

TRANSCRIPT: Ethical AI in Catholic Higher Education - A Thoughtful Discussion

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NOTE: This discussion references the Vatican's [ANTIQUA ET NOVA: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence](#) issued in January 2025

Donna Carroll: Good afternoon, everyone. This is Donna Carroll here, and I'm delighted on behalf of ACCU to welcome you to this very important afternoon program on an important and timely topic. I think we would all agree that artificial intelligence is here to stay, and our challenge is to understand how to integrate it into our lives and our faith so that it has a responsible impact on who we are and what we'll do.

So today, we have this opportunity to have a conversation with two colleagues. Let me thank Monsignor Shea and President Kilpatrick for being willing to lead this discussion, and I encourage all to be engaged and thoughtful in our response. And I'm going to turn this over to Patrick McAvoy, who is the Chief Marketing Officer at Dynamic Campus to take it from here.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Thank you, Donna, really appreciate it. And thanks to ACCU for hosting this important conversation. Dynamic Campus has been serving as a trusted IT outsourcing provider for higher education for more than 23 years. In that time we've seen the Internet and mobile revolutions that have transformed higher education. And certainly there's every indication that AI is poised to do the same.

We help institutions just like the ones on this call apply technology to cut unnecessary costs, increase enrollment, boost retention and maximize your institutional efficiencies. AI certainly offers the promise of assisting on all those fronts, but the risks and considerations do abound. As the trusted IT outsourcing partner for nine ACCU institutions, we know there's another layer of discernment that's required to determine how AI fits into the Catholic higher education tradition. We've been having those discussions already with many of the institutions shown here.

And so we're blessed to have two outstanding thought leaders join us for this important conversation: Monsignor James Shea, President of the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, and Dr. Peter Kilpatrick, President of the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

As we say at the outset, this hour is intended to be a discussion, and so we invite all of you to be part of it. We already have received several questions from you, which we will be inserting in the conversation as we carry on throughout the hour.

But at any other point, if you have any questions you'd like to ask of the panelists, please feel free to type into the chat window, and I will do my best to raise the questions throughout the discussion as time allows. So, without further ado, let's go ahead and turn it over to Monsignor Shea and Dr. Kilpatrick. Monsignor, would you care to start us off on this topic?

Monsignor James Shea: Sure, Patrick. First of all, I just want to note how grateful I am to be here with all of you today, and what an honor for me to share the platform with Peter Kilpatrick, the president of my alma mater, the Catholic University of America. I think often of what a young man I was—a boy, really—from the middle of America when I went to Catholic U, and how much I learned there, and how I left a man. And so I'm just very grateful to Catholic U, and honored to be here with Peter Kilpatrick.

Donna, we're so grateful for all that you do for all of us among the network of Catholic colleges and universities in this country. ACCU is surely a shining light. Pope Francis, you know, spoke often of epochal change, and I know that part of our discussion is based on the note, the document "Antiqua et Nova," which treats of the subject of artificial intelligence. I think that most of our participants have received that document, and many of you have read it already.

On the very first page it mentions this from Pope Francis—of course he borrows that, or it's borrowed from him, in a certain sense, from that document of the Latin American bishops that came out in the middle of the first decade of this century, the Aparecida document, which says that we don't live in an age of change, we live in a change of age.

People talk about all the change that's happening in our time, but really we're living in a time which is the change of the ages, and that happens sometimes in human history, when you can draw a bright line between everything that went before, and everything that's coming after. We live in such a time. Pope Francis said, and the note "Antiqua et Nova" groups AI into that great epochal change, the change of era, the change of the ages. And how amazing it is!

You know I just do what my calendar says, and so I don't remember exactly when we scheduled this, but it was, I think, before the passing of Pope Francis and the election of Leo XIV, who at the very beginning clarified to the cardinals that he chose his regnal name. He chose Leo after Leo the XIII, who, of course, was the great—well, first of all, the founder of the Catholic University of America, but also the author of "Rerum Novarum."

There's that word again, "nova," "novarum," of new things where he was treating of that first great industrial revolution, and Leo XIV said that he took the name Leo because he believes that the Church needs to engage in this moment with both caution and with hope of the changes of our own time. And he specifically called out AI! So how amazing it is that we are here just weeks after his inauguration and election, talking about this great topic.

Let me just say a few different things. First of all, the question of whether AI—artificial intelligence—is intelligence is an important question, and I think Dr. Kilpatrick has something as an engineer to say about that. The term was coined in 1955-56 by John McCarthy, who taught at Stanford, and who convened one summer a gathering of computer scientists at Dartmouth. It's a question—the question of intelligence, of course, touches very much upon the Catholic thing. When other institutions of higher learning, non-faith-based institutions of higher learning, secular or public colleges or universities, wrestle with this topic, as everybody is doing, their considerations are more limited, not just in this regard, but in lots of regards.

But you know, they're thinking about questions of compliance and economic impact and institutional risk and general ethical questions, those kinds of things. But they wouldn't have the metaphysical ballast that we have to be able to probe these things, and these are the moments in which, not just we, but the whole of our society needs institutions like ours to dig deeper and to wrestle with these questions in an adequate fashion.

The Christian tradition, of course, takes a page from that classical Greek vision of paideia which identifies, or which is involved in the discovery of the powers of the human soul: the faculties of the human being, the intelligence, the will, the emotions, the senses, and, of course, the highest of those is the intelligence. The image of God, the "Imago Dei" in us is reason and freedom. It's intellect and will. Those are the faculties we share with God and with the angels. And so there's a nobility there, and a complexity and a wonder which can't be replicated by something like AI. And so the question of attaching the word intelligence to this is a spicy topic. But I'll defer that for now. I want to make four just brief points before I turn it over to Dr. Kilpatrick.

As we look at this document, first of all, it is important to note that artificial intelligence, whatever it is, is not human intelligence. It might recognize patterns in existing data, but it doesn't do what the human mind is able to do in terms of sensing and abstracting, and in terms of judging. And those things, those operations of the human intellect are what we

properly call thinking. And so I think that's a first and clear distinction which the document makes and which the Church would be interested, and we, as Catholic educators, would be beholden to say.

Second, I think we could note that it's a tool. AI is a tool, and human beings have leveraged tools for the improvement of our condition from the very beginning. It's, in fact, one of the things that signifies and marks out homo sapiens as a species that we've used tools at all times, and every major tool has brought about some kind of civilizational disruption and revolution throughout history.

And so this is a time of great excitement. It's not all doom and gloom. I think in this respect we would be—if we're historians at all, we would have grounding to be short-term pessimists and long-term optimists. That's what I would say. In other words, every revolution—the invention of the wheel, and I suppose the invention of fire, although I wasn't there, the printing press and the television and the Internet, and now AI, and we could name many more, the automobile—all of them carry with them peril, because we have to wrestle with the ethical implications, and almost inevitably that brings about sad stories of the violation of human dignity and injustices of all kinds, and the oppression of some people by other people, and yet human beings, because the human race has been invaded by the grace of God through the Incarnation, we're pretty good at eventually coming to our senses.

And so certainly that is what's going to happen, and those of us who are on the forefront of it need to be prophets in that regard. So it's simply a tool. It's not a person. And so when we talk about AI, it's important for us to refrain from making moral judgments about it. "AI is bad." Well, it can't be bad. It's a tool. And so it's neutral. Human beings can be bad in using it, or very good in using it. I think that that's an ethical principle we can point out. I learned that in my philosophy classes at the Catholic University of America.

Third, and I think that this is the most important to me, that we should make sure that AI doesn't replace human relationships, that it's all about relationships, and that there's a certain sense in which, if we allow—and the document "Antiqua et Nova" is very clear about this—we can't allow for the replacement of certain key relational functions of humanity by AI, and so in areas like the economy, health care, education, privacy, warfare, human beings simply can't be replaced. And I would add to that education.

And so for me, the money shot in the whole document actually isn't in the—for us as educators, the money shot, the most important section for me is not in the section on education. It's actually in the section on AI and human relationships. Let me just read it briefly, because I think it just blazes out to us: "Anthropomorphizing AI"—this is section 60—

"also poses specific challenges for the development of children, and I would include in that young adults, potentially encouraging them to develop patterns of interaction that treat human relationships in a transactional manner, as one would relate to a chatbot.

Such habits could lead young people to see teachers as dispensers of information rather than as members, rather than as mentors who guide and nurture their intellectual and moral growth. Genuine relationships rooted in empathy with a steadfast commitment to the good of the other, are essential and irreplaceable in fostering the full development of the human person."

That is amazing, and it's important for us to note that whatever that is, that process started long before AI of students having transactional relationships where they contend to treat what's supposed to be an alma mater, a nurturing mother, an educating institution who cares for them and helps them, launches them into life as like the post office, or something—that's been happening for a long time.

And so this is an opportunity. Just as the COVID pandemic sped up certain inevitabilities, so, too, AI causes us to grapple in a very significant way with the relational aspect of education. And then the last thing I would say is that we shouldn't allow this to become an idolatry. Do you remember C.S. Lewis has that amazing space trilogy where he goes to Mars? And then he goes to Venus, and finally, "That Hideous Strength," the last of them is all about universities, and one of the professors, Mark Studdock, this central figure of "That Hideous Strength" slowly becomes acclimated to things which are meant to invoke a gag reflex in human beings. But there's an acclimation process that he goes through because it's the moving of the worship and devotion which is due to God, and to the numinous alone, to the transcendent and allocating, that to the things of this earth, and that can happen.

We can worship our tools. Human beings do that, and that's not what we should do. We should probably melt that golden calf and use it for the right thing. Use the gold for the enrichment of the human race. Those are some initial thoughts, but that's just a warm-up for the guy who's batting cleanup, and that's Peter Kilpatrick.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: Monsignor Shea, thank you for your kind thoughts and words, and we're so proud of you as our alumnus. So Monsignor Shea typically took, you know, many of the very, very best ideas of "Antiqua et Nova," and I won't repeat what he said, but I will make a few key points.

First of all, we should never call artificial intelligence "intelligence," because it's not. And I recommended in a warm-up call that we call it computational logic, or some such appropriate characterization that doesn't confuse the human person into thinking that

somehow this tool, as Monsignor Shea discusses, is doing anything that a human person really does.

I think one of the ways that the Vatican document "Antiqua et Nova" really brings that home to roost is in its discussion of Aquinas's distinction between "ratio" and "intellectus," so human persons use their intellect in many different ways. "Ratio," of course, is discursive reasoning, tearing things into little pieces, analyzing them, collecting data on them. This is a lot of what engineers do. But engineers also put things together. They synthesize things. They—Monsignor Shea used the expression "judge," which is really, if you look at Bloom's taxonomy, this is one of the highest things that human persons do.

We assemble a complete picture of what's happening. And then we judge, is this a good thing? Is this a bad thing? Is this something that will make me more human? Is this something that ennobles me? We also reason intuitively, and, in fact, that's what the document talks about. It uses the expression, "seeing things with the eyes of the mind." Machines don't do this, and so I think we have to be very, very clear that it's not intelligent. It's a tool.

Now, I taught a course for many years called Ethics and Technology. And one of the things I learned in developing my notes for that course and teaching that is, that just as Monsignor Shea shared, tools are not morally good or bad, they're power. Unfortunately, humans will use power in unfortunate ways. And so there actually are some tools that we should never use. We should never use a nuclear bomb for its intended purpose. That's sort of verboten. And it's kind of obvious why.

So I think a really important question in our discussion is, should we use artificial, artificial intelligence, computational logic, as it develops into the fullest and most powerful sense that it can possibly develop. And one of the admonitions in "Antiqua et Nova" is, if it displaces something that's uniquely human, no, we should never use it. So this is an important point of discussion.

Now, I will say that Pope Benedict in "Caritas in Veritate" wrote that technology is actually a uniquely human thing to do. And in a sense it's human persons responding to God's admonition to keep and till the garden. So when we develop tools, when we develop technology, we're doing something that's uniquely human. And that's a good thing when we use them for good purposes. So I think the conversation might go in the direction of how do we use artificial intelligence, computational logic? How do we use it in the best possible way to educate our students? How do we use it in the best possible way to ennoble the human person? And I could give you many examples of how we might think about doing that.

So, for example, a patient comes to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and presents symptoms of a rare cancer, and the doctor develops all the data associated with the symptoms of the cancer, but then utilizes this very powerful tool called AI, that searches and compares the presentation of this patient with thousands, maybe tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of other patients. The doctor would never be able to do that without the assistance of the tool. So in some sense there are ways.

And this was actually written about by John Kelly, the Vice President of IBM, who wrote a book called "Smart Machines." Machines are not smart, they can be used in a smart way to extend the work of the smart doctor or the smart educator, or the smart whomever, so I can envision ways in which we can powerfully use AI for good. Now, I would never want to ask my students to use AI to do something that I didn't think they could do themselves first. So one of the things we do at our university as we teach students how to use AI is, we ask them to critique AI. Tell us what the flaws are with AI. Tell us what the problems are. Tell us where AI gets it wrong. Tell us what you should do as a human person to do something that's uniquely human that AI should not be doing for you, and once they've gotten through this thought experiment of trying to understand where they fit in and where AI could fit in, now we begin to wean them on to the use of utilizing it as an assistant, as a tool for good.

So I again, I'm thankful to Donna. I'm thankful to Patrick for the opportunity to share with you all today. It's a very important subject, and I highly commend to you the reading of this important document by the Vatican, which is a great gift to the Church and to all of humanity, and I suspect our new holy father, Pope Leo, will be bringing forth additional guidance on this very important area that is part of this epochal change that we're all part of right now. So thank you. And I look forward to our conversation.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Gentlemen, we do have a handful of questions. I think one that came in that I believe, Dr. Kilpatrick you addressed, if we need some further clarification on that. By all means please feel free to follow up in the Q&A. We did capture a couple of questions in advance as well. So thank you for those who suggested those. Here's maybe one to start with. And I would begin with: Can you suggest any moral guardrails and formation strategies that Catholic universities could embrace in incorporating AI into pedagogy, research, and administration in a manner that supports both technological advancement as well as moral stewardship? Any thoughts on that at all.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: Well again, I would never ask this tool to do something that I didn't think we already had the capability to get a jump start on, and to begin to frame the challenge or the issue. I think we use it as an adjunct, as an assistant wherever it can speed things up in situations where we need to be expeditious. I think it can be helpful. Wherever we can learn more, so that we can engage more fully in a relational way, as Monsignor Shea shared. I think that can be a good thing. I mean, there are many backoffice functions that we perform at universities. I could enumerate some of those, but those can

be useful. But those people that work in the back office, you want them to be relational, too. And so they have to discipline themselves to know when is this being assistive? And when is it being displacing?

Monsignor James Shea: You know, this question was framed in the context of moral guardrails. I think that's a happy way to ask a question like this, because it is the case. And I think the document "Antiqua et Nova" notes this, that there are various kinds of technologies. Some of them are simply neutral, such that they're left to the individual discernment of the one who would use them. And then there are others that require more sort of moral examination and consideration. Those would include things like, as Peter said, the atomic bomb and other particular kinds of technologies and technological interventions. And AI is certainly one of those. And so that means that there aren't going to be tried and ready answers to this kind of thing. We can gesture at those, we can prepare as best we can.

But was it Ted Hesburgh who said that Catholic universities are the place where the Church does her thinking? Is that his phrase, Donna? I think so. In any case, I think, then, this is an opportunity for us to gather. You should never waste a crisis, and this is a crisis which shouldn't be wasted. I'm eager to gather my faculties of engineering and my philosophers and those who are dealing in other areas to begin to wrestle with these kinds of questions and consider how to respond to them. But I'm with Peter here that a consideration of the relational aspect is going to be really important.

I saw a study just the other day. It floored me that according to this poll—and I don't know what the sample size was. But 47% of these Generation Z students who were polled said that they wish the Internet had never been invented. 47%. This, to me was shell shocking, and of course they don't really mean that they don't mean that they want to return to a world where, if you missed somebody on a train, then you could never find them again. The sort of inconveniences of the old times.

But what they meant is that they sense at an existential level, that their relationships are much more shallow and less fulfilling and less tending toward their happiness than has been the case at other stages or ages of civilization, and that they're grieving that, and they're grieving it deeply. We have to accompany them in that grief, and if we don't, then we're abdicating our responsibility of functioning, as they said in the old days "in loco parentis." And that's something Catholic universities can never do. We can never reduce our care for students to health and safety, like the big State universities do. We're way better than that, and people expect more of us than this.

I would like to just say this last salvo, Peter. I sure wish that the Busch School of Business at Catholic University would give me some advice on investments and things like that. You know, people talk all the time about how it would have been good at a certain point to buy a

bunch of Apple stock and how they'd be super millionaires today. What we should have done six months ago—I would have appreciated a note from the alumni office composed by the Busch School, saying, "Everybody, get your stock today in Roaring Springs Publishing." Because, did you see the article in the Wall Street Journal that dropped the other day? Roaring Springs Publishing is the American publisher of Blue Books, and they're coming back, everybody. And so like I mean the publication of Blue Books, those torture instruments that all of us remember—they are roaring back, and I wish with all my heart I had bought some stock, holy cow, our portfolio would be doing well, even with the tariffs.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: But I'll take that to Andrew and make sure he—now we are developing guidelines for Catholic investing. We've coupled with the Knights of Columbus and some others, and proposing a way to take "Bona Mensurum" and really apply it to the American world of investing. That is something that we're actually doing. But...

Monsignor James Shea: I just want the tips to the where to leverage—

Donna Carroll: Patrick, can I ask a question?

J. Patrick McAvoy: By all means, Donna, absolutely.

Donna Carroll: So I was at an AI panel a few months ago, and there was an interesting challenge. And Peter and Jim, you may respond to this. They were talking about how AI now was going to be able to personally tailor the educational experience of every student, and I walked away a little spooked because I felt, well, that's our business. You know what Monsignor Shea, you just said that higher order, deeply relationship-individually, tailored education. Well, if AI is able to carve that out, that is a real challenge for us to really identify what is relationship centered. You know what? What is the human piece of that? Distinct from what the tool could do. And I've been wondering about how we answer that question. You know, if the education is personally tailored to each student, the study patterns, the learning styles, then where do we invest our time to be that enriching element of it?

Monsignor James Shea: Can I jump in just for two sentences or three? I think that the premise of that is a little bit problematic in that it's one thing to tailor a student's education in a kind of boutique way to his or her personal capabilities, preferences, and interests—that's not actually education, though part of what we do is that but part of what we do is also to challenge them to go outside of the zones of their comfort such that they're able truly to grow. In other words, that's like calibrating the workout routine of a bodybuilder such that their muscles never advance or develop. And so I'm just not sure about that. But maybe I'm misunderstanding the premise.

Donna Carroll: No, no, and that was part of my challenge. To them it seemed much too simplistic, but it also seemed a little concerning.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: So one of the ways we've started thinking, Donna, about the ends of education are, you know, how do we spell success with the student. And certainly, you know, you want them to successfully pursue their degree and their chosen field of study, and all that. But I think far more important than that is developing the virtues and all the virtues, and you know there are 50 virtues, and you know this has been the one of the singular commitments of our Busch School of Business has been, how do we inculcate these 50 virtues in our Busch School graduates? And now we're taking it to the entire university. We're infusing it in every program of study.

And so to Monsignor Shea's point, it's like, you know, a physical trainer saying, we're going to customize this to your program. But unfortunately, your muscles are going to atrophy. Well, the virtues are the muscles we want them to build up. You know, kindness and compassion, and magnanimity, and hope, and courage, and you know these are critical, and this is what will fulfill and make happy our students is, what if they become virtuous persons who, oh, by the way, also have this wonderful classical education? And oh, by the way, are trained in a profession to pursue this particular element of their life, to provide for their families. Then we've succeeded. So we're always asking ourselves, what does success look like? And I think it's so much more than having a machine tell them here's how we're going to curate your information.

Donna Carroll: I would agree with you, I would agree. And I think it's particularly important today as we differentiate what makes a Catholic education distinctive and enriching and powerful.

Monsignor James Shea: You know, from the very end of "Antiqua et Nova" I underlined this passage, which I had to look up then, because I didn't have the footnotes printed out, but it's from Pope Francis, he says "a person's perfection is measured, not by the information or knowledge they possess, but by the depth of their charity." That really struck me in terms of what you just said, Peter. And in terms of your question, Donna, because if that's the measure of things, if education is meant to produce, not simply a person who's very well informed and who's been trained, whose mind and capacities have been trained a particular way, but a person of deep charity. Well, that's a whole other bar.

I think of the end of the rule of St. Benedict. Remember, Benedict says that the monks are meant to love each other, but they're supposed to compete actually in one thing, and that's in serving each other. And so they should be competing in the measure of their service to each other. And this is the Christian life. You know, when they take studies they see that they note that what people are most jealous of, what causes envy in human beings more than anything is not good looks or athletic talent and prowess, or anything. It is

intelligence. We're very alive to intelligence as a prized possession, but it's not the most important thing. Charity trumps it all.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: I would just—I love that. You know I love that thought, and the way I like to think about it is, you know God is almost infinitely simple. He does two things: he knows, and He loves and if you know but you don't love, you know Saint Paul says you're like a gong in the wilderness, you know. Who cares? It's worthless, no matter what you know. If you don't love, it doesn't matter. But if you know and love, that's beautiful, that's how we image God the most deeply. So...

Donna Carroll: And now put AI back into the equation. How does that enrich the educational experience that you two just described?

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: If you know how to use AI for good, if you know how to use it for good. And I tried to give an example, the correct diagnosis and the rapid diagnosis of a complex cancer. That's a great way to use AI. And, by the way, Donna, I could come up with 20 or 30 of those. And, by the way, John Kelly does that in "Smart Machines," it's a wonderful little book. And by the way, he wrote that book because IBM invented Watson and Watson—remember that? Yeah. Watson was sort of the early instantiation of AI. You know, AI has been around forever. It's machine learning. It's computational logic, that's all it is. But if you use it to do good, that's a good thing. That's keeping and tilling the garden. That's a good thing. So I think we want to teach our students: this is how you use AI to make the world a better place, to make humanity more human, to make your knowing and loving more fulfilling to you. I think that's how we use AI.

Monsignor James Shea: Yeah.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Here's maybe a different facet to that same question as well. And I just really like the way this question was posed. Is there any way that *grief* might be considered a fruitful initial response to the permeation of AI in the humanities? What is the role of AI in the humanities? Curious on both of your perspectives, on that.

