiritual growth, and to advocate for human dignity and divine truth. However, the context in which this mission is carried out requires new forms of theological reflection, pastoral care, and prophetic witness. As the Orthodox Church continues to engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by AI, it must maintain its commitment to the theological principles that have guided Christian thought for two millennia while remaining open to the ways in which technology can serve the divine purpose of human salvation and cosmic transfiguration. Only through such an approach can technology truly serve the vision of a transfigured world where divine grace and human creativity work together for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.

5. Conclusion

In an era increasingly shaped by AI, Orthodox theology offers a critical and constructive lens through which to discern the ethical and spiritual implications of emerging technologies. Rather than dismissing AI outright, the Orthodox tradition calls for a nuanced engagement—one that safeguards the uniqueness of the human person, rooted in the image of God, and preserves the sacredness of embodied, relational, and sacramental life. AI, though powerful in its computational capacities, remains limited in its inability to love, commune, or discern spiritually. It cannot replace the liturgical, pastoral, or theological experience of the Church.

This exploration has illuminated a fundamental truth: technology, however sophisticated, cannot replicate the essence of what it means to be human. The image of God remains inviolable, not as a abstract concept but as the living reality of personhood expressed through embodiment, relationality, and the

[65] Ibid, §70.

capacity for theosis. AI may process information with unprecedented speed and analyze patterns beyond human capability, but it cannot participate in the divine life that transforms the human person into the likeness of God. The Orthodox response to AI is neither rejection nor naive enthusiasm, but rather a mature theological engagement rooted in patristic wisdom. Just as the Church Fathers evaluated the technologies of their time through the lens of salvation and human flourishing, contemporary Orthodox theology must bring this same discernment to AI.

The ultimate question is not whether AI will transform our world—it already has—but whether this transformation will serve the purposes of God's Kingdom or become another form of technological idolatry. The Orthodox vision of transfiguration offers a compelling alternative to both uncritical techno-optimism and fearful rejection. Technology, like all of creation, can be sanctified when oriented toward love, justice, and the flourishing of human persons in communion with God and neighbor. This requires not merely ethical guidelines but a fundamental reorientation of how we conceive AI's role in human life. Instead of viewing AI as a replacement for human capabilities, Orthodox theology suggests approaching it as a tool that, when properly ordered, can free human persons for deeper engagement with their essential calling: the journey toward theosis through prayer, sacramental life, and loving service. AI is therefore neither a quasi-divine rival nor a trivial gadget: its spiritual significance lies precisely in the disproportion between its modest ontological status as a human artefact and the profound ways in which it can reshape human self-understanding, social relationships, and practices of worship.

Perhaps most significantly, the dialogue of the Orthodox Church—and of world religions more broadly—reveals a prophetic responsibility in an AI-dominated future. The intersection between AI and religion has increasingly emerged as a pressing topic across multiple traditions. The Orthodox tradition must stand at the forefront, proposing a responsible integration of AI grounded in its core ethical and theological principles. At the same time, major world religions also articulate distinct ethical and theological perspectives on AI. An interreligious examination reveals significant points of convergence, suggesting that—amid the apparent diversity of views—it would be possible to establish an interfaith ethics committee on AI.[66] Such an initiative could provide the foundation for the development of a shared interfaith ethic of AI (*Interfaith AI Ethics*).

[66] Ioannis Ladas, "Interreligious Bioethics: Challenges and Perspectives," *Arhe* 21, no. 42 (2024): 203–20, https://doi.org/10.19090/arhe.2024.42.203-220.

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