

Introduction: Bearing Magnificent Witness

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Abstract: This introduction addresses the exploding problem of the use of generative and assistive AI for the production of “scholarly” manuscripts and highlights the *Journal’s* AI policy. This problem is brought into conversation with Pope Leo XIV’s first encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* and the six articles comprising the July 2026 issue. Taken together these articles demonstrate the extraordinary beauty of God’s generativity is incarnated in the interpersonal encounters between those caught in the painful places of the world and those who accompany them. As AI promises to continue to consume humanity and the basic goods of human flourishing in so many different ways, these authors and the figures they highlight bear magnificent witness to what the abundance of God’s grace looks like when *imago Dei* meets *imago Dei*.

WE ARE AWASH IN A TSUNAMI OF AI. CONSIDER A SAMPLING of examples from the last month alone. Students are using AI in college and university courses with abandon.¹ University administrators give them the tools and license to do so.² Local communities seeking to limit AI data centers in their neighborhoods or simply asking them to pay reasonable costs associated with their drain on local resources are being sued by multi-billion-dollar corporations.³ So much for the myth of autonomy,

¹ Emma Whitford, “Brown Professor Suspects Majority of His Class Used AI to Cheat,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 8, 2026, insidehighered.com/news/faculty/learning-assessment/2026/07/08/brown-professor-suspects-most-his-class-used-ai-cheat. For an insightful conversation with one professor who is trying to counter the AI disintegration of the classroom, see “Great Books and the AI Apocalypse (w/ Matt Dinan),” *Know Your Enemy*, January 2, 2026, patreon.com/knowyourenemy/posts/great-books-and-147187443.

² For examples of universities that are proactively putting AI tools in the hands of students, see Harvard (huit.harvard.edu/ai/tools), Vanderbilt (vanderbilt.edu/generative-ai/), Oxford University (ox.ac.uk/gen-ai), and Georgetown (guides.library.georgetown.edu/ai/), to name just a few.

³ Lily Ogburn, “Thor Equities Files Federal Lawsuit Against City of Urbana After Data Center Zoning Reversal,” *Springfield News-Sun*, June 23, 2026, springfieldnews-sun.com/local/thor-equities-files-federal-lawsuit-against-city-of-urbana-after-data-center-

informed consent, or local control. Health care workers are being replaced.⁴ OpenAI is being sued for practicing medicine without a license.⁵ As we saw earlier this spring, AI combined with surveillance technologies has operationalized “kill chains” beyond any previously imagined scale compressed into timeframes of seconds.⁶ Scores of children die, but no one will take responsibility.⁷

Knowledge, community, healthcare, peace, life—almost every basic human good is being bulldozed by this barrage of AI. Dozens more examples from just this year alone could be listed, but for the purposes of this introduction, I wish to comment briefly on one particular development which is much more mundane than the foregoing but immediately affecting the *Journal of Moral Theology*: AI is now being deployed to produce faux journal manuscripts.

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Since 2023, the *Journal* has clearly stated our AI-policy on the “For Authors” page of our website. It read:

Manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Moral Theology* should consist of original research and writing by the author(s) and follow accepted canons of academic scholarship. . . . It is expected that manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Moral Theology* will not contain any AI-generated text. . . .

zoning-reversal/article_4fe1f43a-e6cc-5045-89da-598671e5ad03.html; and Paul Kiefer, “Wisconsin Regulators Refuse to Loosen Data Center Credit Rules, Setting Up Oracle Court Fight,” *The Milwaukee Courier*, July 10, 2026, milwaukeecourier.com/news/2026/07/10/wisconsin-regulators-refuse-to-loosen-data-center-credit-rules-setting-up-oracle-court-fight.

⁴ Michael Sainato, “The New York Nurses Replaced by AI: ‘It Should Concern Every Patient Who Cares About Quality of Care,’” *The Guardian*, July 13, 2026, theguardian.com/technology/2026/jul/13/nurses-new-york-ai; Windsor Johnston, “Dr. Oz Pushes AI Avatars as a Fix for Rural Health Care. Not So Fast, Critics Say,” *NPR*, February 14, 2026, npr.org/2026/02/14/nx-sl-5704189/dr-oz-ai-avatars-replace-rural-health-workers; and “Inside the Trump-backed Push to Bring AI Doctors Into American Medicine,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 2026, washingtonpost.com/technology/2026/06/04/inside-trump-backed-push-bring-ai-doctors-into-american-medicine/.

⁵ Molly Gamble, “Man Sues OpenAI for Unlicensed Practice of Medicine,” *Becker’s Hospital Review*, July 22, 2026, beckershospitalreview.com/legal-regulatory-issues/man-sues-openai-for-unlicensed-practice-of-medicine/.

⁶ Alex Ber, “Strike on Iran and Claude’s Role: What Really Happened,” *Medium*, March 3, 2026, alex-ber.medium.com/strike-on-iran-and-claude-s-role-what-really-happened-511da1354fc8.

⁷ Antonio Pequeño, IV, “Anthropic CEO: We Don’t Know Exactly How Claude AI Was Used in Iran School Strike,” *Forbes*, June 10, 2026, forbes.com/sites/antoniopequenoi/2026/06/10/anthropic-ceo-we-dont-know-exactly-how-claude-ai-was-used-in-iran-school-strike/.

As Editor, I scoffed: “really, who would submit an AI-generated *theology* manuscript to a scholarly *ethics* journal?” Call me naïve!

The first AI-gen manuscript—that we caught—was submitted to us in January 2026.⁸ Although we presumed this manuscript was a one-off, we thought it would be prudent to sign up for the AI-detection feature offered through our editorial management system. We activated the service in April 2026. Since then, the service has flagged roughly *a third* of the manuscripts that we have received for consideration since April. Editors of other academic journals in theology and ethics tell me they are receiving almost one per day or that they are receiving multiple AI-generated manuscripts from individual authors.

In deliberating about this issue, the *Journal of Moral Theology* editorial staff and Publication Ethics Committee discussed potential, known limitations of AI-detection services. They noted the concerns that AI-detection services can be biased against non-native English-speaking writers, due both to biases built into the AI datasets as well as the increasingly widespread use of AI-grammar and writing tools. They recognized that AI-detectors do not provide binary analyses, as in “AI or not AI,” but instead flag patterns and prob-abilities. At the *Journal of Moral Theology*, it is the judgment of the human editors who evaluate these converging problematic patterns and make a judgement about AI usage.

In light of this *res nova*, our Publication Ethics Committee will be conferring with the editors of other academic, theological journals. In the interim, we have revised the JMT AI-policy as follows:

Manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Moral Theology* should consist of **original research and writing by the author(s) and follow accepted canons of academic scholarship**. Manuscripts should not have previously appeared (in whole or in part), including in digital repositories or be simultaneously considered for publication in another venue. The *Journal* will not publish any manuscripts that contain third-party content that is not explicitly cited as such.

The *Journal of Moral Theology* is a **scholarly, peer-reviewed, academic journal**. We will not publish any manuscripts that contain or are suspected of containing any AI-generated or AI-enhanced text. The *Journal* now uses the AI-detection service of iThenticate, provided by CrossRef. Every manuscript submitted to the journal is checked by iThenticate. Articles flagged as using AI are double-checked by the JMT editorial staff to confirm AI probability. Articles suspected of using AI will be rejected. We counsel that authors should not use AI programs for research, as they collate material from

⁸ I do not doubt that we had received a few AI-generated manuscripts prior to 2026 that were rejected via the editorial and peer-review process.

predatory journals, repositories, and other substandard sources. We counsel that authors not use programs such as Grammarly or similar tools to “improve” their text. Generating one’s own text—at the sentence, paragraph, and manuscript level—is a key part of the scholarly research and intellectual process. We would rather receive an honestly written and imperfect text generated by a human scholar than superficially smooth AI-slop. Do not use AI-translators, as this may result in the manuscript being flagged and, therefore, rejected.⁹

Some AI-users have, of course, taken issue with our policy. But the use of AI for academic theological publishing is insidious. A first ‘accepted canon of academic scholarship’ is that the *person* who has done the research, intellectual work, and writing merits the credit. In putting one’s name at the top of a manuscript, one avows that the contents of the manuscript are one’s own work. AI-generated or assisted manuscripts are not the product of an individual’s careful research that adheres to accepted scholarly standards. They do not reflect the intellectual effort of an individual deeply trained in and formed by a discipline, who via personal engagement with credible sources and the scholarly community, generates original knowledge. They do not reflect the creative and extraordinarily hard work of distilling that intellectual effort into writing in order to communicate one’s original thoughts to others.¹⁰

The lure of using generative-AI platforms (Google Gemini, Microsoft CoPilot, Anthropic’s Claude, OpenAI’s ChatGPT) for ‘research’ and writing embodies (as we will see further below) the technocratic paradigm. These platforms dazzle putative scholars with promises of efficiency. *Prima facie*, these bots appear to be helpful and efficient at retrieving information. AI-platforms can scan an unfathomable amount of material in a matter of seconds. They can distill it into something that resembles writing equally as quickly. No longer does a person need to “waste time” by going to a library or tediously scrolling through lists of titles and abstracts generated by research databases—much less read any of those sources. Asking CoPilot is simple, fast, and efficient.

Yet for research purposes, AI platforms are qualitatively different than research databases. Credible research databases limit their

⁹ “For Authors,” *Journal of Moral Theology*, jmt.scholasticahq.com/for-authors.

¹⁰ While at times scholars are assisted by other people (graduate students, colleagues, substantive editors), an accepted canon of scholarly research is that any other *people* who have contributed to the research, conceptualization, writing, or editing of an academic manuscript are to be named, either as a co-author or in an acknowledging citation. An additional adverse effect of using AI is that it severs the work of scholarship from the collegial, interpersonal network of intellectual mentoring and relationships.

content to vetted peer-reviewed periodicals and publications.¹¹ LLMs do not. Moreover, it is not even entirely clear what is *in* the dataset. As Brianne Bell Jacobs notes in her article in this issue, “most companies are intentionally and assiduously guarded about exactly what language content they use as the data for their AI models.”¹² As has been well reported, AI developers largely do not know how their LLMs work.¹³ What does it mean for scholars to use a research tool whose scope of content is ill-defined and whose function is opaque even to the people who created it?

Where the content *is* known, the scope is dismaying. As Jacobs again details:

Google’s Gemini uses the entirety of the books and journals scanned into Google Books, the publicly available internet that it already scans for its search purposes, as well as all the content in its email and chat properties (“Google-Cloud specific material”). OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Anthropic’s Claude use the publicly available information of the internet . . . (including movie and TV scripts, reddit, fiction, podcast transcripts, textbooks, and so on).¹⁴

As is clear from the AI-manuscripts that we have received at the *Journal of Moral Theology*, AI platforms capture anything that resembles a given topic—including material from predatory journals, self-published article depositories, blogs in languages the authors clearly do not read or speak, and more. Thus, much of this ‘data’ is junk. It is well-established that these platforms echo back the cultural and other biases their ‘data’ contain.

Equally, much of the content has been pirated, as the court has found in the class-action lawsuit *Bartz v. Anthropic*.¹⁵ This suit covers

¹¹ We recognize that many would-be-scholars turn to the new AI-platforms because they do not have access to research databases. Many do not have positions at academic institutions or cannot afford to get behind the paywalls erected by libraries, research databases, or academic publishers. This is a problem that has arisen with the hyper-commodification of scholarly publishing in the sciences and humanities over the last two decades. This is an issue of justice and exclusion, but the solution is to address the hyper-commodification not to simply use AI as an alternative.

¹² Brianne Bell Jacobs, “Infinite Generation, Infinite Consumption: Theological Anthropology and Human Relationships with Artificial Intelligence,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 15, no. 2 (2026): 23–43.

¹³ Noor Al-Sibai, “Anthropic CEO Admits We Have No Idea How AI Works,” *Futurism*, May 4, 2025, futurism.com/anthropic-ceo-admits-ai-ignorance.

¹⁴ Jacobs, “Infinite Generation, Infinite Consumption,” 26. Google Cloud, “How Gemini for Google Cloud Works,” cloud.google.com/gemini/docs/discover/works.

¹⁵ “Bartz v. Anthropic Settlement: What Authors Need to Know,” *The Authors Guild*, April 8, 2026, authorsguild.org/advocacy/artificial-intelligence/what-authors-need-to-know-about-the-anthropic-settlement/; Margaret Attridge, “Authors, Publishers Near Final Approval of \$1.5 Billion Anthropic Copyright Settlement,” *Courthouse*

only ~500,000 of the 7 million books Anthropic consumed in creating Claude without informing authors or publishers or obtaining their consent. (In the interest of full disclosure, I am a party to this lawsuit). In an era when the ethics of cooperation with and moral appropriation of evil are established components of the discourse of moral theology, what does it mean for *ethics* scholars to use these AI platforms while blithely turning a blind eye to the ethical violations in their genesis, not to mention their ongoing development and maintenance?

Some claim that AI can help them work through large bodies of material by summarizing texts. But it is doubtful that such summaries can be trusted. The rate and magnitude of errors made by LLMs is well-established, perhaps as high as 82 percent.¹⁶ Part of the problem is that AI is syncophantic: it echoes back to people what they want to hear, distorting research findings.¹⁷ Worse, as is clear from the AI-generated manuscripts we have received, even established scholars are using these summaries without actually reading—or understanding—the original sources.

Finally, to use generative or assistive-AI to produce a manuscript violates basic canons of academic scholarship. There seems to be a perception that writing is simply the act of putting words on a page. But to write is to incarnate the thoughts of a unique, particular person. In authentic writing (academic or otherwise), each sentence captures a particular thought of a particular author. Each word is intentionally chosen to convey that thought accurately to another person. Sentences interact in a paragraph to develop each thought to a particular claim or conclusion. What is marvelous about real writing is that the structure and content of each sentence, each paragraph, each document is the creative, crafted product of a particular mind at work that seeks—relationally—to distill knowledge into something new and to communicate that thought to others.

Thus, authentic writing is hard. It is arduous. It takes time. It is not efficient. It is not linear. It is recursive, as sentences and paragraphs and whole documents are drafted and revised and rearranged and expanded and edited and shaped into something original, unique, and which hopefully advances the good of human knowledge.

News Service, July 24, 2026, courthousenews.com/authors-publishers-near-final-approval-of-1-5-billion-anthropic-copyright-settlement/.

¹⁶ Barry Elad, “LLM Hallucination Statistics 2026: AI Gets Facts Wrong up to 82% of the Time,” *SQ Magazine*, April 27, 2026, sqmagazine.co.uk/llm-hallucination-statistics/.

¹⁷ H. Sharma and M. Ruikar, “Algorithmic Syncophancy: A New Source of Systematic Distortion in AI-Driven Biomedical Research,” *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine* 72, no. 1 (March 2026): 23–27, doi.10.4103/jpgm.jpgm_919_25.

Having now waded through a slew of AI-generated manuscripts, the *Journal of Moral Theology* editorial staff has a more seasoned sense of what AI-generated manuscripts look like. Apart from particular clues (which I will not enumerate here, so as not to aid and abet those who are developing AIs to assist “content producers” to avoid AI-detection), what has struck us has been the vacuousness of AI-generated text. To the unsuspecting eye and ear, AI-gen text has a superficial plausibility—sophisticated technical terms, citations to what appear to be reputable sources (but often do not even exist), headings and subheadings, maybe even a novel concept. But as more than one unsuspecting reviewer has stated, there is something vague and unsatisfying about the material. What our editorial staff has found is that when read more carefully, AI sentences and AI paragraphs—despite their superficial sophistication—are *largely devoid of actual content and meaning*.

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Into this roiling dystopia, Pope Leo XIV’s first encyclical—*Magnifica Humanitas*—landed in May 2026.¹⁸ Much could be said about the encyclical, both appreciatively and critically. I will return to an extended analysis of the methodological implications of *Magnifica Humanitas* for the field of theological ethics in a future introduction.¹⁹ But for now, I wish to highlight four insights from the encyclical that speak directly to the problems with using AI for scholarship.

First, as noted above, using AI for scholarship embodies the technocratic paradigm par excellence, privileging “the logic of efficiency, control, and profit” (no. 92). Pope Leo’s description of the lure of this paradigm is on-point. He highlights:

the ease with which results are obtained, the impression of objectivity and the simulation of human communication. The speed and simplicity with which information, complex analyses, media content and practical assistance can be accessed undoubtedly makes life

¹⁸ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, May 15, 2026, vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html.

¹⁹ Among the many points worth exploring for Catholic moral methodology: (1) almost half of *Magnifica Humanitas* (nos. 17–89) is devoted to cementing the doctrinal centrality of the Catholic social tradition for theology, ethics, and the life of the church; and (2) the document’s repeated insight that doctrine—at least in the form of Catholic social doctrine—develops in response to new, historic realities (e.g., nos. 27, 41, 45). For substantive commentary on *Magnifica Humanities*, see the episode of “Conversations in Catholic Moral Theology” featuring Peter Casarella and Catherine Moon moderated by Alessandro Rovati, “*Magnifica Humanitas*: Leo XIV, AI, and Christian Humanism,” June 5, 2026, catholicmoraltheology.com/p/magnifica-humanitas-leo-xiv-ai-and.

easier. Yet they can also encourage excessive reliance and the search for ready-made answers and weaken personal creativity and judgment. The apparent objectivity of the responses and suggestions these systems provide can lead us to overlook the fact that they reflect the cultural assumptions of those who designed and trained them, with all their strengths and limitations. (no. 100)

A second insight is the encyclical's emphasis on limits. The use of AI-generative and assistive platforms seeks to overcome the limits inherent in scholarly research and writing. But as Pope Leo notes, our limits and finitude are not necessarily "an error to be corrected" (no. 11) or something to be devalued in favor of "a purely technical form of salvation" (no. 117). Rather, in his moving reflection on "The Limit, the Heart, and the Grandeur of the Human Person," he reminds us of a truth at the heart of the Christian tradition: that our 'limits' are that "reality through which our humanity matures and opens itself to relationship" (no. 118). Limits are, for Leo, of a piece and necessary for human flourishing: "we must remember that humanity flourishes not *despite* limitations, but often *through* them." It is through limits that we learn virtue, "a new wisdom" (no. 119). Although in this reflection Leo focuses on the deep and tragic limits that plague the human condition, his insights are equally applicable to the work of scholarship, as it is only via our limits, and often the suffering that they bring, that scholars learn the intellectual virtues and that truly human scholarship is produced (no. 120).

The intellectual virtues are inextricably interwoven with truth.²⁰ *Magnifica Humanitas* identifies truth as one area in which AI is currently producing "concrete, and at times tragic, consequences." The encyclical locates truth as an essential component of the common good (nos. 132-146). It focuses on how AI's undermining of truth threatens particularly democracy and education. But its insights are equally important for academic scholarship. As noted earlier, the use of AI "blur[s] the boundaries between truth and falsehood, mixing facts with opinions" (no. 132). Instead, "the truth of facts has a rational dimension, as it requires verification, cross-checking of sources and responsible argumentation. Moreover, it is deeply relational, built through bonds of trust and shared practices, as well as an honest exchange with others and with the world. Only the shared pursuit of the veracity of facts, perceived as a common good, can provide a solid foundation for just communication" (no. 132). On the political level, indifference to the truth—as well as to the canons for pursuing it—lead "slowly but surely, to a descent into totalitarianism." Quoting Hannah Arendt, Pope Leo reminds us that "the ideal subjects of such

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 57.

regimes are not so much those who are ideologically convinced but rather ‘people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction. . . and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist.’” (no. 134). Likewise, his thoughts on education can be applied analogously:

[Scholarly research] by contrast, is a long journey requiring patience, and therefore needs time for development and for engagement with reality beyond appearances. This is a fundamental issue because every technology shapes those who use it. . . . The speed and ease with which answers or summaries can be obtained risk extinguishing the desire to ask questions, which is a process that bears fruit only over time. As Plato wrote, the deepest and most important things are learned only after much time and effort, by engaging in discussion with others, “striking upon” ideas and experiences together like flint until the spark of understanding is kindled within us. . . . Without careful attention, [a scholarly] system lacking in a love for truth may emerge, in which an incessant flow of information replaces the essential exercise of research, reflection and discernment. As knowledge becomes increasingly fragmented, it becomes difficult to grasp reality as a whole, to ask profound questions about meaning, or to develop authentic, critical and creative thought. Many educators already report signs of dehumanization, where people may “know many things” but struggle to find direction in their lives, partly due to an inability to connect information with deeper knowledge or maintain a sense of purpose. A genuinely healthy attitude is needed, requiring rhythms that incorporate silence, in-depth study, reading and judicious analysis, for without these elements inner freedom may be compromised. (nos. 140, 146)

This extended paragraph brings us to the final point: not only that these technologies are not neutral (no. 9), but that “every technology shapes those who use it.” Regardless of the end to which one might put them, AI-platforms, in their very use, shape us. To take a mundane example, consider the microwave oven. My family was an early adopter of what, at the time, was a dazzling, space-age technology. And I am as addicted to my microwave as the next American. But though mostly used for benign (easy clean up!) or even good purposes (feeding the hungry, less work for women), as William Moreno details, the microwave “reshaped culinary practices, changed social dynamics, influenced health, and even transformed the economy.”²¹ Apart from efficiency, most of these impacts—seen now in the long run—have been negative for cuisine, nutrition, community and relationality, health and microplastics, the environment, and more.

²¹ William Moreno, “The Microwave Revolution: Transforming Food and Society,” *Microwaves Hub*, n.d., microwaveshub.com/how-has-the-microwave-impacted-society/.

Thus, it is not simply that AI-platforms can be ‘used for good or for ill.’ The minute we engage with them, they begin to change us and they begin to change the ecosystem of the basic human goods inherent in education, academic scholarship, and the pursuit of truth. Ragan Sutterfield reminded me recently of Wendell Berry’s 1987 essay “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer.”²² Scholars of theological ethics may be too late with regard to the computer, but we would be advised to heed Berry’s wisdom in the face of AI.

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Against the nihilistic dystopia being created by AI, wherein lies hope? For Pope Leo it is in reaffirming the *magnificence* of humanity, in re-centering the human person, and in celebrating and privileging the generative grace of authentic human relationships. Fortuitously, this issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology* provides a series of articles which exemplify what the magnificence of humanity—or, better, the magnificence of Christian witness—looks like in the face of social and cultural forces which have and continue to dehumanize people in concrete times and places.²³ Four of the articles lifts up a person who distinctively and powerfully embodied God’s generative grace by entering into relationship with those suffering under “the moral corruption of our limitations as created beings—namely the evil that clearly agitates the human heart—ruins society and life, at times reaching extreme forms of inhumanity.”²⁴

But first, the issue opens with Brianne Bell Jacobs’ article, “Infinite Generation, Infinite Consumption: Theological Anthropology and Human Relationships with Artificial Intelligence.” She focuses on the myriad ways people are turning to AI chatbots such as Claude, Chat GPT, and Google Gemini instead of therapists, friends, companions, even (apparently) lovers.²⁵ From her careful theological assessment of these platforms as relational surrogates, she draws no milquetoast both-and conclusion. It is not a matter of ‘using AI wisely,’ as we so often hear. She makes clear that AI-human ‘relationships’ are not only empty simulacra; worse, she argues, they consume us.

²² Wendell Berry, “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer,” *Harper’s* 277 (1987), jesusradicals.com/uploads/2/6/3/8/26388433/computer.pdf; and Ragan Suterfield, “Why I Will Not . . .,” *Substack: The Way We Practice*, July 6, 2026, thewayweppractice.substack.com/p/why-i-will-not.

²³ I say fortuitously because our January and July issues are open issues, composed simply of the articles that have been submitted for consideration through the journal’s submission portal. The ‘themes’ of our January and July issues emerge organically, not by design.

²⁴ Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 121.

²⁵ See also Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, no. 100.

While AI is purported to be infinitely generative, I argue it is infinitely consuming. In its simulation and predictive reproduction of human work, it consumes human labor, art, writing, and problem solving. It consumes natural resources from rocks to water to energy. My thesis, via Rahner, is that as a relationship partner, it also consumes its human users. I argue a relationship with an AI chatbot reflects our own desire and knowledge turned back in on ourselves, like a snake eating its tail, ruining the very possibility of human becoming. A relationship with an AI functions like Augustine's definition of sin, *homo incurvatus in se*, humanity curving back in on itself. . . . Because an AI chatbot is . . . a limited and often sycophantic program oriented back toward its user, human-AI relationships consume the possibility of that generation and therefore the very possibility of human becoming.²⁶

Jacobs' argument rests on two premises. The first is a careful and critical description of how LLMs—the AI application utilized for 'relational' and other purposes—work. She concludes that AI programs, far from being an 'other' with whom one can enter into a relationship, are essentially narcissistic mirrors that recursively represent ourselves to ourselves, what we might call (to coin a phrase) an *imago sui*. Having clarified the nature of AI, Jacobs turns to her second premise: a careful and theological description of the human person, whom the Christian tradition affirms to be the *imago Dei*. Insofar as God is, in se, the endless ground of other-oriented relationality, it is only as the *imago Dei* meets the *imago Dei* that true relationship, true infinite generativity, is incarnated.²⁷

Emmanuel Ojeifo provides a first exemplar of what this graced generativity looks like in his essay "Christophe Munzehirwa and Abundant Life in Africa: Witnessing to an African Theological

²⁶ Jacobs, "Infinite Generation, Infinite Consumption," 24.

²⁷ As an aside, to posit the possibility of human 'relationships' with AI requires that we erroneously anthropomorphize AIs.²⁷ Additionally, much of the AI discourse is premised on a subtle—or not so subtle—deification of AI. As Gregory Kaebnick reports, for AI 'thought leaders': "AI is becoming a God. AI 'will achieve the outcomes that many religions claim their deities would be able to achieve. . . . It displaces God,' and if it is not literally God, it is at least 'something analogous to the Second Coming' (Gregory E. Kaebnick, "If AI Replaced God, What Could We Demand of It?" *Hastings Bioethics Forum*, May 28, 2026, thehastingscenter.org/if-ai-replaced-god-what-could-we-demand-of-it/; nytimes.com/2026/05/26/technology/pope-leo-ai-religion.html). This, of course, is a Second Coming without the First, a god of sheer power that is "uncontrollable"—that "culture of power" Leo XIV calls out (*Magnifica Humanitas*, nos. 182–228). The theological heresies rife within the AI discourse are ripe for analysis. But in the short term it is clear that the new AI, fueled by the post-humanist goal of superceding the human, seeks to consume not only humans; it equally boasts of consuming God.

Ethic.”²⁸ Ojeifo brings to the attention of *Journal of Moral Theology* readers Congolese archbishop of Bukavu and Servant of God Monsignor Christophe Munzihirwa, SJ. Munzihirwa was martyred in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide as he sought to advocate for refugees and others suffering great distress. Ojeifo reads the specifics of the archbishop’s life and praxis through the social, economic, and political distress endemic across post-colonial Africa, particularly that of the “minerally wealthy yet most despoiled country” of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In so doing, he enters into critical engagement with a leading theological category in African Christianity, that of “abundant life.” The “abundant life” framework, pioneered by Laurenti Magesa and furthered by theologians such as Stan Chu Ilo and Simon Mary Asese Ahiokhai, is both deeply African and deeply relational, “an understanding of and approach to life characterized by the integration of the natural/physical, human, and spiritual dimension of existence, which makes the health, well-being, and harmonious coexistence of both the human and non-human creation possible.”²⁹ On a practical level, ‘abundant life’ in Africa often seems an elusive myth. Yet, for Ojeifo, it is equally a theological, pastoral, and moral imperative. This concept of abundant life resonates with Jacobs’ concept of infinite generativity.

A second exemplar comes from down under. In his article “Mary Berchmans Daly: Moral Exemplar for Leaders in Catholic Health Care,” Daniel J. Fleming introduces *Journal of Moral Theology* readers to another extraordinary but little-known leader who pioneered Catholic health care in Australia.³⁰ Mother Berchmans founded the historic St. Vincent Hospital—now the twelve hospital St. Vincent’s Health Australia. The Sisters of Charity’s fourth vow—“service to the poor”—lay at the center of her work. “Recognizing the face of God in those in need,” Berchmans understood herself as embodying the *imago Dei* to the *imago Dei*.³¹ The result was not just care for the sick or a unidirectional ‘charity.’ Rather it was a generative solidarity that bore the fruit of ‘abundant life’ in the 1890s and continues to today. This abundance is captured in Fleming’s description of her vision:

She imagined a hospital that was large, equipped with the latest technology, and beautiful in design. Its services would be available to any person who needed them. Those who could not pay would receive care for nothing, and those who could were asked to subscribe to the

²⁸ Emmanuel Ojeifo, “Christophe Munzihirwa and Abundant Life in Africa: Witnessing to an African Theological Ethic,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 15, no. 2 (2026): 44–69.

²⁹ Ojeifo, “Christophe Munzihirwa and Abundant Life in Africa,” 44.

³⁰ Daniel J. Fleming, “Mary Berchmans Daly: Moral Exemplar for Leaders in Catholic Health Care,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 15, no. 2 (2026): 70–94.

³¹ Fleming, “Mary Berchmans Daly,” 82.

hospital or pay their fees in full—an early form of a mixed public and private health system. As her vision expanded, it included a dedicated private hospital, Mt. St. Evin's. This facility provided for doctors to receive money for services from patients who could pay and a profit margin for St. Vincent's which, in turn, enabled the hospital to continue to serve the poor in the public hospital for free.

The connection between science and charity was central to her vision. Berchmans saw that the hospital's capacity to serve unmet need would expand through the skill of the best medical and nursing practitioners, and she actively worked to build trust with those who excelled in both fields. Given her background in education, Berchmans saw the hospital in expansive terms. It was at once a response to immediate health care need as well as an institution which could form doctors and nurses to shape the future of health care.³²

Here beauty, science, healing, education, professionalism all emerge from a matrix of deep relationality centered on the poor. For Fleming via Linda Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory, Berchman's life and work—especially via her attention to fostering relationships with patients, the poor, practitioners, and policy makers—provides a normative model for leaders in contemporary Catholic health care institutions.

Jens Mueller brings a third exemplar in "Bearing Witness: Thomas Merton, Truth-Telling, and Racial Justice."³³ Most know Merton as a contemplative and mystic. Mueller expands on emerging scholarship on Merton's engagement with racial justice and the horrors of Jim Crow racism in the 1950s and 1960s in order to develop "a Christian account of truth-telling as a relational and communal practice rooted in self-examination, encounter, and responsibility."³⁴ He begins by highlighting the ways in which various forms of mendacity and the elision of truth are required to sustain the social construct of race. He then turns to an account of truth-telling as a Christian practice and "form of solidarity that seeks justice and healing for those most affected by injustice," particularly the injustices of structural racism.³⁵ For Mueller, Merton provides not an heroic exemplar but a guide for what the conversion to becoming a truth-teller vis a vis racism entails. Certainly, it requires prayer and contemplation, by which God orients us toward the truth. As importantly, it required personal encounters—for Merton, it was encounters with people in Harlem at Catherine de

³² Fleming, "Mary Berchmans Daly," 80.

