

May 25, 2023

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: ALL SMARTS, NO SOUL

At my ordination in 2007, I received several symbols of my vocation, including a newspaper. It was meant to remind me that since I am to be a bridge between the church and the world, it is important to keep up with the news. I've always loved newspapers; but absorbing the news is often a dreadful duty, awash with tragedy, mayhem, and disturbing trends. Once such trend is the growing influence of Artificial Intelligence, or AI.

In its simple forms, like the autocorrect spelling feature, AI can be either helpful or annoying. Recently, when I mistyped the word "courtesy" my device substituted "heresy" -- distinctly unhelpful. But AI has taken flight since autocorrect was invented.

Students can now use it to generate their papers, likewise speakers their speeches. Chatbots can execute household commands, impersonate familiar voices, engage in ersatz conversation, and more. Where might the rapid and unrestrained deployment of AI lead? It is not a far leap from fooling a teacher to deceiving citizens; deceptions all along that spectrum are spiritually and culturally devastating.

Even AI developers have expressed fears about its potential use in cyberattacks, scams, disinformation, surveillance, and autocratic malevolence. "AI can be very harmful if deployed wrongly, and we don't have all the answers yet," said Sundar Pichai, Google Chief Executive Officer. In other words, this unpredictable genie is already out of the bottle.

Thus, counterfeit human intelligence can be used to serve the dark trend of devaluing human beings -- the crown of God's creation, made in his image and endowed by Him with life and soul (Genesis 1).

Today, people are increasingly seen as commodities, disposable through abortion and replaceable through AI, both of which demonstrate a desire to circumvent God's created order and put ourselves in charge.

This is not a modern phenomenon. We have evidence of it in the Bible from time immemorial, when "the whole world had one language and a common speech" (Genesis 11:1). Then, tellingly using a man-made product instead of natural material, the people began to build a city "with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

This Tower of Babel, a monument to their perceived greatness, was just one of many human attempts to make our own way to heaven, using our God-given ingenuity to work around the salvation only available through divine mercy, Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, and belief in Him (John 14:6).

God saw where this idolatry could lead: "'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.' So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city" (Genesis 11:6-8).

Whether taken literally or metaphorically, the story's message still pertains today: human ingenuity unsubmitted to divine restraint is disordered, degrading, and disastrous.

Millenia later, the temptation persists. Even I, living outside a mountain village and functioning at the fringe of technology, have been offered the services of AI to generate material for my readers. Yes, the prose

might be more structurally sound, grammatically pure, or typo-free. Perhaps it would access more sources or draw more sophisticated conclusions. It would surely save me a lot of time and effort, which sounds tempting as I struggle to drag a decent draft out of my unruly thoughts. But I say, "Literally in heaven's Name, no thanks!"

God has created me for this work, giving me sufficient talent and abundant inspiration to do it, in order to share his truth and hope with you, his beloved reader. It would be an unconscionable violation of his trust to serve you an AI-produced imitation, generated without his love or Holy Spirit.

Each of us honors God only when we give and receive God-guided and properly humble human effort, with gratitude for the genuine, wondrous, soul-endowed people only He can create.

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux