

Reflection on Sunday 7 September 2025

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A few days ago, I read an article (actually, I read several articles) about the idea of giving Artificial Intelligence maternal instincts in the hope that this fast developing technology, with the potential to wreak havoc and outsmart us, would stay benevolent towards us.

As a mother, I was at first very flattered. My maternal work of caring and nurturing was recognised as the very sort of thing that could save humanity. Well done, mums. Aren't we great?

And then I found it very depressing. Surely, compassionate caring and nurturing should be universal qualities?

Although much is lost in translation in today's Gospel reading from Mark 7. 32-37, where Jesus ministers to a man with a speech impediment by spitting and touching the man's tongue (which sounds strange to our modern sensibilities), there's no doubt that Christ is acting with compassion.

Jesus doesn't stop to ask the man's nationality or in any way try to assess whether the man is deserving of care. He sees a need and ministers to the person in front of him. If we call ourselves Christians, followers of Jesus, we are called to follow his example.

That's the background to what follows.

AI. Artificial Intelligence. Digital systems capable of learning.

Dispassionate, logical, efficient. What's not to love?

Well, love doesn't come into it: "Dispassionate", remember? An artificial intelligence does not, unless it has been trained to do so, engage in petty emotional squabbling, nor does it love.

It is, unless trained not to be, logical and efficient. Give an advanced artificial intelligence the task of creating world peace and it would wipe out humanity. World peace. Logical and efficient.

These qualities of ruthless efficiency can make AI a powerful medical diagnostics tool for good. It is also useful for monitoring deforestation and monitoring bee populations, as well as processing millions of data points on crops, weather conditions, population etc to predict and prevent famine.

Of course, having the facts doesn't necessarily mean we act in any useful ways to improve a situation, for that we need to add compassion to the logic and efficiency. Compassion and love is where we humans excel, unless we have been programmed not to.

As has been the case since the dawn of mankind, we develop technology and systems long before we start to develop ethical frameworks around their use or, in the case of artificial intelligence, before we've understood the potential for harm.

Scientist Geoffrey Hinton, often called the Godfather of AI, points out that a futuristic scenario of killer robots turning on humanity is not around the corner just yet, but it is not a fringe view that within our lifetime there will be artificial intelligences that are smarter than us and able to manipulate us.

We are still at a stage where artificial intelligence is a tool for us to use, but it is often a blunt tool, as you will know if you have had the misfortune of coming across an AI renderings of a person. In capturing the likeness of a human, humans still have the upper hand and, unlike the AI renderings, that hand only has five fingers.

At the moment, AI is still learning from us. It learns and reflects the best of us and the worst of us. When software giant Microsoft launched its chatbot Tay on Twitter, it took one day to become wildly offensive, spouting racist, anti-Semitic and sexist slurs.

There are now countless examples of AI generated content having been used to dehumanise, misrepresent people and spread disinformation to drum up hatred and suspicion.

Within less than three hours of the hideous stabbing of three girls at a Manchester dance class last year, the social media account Europe Invasion, among others, was busy using AI generated images to falsely link the murders to Muslims and immigrants. Within days, we had xenophobic and racist violence in the streets.

What we must never lose track of is that Artificial Intelligence is a mirror. Artificial Intelligence reflects back to us our longings, our search for meaning, our delusions of grandeur and superiority as well as our prejudices and especially our searches for fast kicks, the dopamine rush of opinion. AI-powered algorithms push content that pushes our buttons. Anger and fear sells and misleading headlines drive engagement.

Information rushes at us faster and faster; it has never been more important to stop, think and reflect: Who is behind this message? Really. Is what I engage with making the world a better place or is it stirring up anger, fear and hatred? Is there truth and integrity to this message? And if you consider yourself a Christian, it is a good idea to also ask: "Is this Christ like?"

We need to choose now, and choose wisely, the direction we want, because we have the tools - fantastic, clever and terrifying tools - to turbo power values, ideas and ideals.

What values, ideas and ideals do we stand by? You may be familiar with the following words. I invite you to meditate on them.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." ([John 13:34](#))

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.'"
(Matthew 25:34-35)

"Do to others what you would have them do to you." ([Matthew 7:12](#); [Luke 6:31](#))

"Love your neighbour as yourself." ([Matthew 22:39](#))

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