³³ Jens Mueller, "Bearing Witness: Thomas Merton, Truth-Telling, and Racial Justice," *Journal of Moral Theology* 15, no. 2 (2026): 95–119.

³⁴ Mueller, "Bearing Witness: Thomas Merton, Truth-Telling, and Racial Justice," 95.

³⁵ Mueller, "Bearing Witness," 120.

Heuck's Friendship House, his interactions with African-American authors and correspondents (such as Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, Fr. August Thompson, and Robert Lawrence Williams), and his direct engagement with concrete cases of racial injustice.

Immersion experiences have become a ubiquitous presence on the campuses of Catholic colleges and universities. They are often hailed as exemplars of authentic encounter, where a first-world *imago Dei* meets the *imago Dei* in the poor. In her article, "Negotiating Authenticity: Immersion Experiences as Compromised Vehicles for Francis' 'Authentic Encounters,'" Sara Williams challenges this simplistic reading.³⁶ Be they peopled by college students or health care workers, the practice of immersion experiences, insofar as they are structured by and perpetuate inequitable power relations (including market logics and ideologies of whiteness and coloniality), cuts against idealized rhetoric of "authentic encounter." If, per *Magnifica Humanitas*, Jacobs, and others, authentic encounters between persons is where the infinite generativity of God is incarnate, what makes an encounter authentic—or works against it? Williams carefully details Pope Francis' use and development of the concept of authentic encounter which entails three components of *mutuality*, *recognition*, and *responsibility*. She shows how immersion experiences, as typically practiced, work against these ideals—and may even exacerbate damage to them. It is only by identifying their "characteristic damages" that we can begin to imagine ways that such practices might be repaired, specifically via "long-term relationships of trust." As she notes, "such repairs will help us to move past vague feelings of compassion tied to constructs of a generic other, to responsible action in solidarity with complex pluri-dimensional human beings whose inequitable situation in shared systems of power calls us to response."³⁷

Our closing article adds a final exemplar to the roster while also introducing a new feature of the *Journal of Moral Theology*. As faithful readers know, the *Journal* has published two special issues in Spanish.³⁸ Going forward, each of our open issues (January and July) will include a translation of one of the articles from the Spanish issues. The first of these articles is Juan Miguel Espinoza Portocarrero's

³⁶ Sara A. Williams "Negotiating Authenticity: Immersion Experiences as Compromised Vehicles for Francis' 'Authentic Encounters,'" *Journal of Moral Theology* 15, no. 2 (2026): 120–147.

³⁷ Williams "Negotiating Authenticity," 146.

³⁸ See: "Covid-19 y Ética Teológica en América Latina," *Journal of Moral Theology* 10, Special Issue 2 (2021): jmt.scholasticahq.com/issue/3259-vol-10-issue-si2-2021, and "Abya Yala: una teología moral latinoamericana y caribeña con los pies en la tierra," *Journal of Moral Theology* 14, Special Issue 2 (2025): jmt.scholasticahq.com/issue/13016-vol-14-issue-si2-2025.

tribute to the late Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP. In “The Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Its Echoes in Contemporary Theological Ethics,” Espinoza Portocarrero analyzes two original and groundbreaking themes in the work of this extraordinary figure.³⁹ The first is the intersection between Christian salvation and the human experience of liberation from political and socioeconomic oppression—i.e., salvation as an intra-historical reality. The second is Gutiérrez’ pioneering insight to understand suffering as a central theological inquiry. Along with other liberation theologians, the crucible of Gutiérrez’ visionary work was his participation in the lives of the poor, knowing the concrete faces of the oppressed, and coming to know the historical and structural causes that foster social injustice from the underside. The generativity of this locus continues to reverberate throughout Catholic theology—most recently in *Magnifica Humanitas*.

Taken together Jacobs, Ojeifo, Fleming, Mueller, Williams, and Espinoza Portocarrero bear magnificent witness to the extraordinary beauty of God’s generativity that is incarnated in the interpersonal encounters between those caught in the painful places of the world and those who accompany them. As AI promises to continue to consume humanity and the basic goods of human flourishing in so many different ways, these authors and the figures they highlight model what the abundance of God’s grace looks like when *imago Dei* meets *imago Dei*. 

³⁹ Juan Miguel Espinoza Portocarrero, “The Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Its Echoes in Contemporary Theological Ethics,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 15, no. 2 (2026): 148–158. This article was originally published as Juan Miguel Espinoza Portocarrero, “La teología de Gustavo Gutiérrez y sus ecos en la ética teológica contemporánea,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 14, Special Issue 2 (2025): 157–167, doi.org/10.55476/001c.146538.