

Ethical Implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Religion

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ABSTRACT : The research looks at the profound impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on contemporary society. AI is conceptualized and defined as the creation of computer-generated systems that are capable of performing activities and normally require cognitive abilities in humans. These functions include the human activities of reasoning, perception, understanding, learning, and problem-solving. AI is an 'artificial,' as opposed to the human cognitive natural way, of using machines and technology to imitate human intellectual abilities. Today, AI is used to handle complicated issues that would take human intellect a long time to handle. It is highly characterized by the ability to understand and interpret visual information as pictures and videos. Special attention will be particularly focused on its influence on religion in contemporary Africa. In our connected global world, the effects of AI are global and universal. Just like any other study, the area of technology and in particular AI carries with it some ethical implications. One of the areas which has been largely affected is the ethical implication of AI in religion. This study demonstrates the ethical implications of AI, with a specific focus on ethical reflections rooted in contemporary religious and African contexts. The work proposes methods to uphold and promote religious values through AI while also seeking to expand the role of religion within this technological landscape. The study examines the relationship between humanity as ethical beings and AI, discussing the factors that influence religion, the essence of AI, and its key characteristics. It explores how AI can address religious challenges and contribute to human development.

KEYWORDS : *Ethical, Artificial Intelligence, Religion, Technology, Freedom, Responsibility*

I. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has influenced contemporary society in several ways. One area which has been influenced greatly by this culture is religion. At present with the world becoming a global village, no one is an exception to the effects of AI. We seek to demonstrate the ethical implications of AI. We will highlight the ethical reflection founded on religion in the modern world. It shall also propose ways to promote religion's values through AI. We intend also to seek many ways of widening the horizons of religion through AI. To achieve the goal of this paper, we shall explore the paper from a philosophical and theological approach. This work examines the reality of humanity in relationship with AI. It discusses the factors that affect religion. It also discusses the meaning of AI and its main characteristics. Further, it demonstrates how the challenges of religion can be approached using AI. This gives ways and means to promote human development. A culmination of this work will offer practical prospects and propositions for achieving an ethical dimension in promoting the use of AI in the contemporary world.

1.1. Conceptual Analysis of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The term conceptualization refers to a process of forming ideas while paying attention to their meaning marching with reality as accurately as possible. For Aloysious Sequeira, conceptualization is to specify exactly what we mean and don't mean by the terms we use in our research."¹ It is a process that leads to forming a concept. The term 'concept' also referred to as 'construct' refers to the end product of 'conceptualization'² which will lead us to analyses.³ Conceptual analysis of AI, therefore, refers to the process

¹ Aloysious. H. Sequeira, "Conceptualization in research," Conceptualization in Research Article in SSRN Electronic Journal January 2014 DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.2489284 retrieved from <https://sta.uwi.edu/igds/sites/default/files/igds/documents/Conceptualizing%20in%20Research-1.pdf> (accessed 5.4.2025).

² Aloysious. H. Sequeira, "Conceptualization in research," Conceptualization in Research Article in SSRN Electronic Journal · January 2014 DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.2489284 retrieved from

of examining and understanding the fundamental concepts, principles, and theoretical frameworks that underpin AI. This analysis involves dissecting the various components and dimensions of AI, and information communication and Technology (ICT) and their relationship.

AI is defined as the creation of computer-generated systems that are capable of performing activities that normally require cognitive abilities in humans.⁴ These functions include the human activities of reasoning, perception, understanding, learning, as well as problem-solving. Essentially AI as the word indicates, is an 'artificial,' as opposed to the human cognitive natural way, of using machines and technology to imitate human intellectual abilities. Key characteristics of AI include intellectual assessment of information thus drawing conclusions and making decisions based on the available internet data. AI also can handle complicated issues that would take human intellect a long time to handle. It is highly characterized by the ability to understand and interpret visual information as pictures and videos.

Moreover, AI uses various applications, including fraud detection in financial transactions and medical diagnosis based on complex medical data. AI's predictive analysis, utilizing historical data, offers high accuracy in predicting future trends and outcomes, making it crucial in finance, weather forecasting, and supply chain management.⁵ Again AI systems keep on improving thus continuously improving their performance over time. Having defined the meaning of AI and its key characteristics, we cannot fail to discuss the historical connection and understanding of the development of technology.

