

Monastic Scribe 101 - February 27, 2026

AI AM IN YOUR MIDST

Recently we had a talk on artificial intelligence here at the abbey. A professor from Salve Regina University, Sean O'Callaghan, described what AI is all about, its advantages and disadvantages. I attended out of mild interest to find out more about what this new phenomenon was all about. At my age I had thought this was something new, still developing, and would be beyond my field of activity in the future of the remaining years of my life. But intellectual curiosity did prompt me to learn what I could.

To my surprise I learned this was not that new at all. It has been in the works for a good time. There are AI data centers all over the country. Business groups are rushing to develop them and are using high levels of energy and fuel to support them. Business of course, is interested in profits. But AI is being used in the scientific, intellectual and educational domains for the needs of our world and all of us humans. I am convinced that AI is another human development of God's creation and should not be feared. But, like sex, it is a powerful gift of God that can be misused as well as used for our good.

Pope Leo has been concerned about AI and the dignity of human work from the earliest days of his papacy. On Ash Wednesday he addressed priests of the Diocese of Rome. In that talk he urged the priests not to use artificial intelligence to write their homilies or to seek "likes" on social media platforms like TikTok. He told them to use their brains, to exercise their intelligence so as not to lose its capacity to think. I imagine that applies to all of us!

Personally I have become newly aware of how AI is used in everyday applications. When I order a book from Amazon or get a movie from Netflix, I am being profiled by a machine that will try to get me buy other like products. Facebook has also been a convenient vehicle for me to be aware of what my nephews and nieces, and their children, are doing! But the anti-church, anti-Vatican postings that I find there are disturbing. For instance, for some time now they have repeated that Pope Leo has done away with a number of Catholic beliefs and that half of the College of Cardinals are in uproar with him. It is all pure fabrication.

Phony AI photos are also used to promote some fallacious events.

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Currently this social media is presenting a simplified and very inadequate picture of the differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the schismatic Society of Pius X priests. They boil everything down to a difference over Latin. But the Society has refused to accept the authentic teachings of the Church such as rejection of anti-Semitism. This is causing some real damage to believers.

The awareness of the power of AI must be seen in the same way that all modern technology affects us. Our speaker, as a college professor, believes that attention deficit is a product of dependence on phones, social media, and like devices. The inability to think, to write, to socialize (even to go on dates and court someone) are all concomitants of being wedded to social media. He also has observed that college students are often relieved to come to a classroom where there are no such devices allowed and they all have to indulge in personal, human interactions. He also takes delight in going to a very noisy cafeteria at lunch time when all the students are talking to one another.

What do you and I do about this? If you use many technical devices, observe a Sabbath from them once a week, for a day, or even for an hour.

Stop talking to Alexa and take the time to look things up. (I refuse to have her in my room!). Don't take out your smart phone during a meal to look up something you are talking about. Struggle with it! Defend the liberal arts programs and take part in them. Literature, history, as well as religion, are all part of our mind's maturation.

As the historian David McCullough used to say, "Read, Read, Read!"

There are social effects to using AI. The AI chief at Microsoft said recently that all white collar jobs using computers will be wiped out in the next 12 to 18 months - accountants, project managers, marketing staff. Not everyone agrees, thank God!

I repeat that AI can be a blessing. AI has proved to be beneficial to the mission of religion, spirituality and morality; to society and relationships; to education; to politics; to media, entertainment and the arts; to economics and business; to law and the judiciary; to science and technology; to medicine and health; to military and defense; to foreign relations; to transportation; to the environment. AI is a great tool to serve humankind in making a better world but it requires some

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intelligent insights and planning. We all need to be aware of what is happening.

I am interested in what you think. You can drop me a line at:

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.