Monsignor James Shea: Well, any of us who care about the humanities—those of us who studied English literature, or history, or philosophy or theology, have been grieving for a long time that that's sort of been thrown aside. Remember the address that Cardinal Francis George gave some time ago at Georgetown, where he said that if we're not careful institutions like Georgetown, and institutions like any of ours, run the risk of becoming high-tech trade schools instead of real universities. And so this, I think, loops back to the previous question, that if ChatGPT has the capacity to delve in at a rapid pace to the riches of the works of Dostoevsky and Mark Twain and Sophocles, and his plays, and the writings of Aristotle, and bring that together in a way that a responsible and discerning human mind is able to then integrate, then it truly is a tool. But I think that the grief is very real, and it

should be real. And this is an opportunity for us to say, Look, we're tapping here into the vastness, not just of astrophysics or medical technology, but into the real riches as well of the Western canon. That's my stab at that.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: So I was—that's beautiful. I was very heavily influenced by a book I read recently called "Beauty and Imitation: The Philosophy of Aesthetics" by Daniel McInerney. And one of the things that struck me in that book is that all of art, all of literature, all of drama, all of painting, all of sculpture, all of art at root is what Aristotle called mimesis. It's imitative in one way or another, and what we hope for, as Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote, is that that imitation points you to the drama of your life with God. And if it does, then it ennobles you. It elevates you, it points you in the right direction.

If, on the other hand, it points you in the direction of the drama of your life with yourself, the ego drama, then there's a problem. And so I think the humanities have a critical role to play. But we have to give people the philosophical underpinnings, the metaphysical underpinnings, so that they understand what you should be trying to get out of this is, how do I relate to God, and how do I relate to others? And again, it's the perfection of knowing and loving. And if AI can help us with that, great. If it can't, maybe we need to think about this a little bit.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Well said, I appreciate that. I've got a couple other questions here as well, and I think we've got some comments that have come in. One interesting comment. It looks like from Paul said, "I wonder if the uniqueness of man is his humanity, and there's an inherent responsibility to grow, develop and extend our humanity in all its faculties and dimensions. How does it square that we may be abdicating so much of quote being human to machinery as it relates to learning and creativity? At what point does that pendulum tip? And all of a sudden, now we are giving up so much of what it means to be human to something that is, in fact, as you mentioned, as both of you mentioned, a tool?"

Monsignor James Shea: And there is a scary element to that. We just, you know, as Catholics, we resist the temptation to become apocalyptic, except when the Apocalypse is here, but there is a difficulty. Do you remember Kurt Vonnegut had all those sort of gloomy, edgy novels back in the day, and he did one called "The Sirens of Titan." In it is the story of this planet which was once inhabited by some people who were really good at building machines, but they were also warlike people, and so they realized that they could build machines that would help them to fight in the wars. And so they built these robots, who then were so good at their job that they slaughtered everybody and became the new inhabitants of the planet. Well, that's sort of a grim—Tralfamadore, I think, was the name of the planet—and that's of course really important for us to avoid that outcome.

We're sitting on the edge of a knife in that respect, and we don't want to outsource humanity to machines. And yet, yeah, I don't know. I think we have to be really wise about

that. That's why the document, the note from the CDF and the Dicastery for Culture ends with a note on wisdom, which is to order. Aristotle says so—to keep the first things, first, to know the difference between the important things, and the second things. I don't know.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: Yeah, I think Paul asks, you know, just a really central question here. And I think it's the question we should all be asking ourselves frequently. And again we talked earlier. There are tools which become so powerful that we should never use them. And now will AI become that tool? I don't think it's there yet, you know. I do think that with sufficient wisdom we can manage the tool at this moment in time. But I think it's something we need to be mindful of, and maybe wary and cautious of is that as large language models and the algorithms that drive them become increasingly powerful and interconnected.

I think we have to be constantly asking ourselves, Is this disrupting my relational life? Is this, you know, as those young people that were surveyed are beginning to realize, social media is disrupting my life in a way that is making me less human. This is why the anxiety crisis and the, you know, suicidal ideation is as high as it is right now, I believe, is because a lot of these young people have ceded their lives to their technology. And so it's something to be very cognizant of and very wary of.

You know I'm a crazed optimist, and I believe that we can learn how to use tools in very, very good ways. And I'm also a technologist, and you know, so I appreciate the power with which we can wield tools to do good. But I'm also wary. I'm also mindful that there can be a cautionary tale here.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Let's maybe stay on that point and have you both—I know we've spoken at a very high level, maybe talk about in practical terms, and maybe actionable terms for both of you or your institutions. And we've got a question here from Joel Kelly, who asks, "Practically speaking, how do we accompany, inform our students who are coming to college socially, emotionally, and spiritually underdeveloped in light of recent technological advances," just like both of you had mentioned, "the epidemics of loneliness, particularly the children now, who have come through COVID in their formative years of high school, and are entering college and matriculating through the institutions. How do we come alongside and nurture those individuals in light of some of their recent experiences through adolescence?"

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: I'll take a whack at that. We have an initiative here called the Friendship Initiative at Catholic University, and I'm thrilled that our student government has kind of grabbed a hold of this and run with it. But we—you know I could accompany maybe 15 or 20 students a year in a serious way, and I do through mentoring and tutoring, and you know, just again being a good friend. But I can't reach all of our 5,000 students. But our students can reach many, many students, and we have wonderful students here.

But some of our students are lonely. Some are emotionally, spiritually underdeveloped. They need that accompaniment. And we find that our other students, who have a great deal of enthusiasm, who are, you know, who are perhaps more developed are wonderful companions to those students. And so we're starting to build this social capital, this interconnectedness of our student body. And it's beautiful to see.

Monsignor James Shea: Yeah, I think we're doing similar things here, as are many other institutions that I know, building a campus-wide network of mentorship. Older students who have been at Mary for a while helping younger students who are just coming in. We're much more focused than we used to be upon programming in the residence halls. We think that that's a really important area.

Of course, you know, John Henry Newman, one of our great patrons, makes the distinction between the university and the college, and he means something different from what we mean in this country. The university was where lectures happened, but the college was where real formation and integration happened, and the university had professors. The college had tutors. And so we're taking upon ourselves that tutorship model in a more intentional way. But you know this is both a practical question, and it's a profound question of ideas. This is an opportunity we can't miss, and it's a crisis we can't waste, because Pope Francis was right.

The world is such that the church is now a field hospital, and our institutions are the landing place for young people who get washed up on our shores, really wounded already in their young lives, and stunted in lots of ways. Well, a vulnerable person is all the more worthy of love. And so let's take them in our arms. I think it's more important than ever.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Appreciate those responses, another one that came in from yesterday, staying somewhat in the practical space here. Should Catholic higher education institutions at this moment in time teach students how to responsibly use AI for classroom work, research, and other coursework? How do you both feel about the use of AI at your institutions as we enter the fall, 2025 semester?

Monsignor James Shea: I'm going to say something that'll probably be irresponsible. I'm sitting back very curious and interested as I watch the various responses of my professors in this regard. We've hired everybody for mission, and so we really trust our people. We have to, because we've entrusted them with so much already. And so I know that we have professors who are really into this, and who are laboring to think about creative ways. And then we have others who are saying absolutely no—verboten—blue books all the way. Sorry, Monsignor Shea. You should have bought your stock in Roaring Springs Publishing.

And so I do think that in the rough and tumble of that again as a university being the place, a Catholic university being a place where the Church does her thinking, I think, that those

various responses are going to come to a kind of—I hate to use a watchword, but a beautiful diversity of response, and maybe give us a consensus about the best way to proceed. I think we're in an experimentation phase in that respect, and maybe that's an abdication of my responsibility. I don't think so.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: I actually think that's—we've seen something somewhat similar where our English language professors, our writing professors, and the freshman seminar professors are, "We're not going to use AI until I'm convinced they understand the craft and the art of writing and they understand good construction. They understand how to be creative. And then they're a little more open. Once they're convinced that the students have mastered some of the rudiments that they need to have in the humanities."

But just like Monsignor Shea says, we've got a beautiful diversity of opinions on this, and I think that's healthy. I think you know. Isn't that what the openness of the mind is about? Isn't that what judgment is about? I mean, what's there to judge if everyone does the same thing? So I like that approach.

Donna Carroll: I'll tell you a funny story on my limited AI. You know, as a laywoman in my position I walk into many rooms, and people will turn around and say, "Donna, will you say the prayer?" And very often I say, "Well, I don't just automatically do prayers," but now I can say, "Well, do you have a ladies room?" I go into the ladies room, I open up ChatGPT, I put in the feast day, I put in three or four thoughts. A prayer comes up immediately. I walk right back into the room, and I say, "Of course I'll say the prayer." So AI has some very good...

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: There you go! Donna.

Donna Carroll: You know my confession.

J. Patrick McAvoy: I think we got one more here from yesterday. We're kind of tracking things over here. We are certainly winding down, getting towards the bottom of the hour. Maybe we'll finish up with this one. A question came in that said, "I understand that Europe has an inspection process called Z-Inspection for examining trustworthy AI." Not something I've heard of before, certainly interested in finding out more. Are either of you aware of Catholic higher education institutions on other continents that are studying or making advances on these challenges? Any—are you engaging with any institutions elsewhere outside the United States? Maybe for some additional discernment or additional points of view on this particular topic?

Monsignor James Shea: I don't know.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: One thing—well, I know that Paolo Benanti, who's at the Gregorian University in Rome, is something of the Vatican expert on ethical AI. So Paolo, and Paolo, I

think, is actually an adjunct professor at a few different universities here in the States. He would be a good point of departure, and then there are others. I do think there are others in Europe who are looking at this issue. But one of the things I would say is, it's very instructive to do some Internet research on the bias, the dishonesty and the active censorship of a number of large language models. And it's interesting, you know.

So, for example, DeepSeek has some real issues, and if you want to, if you want to explore this, you type into your browser "DeepSeek and Tiananmen Square" and see what kind of news articles pop up, and you begin to learn that, "Oh, my gosh! These things can be heavily manipulated. They can be biased, they can be censored." And there are ways around that. And so you also look up some of the articles that try to get around DeepSeek censoring so that you can get it to divulge what it knows about—well, what it knows. It doesn't know anything—what its computational logic is about Tiananmen Square.

And so I think, learning all that is a healthy reminder to our students and to the faculty that are going to use this of what are some of the real pitfalls of artificial intelligence? How do you test drive it? How do you run it through its paces? But we should have a healthy disregard for the purity of computational logic, because, after all, human persons make it, and human persons make mistakes, just like we made some serious mistakes with, you know, a lot of the other technologies that we've developed over the years.

Monsignor James Shea: Very well said. You mentioned the Gregorian University. That's my other alma mater, Peter, and I haven't given them—my alumni giving doesn't match what I give to Catholic University. Just so, you know. But I will say that the sensitivity of the Europeans around some of these types of questions is oftentimes heightened compared to the American context.

And so it's interesting to keep an eye on all of these different aspects of things. I just so appreciate this conversation. I'm so thankful for all of the people who joined all of us here online for this—there's so much to explore and to plumb the depths of, you know, if we think back to once again the Industrial Revolution.

When Leo XIII was writing "Rerum Novarum," that was a time of massive societal change, economic systems, communism, capitalism, the advance of technology, massive migration of peoples from rural to urban areas, and all of the problems that came with that. And the Church has always risen to the occasion with this type of a thing, and we'll again in this context.

And so I'm so grateful to our new Holy Father for sounding that clarion call at the very beginning, and of course he was born in our country in the home of Silicon Valley, and so he's uniquely suited by Providence and by history to assist us in this very regard. Patrick, maybe I just end with a word of thanks, first to ACCU once again—to you, Donna Carroll,

for all that you have done for all of us through the years, and you're doing a great job replacing Father Dennis—that was a high order. But you're really doing a great job.

And then, Patrick, I want to say, you know, we've been a client of Dynamic Campus for almost 15 years now. And speaking of artificial versus real, our relationship has not been artificial with Dynamic Campus. It's been a real relationship with human beings and bumps along the road. And yet you're one of our very best partners here at the University of Mary. I'm so grateful for that, because we've tackled great enormous problems and challenges together—the systems that we've built for monitoring our enrollment and for marketing questions, the cleanliness of our data, the way that you've saved us really in the end, probably tens of millions of dollars in terms of—you cost us a lot, too. But you've saved us a lot—that has been just very gratifying for me as a leader, and so I'm grateful. I'm grateful you have a task force in Dynamic Campus for artificial intelligence that we can tap into, too. And so it's just an honor to be part of this conversation.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Incredibly kind of you, Monsignor Shea, and we're absolutely humbled and blessed to have you as a partner. And we appreciate both your input on this particular topic and your leadership, Dr. Kilpatrick. Thank you so much for joining us as well for exploring some of the real nuances of this potentially disruptive technology as it works its way through our society. And Donna thank you and ACCU for allowing us to have this platform to discuss it. I would turn it over to you for any closing comments.

Donna Carroll: And I would stay tuned to the annual meeting in February for more discussion about AI and all of its dimensions. I will end by saying, there's a word I've been using, or two words I've been using more frequently. They're not mine. I will attribute them—that this is a moment for Catholic higher ed to lead in a number of different dimensions, and we lead out of a sense of defiant humanism. And I think that's what I heard Peter and Monsignor Shea threading through all of this, that it's not one or the other. It's the two integrated well with a deep humanity in the lead. So I thank you all for joining us. I thank our two speakers, colleagues, and friends, and have a good afternoon, everyone.

Dr. Peter Kilpatrick: Thank you, Donna. Thank you, Monsignor Shea, and thank you, Patrick and Rebecca. It was a wonderful conversation. I enjoyed it, and it's great to be with wonderful people. Thank you.

J. Patrick McAvoy: Much appreciated, everybody take care.

Donna Carroll: Thanks, everybody.



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