1.1.2. Understanding Technology

The word Technology comes from the Greek word *tekhnologia*. It is compiled from the Greek root *tekhnē*, which means 'art or skill'⁶ and *logos*, which is commonly defined as "the study of." The Greek roots come together, then, to mean 'the study of an art or skill' or knowledge. Techno-logy is the study of *techne*. In the Classics, *techne* would have been understood as 'craft' or 'art' or 'skill', which is how *techne* was used by both Plato and Aristotle. As opposed to episteme (passive knowledge of the nature or being of things), *techne* is the knowledge of doing or making. *Techne* is always instrumental as it changes and creates.

In his book, *Ethics in the Age of Technology*, Ian Barbour, defines technology as "the application of organized knowledge to practical tasks by ordered systems of people and machines"⁷ This is in line with Frederick Ferré, who defined technology in *Philosophy of Technology*, as the practical implementation of intelligence which is both practical and theoretical forms.⁸ We can therefore say that technology is not only organized knowledge but also allows for practical experience and intervention.

In other words, technology is the branch of knowledge that deals with the creation and use of technical means and their interrelation with life, society, and the environment, drawing upon such subjects as industrial arts, engineering, applied science, and pure science.⁹ Concerning humanity, I agree with Stephen K. Spyker, who claims that technology is the study of human art and skill. Technology differentiates human beings from other animals. According to Stephen Spyker, anthropologists have pointed to our propensity to fashion and use tools. However, he clarifies that technology is not our tools but is part of what defines us; it is a part of what makes us human.¹⁰ It is the use of scientific knowledge, experience, and resources to create processes and products that fulfill humans. It is pertinent to note that technology is vital and mostly in

<https://sta.uwi.edu/igds/sites/default/files/igds/documents/Conceptualizing%20in%20Research-1.pdf>
(accessed on 5.4.2025).

³ Joachim Horvath "Conceptual Analysis," retrieved from <https://philpapers.org/browse/conceptual-analysis> (accessed on 4.4.2025).

⁴ Skyler White "Key Characteristics of Artificial Intelligence" Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@skylerwhite0108/key-characteristics-of-artificial-intelligence-eb2fbb4372ad> (accessed on 26.6.2025).

⁵ Skyler White "Key Characteristics of Artificial Intelligence" Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@skylerwhite0108/key-characteristics-of-artificial-intelligence-eb2fbb4372ad> (accessed on 26.6.2025).

⁶ Dictionary.com, "Technology," Retrieved from TECHNOLOGY, Definition & Meaning Dictionary.com (accessed on 22.4.2025).

⁷ Ian Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 3. This is close to the definition given by Arnold Pacey in *The Culture of Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 6.

⁸ Frederick Ferré, *Philosophy of Technology* (Prentice Hall: Eagle-wood Cliffs, NJ, 1988), 37.

⁹ Dictionary.com, "Technology," Retrieved from TECHNOLOGY Definition & Meaning | Dictionary.com (accessed on 22.4.2025).

¹⁰ Stephen K. Spyker, *Technology & Spirituality: How the Information Revolutions Affects our Spiritual Lives* (Sky Lights Paths: Woodstock, 2003), 37.

development in Africa in communication and therefore a way of using tools even in the realm of religion. Let us now look at the philosophical development of technology.

1.1.3 Philosophical Development of Technology

The philosophical development of technology can be traced back to the Greek myth of Prometheus. He was a Titan who defiled the gods by stealing fire from Mount Olympus and giving it to humanity. This act of disobedience symbolizes the acquisition of knowledge, particularly technological knowledge, by humanity. The Prometheus myth in its various versions, hinges on the tensions between the seeming limitlessness of human curiosity and capacity for technological advancement.¹¹ The myth is aimed at explaining the mental capacity of humanity to use their minds to transform themselves and the world technologically.

1.2. Creation Narrative and Relationship with Technology

According to Eugene H. Maly, the ontological foundations of human ingenuity are found in the two creation stories, namely the Priestly¹² and the Yahwistic.¹³ Humanity was not created a solitary being- “in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons and God. Man is, by nature, a social being; if he does not enter into relations with others, he can neither live nor develop his gifts.¹⁴

The creation biblical narrative shows us the story of a God who walks with Adam and Eve. The anthropomorphic description of God walking in the garden suggests the enjoyment of fellowship between Him and our first parents. God created human beings to have fellowship with him and that is why he was walking in the garden and wanted to meet with Adam and Eve and spend time with them. “The man and his wife heard the sound of God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”¹⁵ Personal fellowship with God cemented this solidarity. Through the creation narrative, we recognize our interconnectedness with the Creator in forming a community that promotes solidarity.

Recognizing our interconnectedness as human beings, we are created as individuals who form a community. Although they are individuals and free, they are part of the community of creation connected with the Creator. Slowly they separated themselves from God through sin, thus destroying the solidarity and communal relationship with God the Creator had intended. They hid themselves after realizing they had sinned. But God called out to the man, “Where are you?”¹⁶ God came looking for them as they were no longer a community in solidarity with one another.

Human relationship is destructive when it is founded on evil. A good example is what we see at the tower of Babel.¹⁷ Building a tower was a “misguided attempt, born of pride and ambition, to create a unity other than that willed by God in the providential plan for the nations.”¹⁸ This is the earliest human relationship with technology. With Spadaro, we agree that “The God of Exodus puts us on our guard against making images, from technology that substantially exposes idolatry and reduces the order to something amongst other things”¹⁹ The Bible addresses humanity’s relationship with technology and its potential consequences.

The Tower of Babel story highlights the dangers of human pride and ambition. It cautions against excessive technological aspirations that challenge our dependence on God. He destroyed humanity’s technological endeavors because they misused their purpose. Human beings were in solidarity with each other, but it became evil as they used it to disobey God and worship their achievements.

1.2.1 Human Beings in Participation as Co-Creators and AI

Co-creation entails being cooperative and therefore co-creator. This is well put by J. Scott, who alludes that in religion, “however, humanity’s dominion should be a co-operative dominion in which in exercising God-given dominion, they should not create the process of nature, but cooperate with them.”²⁰ Accordingly, it is clear from

¹¹ The Prometheus myth occurs in several versions, appearing in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, in an Aeschylean trilogy of plays beginning with *Prometheus Bound*, and in a discussion in the Platonic dialogue *Protagoras*.

¹² Gen. 1:1-2:4a

¹³ Gen 2:4b-2:25 Cf. Eugene H Maly Eds, Raymond E Brown, et.al., “Introduction to the Pentateuch”, Jerome Biblical Commentary (London: Double Day, 1970), 14-22.

¹⁴ Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitutions on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, (7 December 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58, nos. 12.

¹⁵ African Bible, Gen 3:8.

¹⁶ Genesis 3:9.

¹⁷ Genesis 11:1-9.

¹⁸ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, On Fraternity and Social Friendship (3 October 2020): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 112 (2020), no. 43.

¹⁹ Antonio, Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 7.

²⁰ Scott, John., *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1994), 112.

the book of Genesis chapter one, that the earth was made fruitful before humankind, and then mankind was told to subdue it (Gen 1:28). Therefore, one can conclude that in all their activities, humans are merely co-opting in development and with the cooperative responsibility guided by the laws of faithfulness, which God has already established. Besides, people ought to humble themselves and acknowledge that their dominion over nature would be entirely fruitless if God had not made the earth beautiful and continuously increased it.²¹ What does this then imply? It means that, however much we think that we are custodians, and have developed an extraordinary expertise in taming, controlling, and using nature, as well as human knowledge through technology, we are still children in our ultimate dependence on the fatherly providence of God who gives sunshine, rainfall and fruitful seasons.²² Scott continues to put this idea in a very explicit way when he argues that;

The earth 'belongs' to us not because we made it or own it but because the maker has entrusted it to us. This has significant implications. Firstly, if we think of Earth as a kingdom, then we are not Kings ruling our territory, but viceroys ruling it on the King's behalf, since the King has not abdicated his throne. Secondly, and more importantly, if we think of the earth as a country estate, then we are not the landowners, but only bailiffs who manage and farm it on the owner's behalf. God made us, in the most literal sense, 'caretakers' of his property.²³

Hence, human beings as co-creators in development have no freedom to do what they want regarding technology. Humanity therefore cannot deem to treat as they are pleased. For Samson Gitau, this 'dominion' is not a synonym for 'destruction'. This is precisely because humankind holds it in trust, they have to manage it responsibly and productively not only for their own sake but also for subsequent generations hence calling for greater responsibility.²⁴ We can therefore conclusively say that human beings occupy a very useful place in being responsible co-creators with God.

Human beings practice freedom which indicates the power of creativity in development. God has given humanity freedom so that man in his vocation can continue to co-create and develop. In the second creation story (Gen 2:4b-23), God empowered man to continue to co-create and develop knowledge. The man was placed in the garden to 'till and keep it'.²⁵ After animals and birds were created, the man was given the mandate by God to name them, "and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name."²⁶ God entrusted his creation to the man with the responsibility of continuing to co-create and develop himself.

Scientific discoveries have brought undeniable benefits. These discoveries show that humanity is still involved in the co-creation development mission. Man has continued to co-create with knowledge of science and technology, medicine, and agriculture. Man's vocation in co-creation must be accompanied by reorientation of values and ethics. Therefore, with AI humanity is using creativity as well as the gifts bestowed by God.

1.2.2 Stewardship and Development in Creation and AI

Humanity has the responsibility and development to care for the earth as stewards and trustees. Stewardship implies that people must protect and be responsible when dealing with AI. Stewardship reminds us that, all human possessions are not our own; rather we hold them in trust for others. All created reality hangs at every moment over the charism of nothingness; we and our world are created and sustained in being *ex nihilo* and thus we never have fully autonomous possession of either ourselves or our world. Stewardship requires responsibility and accountability for the way we use our technological knowledge before God. Stewardship responds to the increasing human knowledge concerning the way we are exploiting the world and using technology. Thus our notion of stewardship embraces and responds with the religious mission to two of the most profound and pressing problems of our age; namely how we deal with and manage AI.

Stewardship is a key test for a person's position before God. Human beings are not 'conquerors' of the earth but responsible and respectful stewards. The concept of stewardship is well articulated by St. Francis of Assisi who called the birds as brothers, indicating that he saw himself as a steward as a man and not as a conqueror of the earth. Responsible stewardship brings harmony and mutuality to the use of technology. Responsibility and stewardship are inseparable concepts when we talk of AI. The parable of the wicked tenants (Mt. 21:33-41), and the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30) are wonderful biblical resources to grasp the role of responsible stewardship and custodians in human development and growth.

²¹ Scott, John., *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 112.

²² Scott, J., *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1994), 112.

²³ Scott, J., *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1994), 112., Cf. Scott, J. *Issues Facing Christian Today*, AFER 320-321.

²⁴ Samson Gitau, *The Environmental Crisis: A Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000), 147., Cf. AFER 321.

²⁵ Gen 2:15

²⁶ Gen 2:19

According to Richard Rwiza, “the notion that human beings have been created in the image of God and given dominion over the earth does not justify absolute dominion over other creatures.”²⁷ The same ideas were echoed by Pope Francis who in *Laudato Si* says that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is a sin.²⁸ In recent years a growing number of critiques have pointed out limitations and shortcomings in stewardship-based eco-theologies hence the critique.²⁹ First according to theological-philosophical critique this approach. The concept of stewardship seems to imply a distant, absentee God. The landlord (God) has entrusted his property, including technological knowledge to his stewards and has vacated the premises. Such a model cannot incorporate the theological affirmation of God’s creative immanence, which upholds the notion that every moment of existence is a gift from and dependent on God.³⁰ Secondly, the methodological critique focuses on the way that the Scriptures are used to develop the metaphor of Stewardship. While the biblical narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 contain basic commands as to how the first humans ought to relate to creation and use of technology, this critique insists that those commands need to be understood in context.

It is important to note here also that the terms Steward” (*oikonomos*) and “Stewardship” (*oikonomia*) do not appear in the creation narratives themselves. The first humans are told to fill and subdue and rule the earth and its inhabitants. The idea of humans as Stewards is an external characterization of those commands, a clarification or qualification of what it means to have dominion in this arena.³¹

Here, I would suggest another way of looking at AI stewardship. This developing idea calls for a paradigm shift that moves beyond stewardship towards ‘Agapeic ethics geared towards the common good in religion, philosophy, and human development. I would think this agapeic concept can be a womb of novelty in understanding philosophical-theological ethical stewardship in dealing with AI. Echoing these sentiments, Christopher Vena develops the idea that what Christians need is a new model of human agency. This amounts to an approach to modeling rather than a singular model or ethic itself³² guided by love and the common good.

1.3. AI Culture Versus Religious Culture

Culture is a particular way in which persons and peoples cultivate their relationship with nature and their brothers and sisters, with themselves and with God, to attain a fully human existence.³³ Culture only exists through humanity, by humanity, and for humanity. It is the whole of human activity, human intelligence, knowledge and emotions, the human quest for meaning, human customs, and ethics. AI culture also known as cyber culture, internet culture or e-culture is a concept that describes how information technology and the internet are shaping the way that we interact as human beings.

AI culture is the product of the endless influential technology around us and the result of technological invention. The main emphasis is the communication relationship between humans and technology.³⁴ According

²⁷ Richard Rwiza, *Environmental Ethics in the African Context* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2021), 175.

²⁸ Pope Francis retrieved from, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf (Accessed on 11.5.2025). Cf. Richard N Rwiza, *Environmental Ethics in the African Context*, (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2021)175-176.

²⁹ Cf. Ernst Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 67-87; Anna Lisa Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁰ Cf. Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, (Cape Town: Sun Press, 2006), 214.

³¹ Christopher J. Vena, "Beyond Stewardship: Toward an Environmental Ethic," 114.

³² Christopher J. Vena, "Beyond Stewardship: Toward an Environmental Ethic," 242-243.

³³ Cf. Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999. 7-8. Cf. Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitutions on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, (7 December 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58, nos. 53.

³⁴ GDS Insights Industry outlooks, "What is Digital Culture? – Everything You Need to Know" trends25 March 2020. Retrieved, <https://gdsgroup.com/insights/technology/what-is-digital-culture/> (accessed on 11.5. 2025).

to Antonio Spadaro technological culture claims to connect people, opening up new relationships.³⁵ AI culture is highly interactive and active, therefore changing the ways humans communicate, develop, and interact today by sharing and accessing information even in religious aspects.

1.3.1 Effects of AI on Religion and Development

For some people and under some conditions, certain forms of digital communication can be harmful. For others, under the same conditions, may be beneficial. Herbert Marshall McLuhan,³⁶ who is often called the media prophet of the 1960s already had predicted how technology would actually influence or even change culture and religion. He is well known for his studies of the effects of digital culture on thought and behavior. For most people, under most conditions, communication is probably neither harmful nor particularly beneficial.³⁷

In analyzing the effects of technology, Bernard Berelson points out that “some kinds of communication of some kind of issue, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects.”³⁸ These effects depend on the philosophical wonders of those ‘who’ receive the message, ‘what’ kind of message is received, ‘when’ the message is received, ‘where’ the message is received from, and, ‘why’ the message is received. No doubt that “(t)he evolution of the social web and its compelling mobility and visual engagement have unprecedented social impact and sometimes powerful disruptive influence on what hitherto been held as sacred facts, truths and even faith.”³⁹ Technology affects the values of society and individuals. It determines what we think about and what actions we may take.⁴⁰ Technology, is one of the most powerful tools:

challenging established societal hierarchies, including religion and morality, forging new links between democracy, human rights, and international security, and; influencing people, often in subtle ways, to rethink their ideas about family and family life, especially marriage, gender, sex and intimacy and the meaning of life and existence.⁴¹

Moreover, depending on the people’s existing experiences, moral and religious values and cultural-ethical values technology content offers an orientation, a moral formation and a frame reference that determines the direction of their behavior.⁴² Technology and recent developments in AI can create or ‘paint’ a portrait the way it is designed. There is much wisdom in the words of Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as he rightly claims that “at its best, the digital revolution will empower, connect, inform and save lives. At its worst, it will disempower, disconnect, misinform, and cost lives.”⁴³ Technology and AI on one hand, digital technologies such as social media, have allowed human beings to communicate, relate, and develop, and develop in real time around the globe and across traditional cultural boundaries. On the other hand, the digital divide may create an even greater separation between people and between cultures including religion.

1.4. Community Versus Individual and AI

The digital world of AI has a connection of networks and interactions. However, sometimes the individual is divided. This causes some weak and personal relationships. This means that we could be

³⁵ Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 23.

³⁶ Herbert Marshall McLuhan (July 21, 1911 – December 31, 1980) was a Canadian philosopher whose work is among the cornerstones of the study of media theory. He is well known for his famous saying “The Medium is the message,” Meaning that the form of a medium attaches itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium and influences how the message is perceived.

³⁷ Herbert, Ray E. et.al. (eds), *Mass Media VI: An Introduction to Modern Communication* (New York: Longman, 1991), 544.

³⁸ Herbert, Ray E., *Mass Media VI*: 546.

³⁹ Emmanuel Adetoyese Badejo, “The Influence of Modern Media and New Ideologies on the Family in Africa Today”, in *The Echo of Amoris Laetitia in Africa: Towards Living the “Joy of Love Experienced by Families” in the Church*, eds. Nicholas Segeja & Emmanuel Wabanhu (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2017), 6.

⁴⁰ Herbert, Ray E. et.al. (eds) *Mass Media VI: An Introduction to Modern Communication* (New York: Longman, 1991), 548-549.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Adetoyee Badejo, “The Influence of Modern Media and New Ideologies on the Family in Africa Today,” 6-7.

⁴² Contance Bansikiza, “*Restoring Moral Formation in Africa*,” *Spearhead* Number 155 (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 2001), 61.

⁴³ Michelle Bachelet, “UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the digital age - Can they make a difference?” Japan Society, New York, 17 October 2019 retrieved, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/digitalage/pages/digitalageindex.aspx> (accessed on 10.6.2025).

connected digitally or virtually, but strangers with limited or real interaction hence affecting our communal relationships or religious. Felix Stalder argues that due to their immense popularity, weak networks are setting a new baseline of what (inter)personal communication means today and they shape the new ‘common sense’ about social interaction.⁴⁴

How is our inter-relationship affected by the AI? It could be something, which brings humanity together or that which divides the individual. Probably we could ask a fundamental question: Is it “I am connected therefore I am”?⁴⁵ or “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am”?⁴⁶ Our friendship, human relationship, and connectedness have been affected as we are disconnected in real-life conversations. Is it possible to have an AI church service or mass? This would bring more gaps because;

“Communion” — fellowship, *koinonia*— acquires its meaning in the language of relationship, with God and with one another. That communion is maintained by the active relationship of the congregation (members of the Church) and the priest who has been ordered to preside in “community”. When we speak of the “gathering” (the synagogue-ing) of the people at the beginning of the eucharist, we refer to the coming together of the *community* into *communion*; the bringing *into unity* what the people haven *common*.⁴⁷

This has affected even the religious interaction of communal prayer life. However, we cannot deny the fact that AI helps us to make our lives easier. We have real one-on-one companions in the real world who understand our feelings and we have religious connections with them. These are people who can give us direct advice, and offer religious experiences all of us have feelings and experiences that AI robots and technology do not have. We therefore need a community of persons as much as we connect with machines and technology. As Marius Dorobantu, in his article “Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans” rightly argues;

At the most foundational level, humanity’s very existence is ontologically rooted in its continual relationship with God. At a more pragmatic level, each of us can survive and flourish only in a community of loving relationships. An honest look at current AI and our psychology reveals that our unique way of being in the world as *persons*, in which relationality plays a critical part, is not due to our rationality, but quite the contrary.⁴⁸

We should therefore put our gadgets aside for us to have real conversations with the real people around us. This brings us more happiness when we live in a lively world as this promotes unity and development. This argument is exemplified by Stalder. This is because in social experience, however, a friend of a friend of a friend (two degrees of separation) is already a perfect stranger.⁴⁹ The price it carries, of course, is that the social meaning of what counts as a ‘friend’ has decreased so that by now, a Facebook friend of a Facebook friend, is a stranger. Yet it is precisely a sense of connectedness.⁵⁰ Technology through AI is meant ethically to unify the world and should not divide persons and nations as we become globalized, it makes us neighbors.

AI can isolate the individual from the community. In a 2003 article, computer scientist William Clocksin makes a good case that a general intelligence comparable to a human is not even possible without the kind of personal relationships humans have with each other.⁵¹ That is why it is very important to promote our religious cultural values which entails cooperation and participation in the use of technology. One of the core beliefs of AI culture is that digital networks encourage greater connectivity, collaboration, communication, community, participation, and development. As Charlie Gere asserts in his book, *Community Without*

⁴⁴ Felix Stalder, *Digital Solidarity* (Leuphana: Mute Books, 2013), 43-44.

⁴⁵ Cf. Sherry Turkle on her TED Talk, “Connected, but alone” retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_connected_but_alone, <https://singjupost.com/connected-alone-sherry-turkle-ted-transcript/> (accessed 31.6.2025). According to the article, “I share therefore I am” means that you are inventing yourself to make you that person when in fact it is not your true self. This is a kind of a mask you feel you are connected to the world and you have a lot of “friends” but in real life you are lonely.

⁴⁶ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (London: Heinemann, 1988), 30.

⁴⁷ Church Times “Consecrated bread should not be posted to communicants,” retrieved from <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/18-december/comment/opinion/consecrated-bread-should-not-be-posted-to-communicants>, (accessed 31.6.2025).

⁴⁸ Marius Dorobantu, “Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans,” online Journal of Disability and Religion, Full article: Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans (tandfonline.com) (accessed on 24.6.2025).

⁴⁹ Felix Stalder, *Digital Solidarity*, 45.

⁵⁰ Felix Stalder, *Digital Solidarity*, 45-46.

⁵¹ Marius Dorobantu, “Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans” online journal Journal of Disability and Religion, Full article: Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans (tandfonline.com) (accessed on 24.6.2025).

Community in Digital Culture, “Far from producing new kinds of community and relationality, these technologies affect non-relations, and non-communities, community without community.”⁵² Such phenomena suggest securing the sense of community that we believe we have lost mostly in the African context. Against the prevailing presumptions that new technologies involve greater contact, rationality, and community, a community without community in technology proposes that they exemplify the gap inherent in touch,⁵³ that separates us from each other in time and space.

In promoting our traditional human culture in Africa, the ‘I’ is not lost in the ‘We’ and neither the ‘We’ should not be lost in the ‘I’. We cannot therefore discredit the claim that “I share therefore I am” because our humanity remains with us as it was in the past and the future. This idea is what Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* notes “working to overcome our divisions without losing our identity as individuals presumes that a basic sense of belonging is present in everyone.”⁵⁴ According to Charlie Gere, even if participation and cooperation are central to our cultures, equally central is a strong sense of individuality or singularity of each of the participants.⁵⁵ In other words, there is the interconnection between the individual who is a religious ethical entity, and the community and not just mere interactions with machines and robots. Human culture and religion therefore have an ethical and communal dimension. The desire for personal relationships in technology and AI should not encourage practices of social exclusion, expression, and exploitation. We can see elements of this in the forms of participatory surveillance systems, greed, exploitation, and individualism.

1.5. AI, Human Beings as A Search Engine for God?

Today AI would, by definition, be capable of doing anything that human beings can do at a similar or even superior level. Fears that it would radically impact the global economy, and development by taking over human jobs, or that it might even wipe humans out, accidentally or intentionally, are not unfounded ethically and deserve to be treated with as much attention as possible. However, beyond all these, there arguably looms a potential identity crisis over humanity's moral life as a whole, triggered by the emergence of an entity that could fully replicate human behavior and perhaps even be more intelligent than us. At the root of this crisis lies the age-old question of what, if anything, makes humans unique and distinctive.⁵⁶ The question is can humanity created in the image and likeness of God be replaced by machines? How ethically can machines replace *imago Dei*?

If intelligent machines can have all the intellectual capacities that humans have, and if they can do everything that we can do, then humanity ceases to relate with others and God. It is true as Marius Dorobantu argues, that Robots may outsmart us, but as long as they do not share our vulnerability and capacity for personal relationships, they cannot partake in the image of God. If this is the opposite then, it is perhaps for such reasons that the idea of a robot Christ, God incarnated as AI, sounds like pure absurdity.⁵⁷ In other words machines and robots however much they help human beings, in religion, they cannot replace God. He is the crater of humanity, whereas humanity ‘creates’ not in a theological way and not out of nothing *ex nihilo* but out of the creative nature of God (the technical nature) has bestowed on humanity.

From another point of view, we can argue God is the ‘Maker’ while the human person is the ‘Citizen’ who is the ‘responder’ and can ‘respond’ to the needs of society by use of his technological knowledge. The Maker asks the question, “What is the good thing to do?” even technically, and the ‘Citizen’ asks the question, “What is the right thing to do?” The Responder reminds us that ultimately humanity has to be responsible. This means as Marius Dorobantu writes “The responsible man is not merely one who can perform good actions; he is, in fact, the good man. His goodness consists precisely in his responsibility. This is responsibility in lived life.”⁵⁸ He seeks the appropriate responses which join the demands of value. He asks first of all, what is going

⁵²Charlie Gere, *Community Without Community in Digital Culture*, (Macmillan: Lancaster University, Palgrave: Hampshire, 2012),1.

⁵³ Charlie Gere, *Community Without Community in Digital Culture*,12. Cf., Leonard Lawlor, *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 22–23.

⁵⁴ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, On Fraternity and Social Friendship (3 October 2020): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 112 (2020), no. 230.

⁵⁵ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*,55.

⁵⁶Marius Dorobantu, “Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans” online journal, *Journal of Disability & Religion*. Full article, *Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans* (tandfonline.com) (accessed on 24.6.2025).

⁵⁷ Marius Donabantu, “Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans” online journal, *Journal of Disability & Religion*., Full article. *Cognitive Vulnerability, Artificial Intelligence, and the Image of God in Humans* (tandfonline.com) (accessed on 24.6.2025).

⁵⁸ Albert R. Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics* (Washington: Corpus, 1968), p. 5.)

on? and secondly, how must I respond to what is going on? These questions cannot be ignored when dealing with the ethics of AI about religion.

Conclusion

Coming to a lengthy exposition, this paper aims to reflect on the ethical implications of AI in religion. The paper took the hybrid approach which is both philosophical and theological. The discussion started by offering a roadmap of the understanding of technology, and the conceptual analysis of AI. In this comprehensive exploration of the ethical implications of AI, we have traversed through various dimensions of its impact and implications. We have focused on the intersection of technology, religion, and ethics with a philosophical-religious underpinning. This set the stage for a deeper examination of how AI is intertwined into the fabric of our existence and its potential to transform various aspects of human life, religion and development in an African context.

From the theological perspective, we discussed the creation narrative and its relationship with theological perspectives that view humans as having dominion over creation in development. This dominion extends to the technological innovation of AI, recognizing humans as natural co-creators with a responsibility to use technological and artificial advancements with ethical and religious values. In exploring the role of humans as co-creators, we then discussed the natural ethical stewardship required in the use of AI. This involves ensuring that AI is used sustainably and ethically, preserving the integrity of creation while enhancing human and religious development. We later discussed the connection between AI and religion revealing fundamental insights into how AI influences religious practices, beliefs, and humanity. We examined the effects of AI on religion, noting both the potential developments for enhanced communal experiences and the risk of individualism and passivity in religious engagement. Ethical considerations were central to our analysis in this study particularly concerning human freedom, responsibility, and accountability in the use of AI.

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