



## Summer Visiting

This Summer, Fr Brendan and Fr John received visits from some parish members. The visit to Fr Brendan at the beginning of August found him in good health and recovering well from his stroke in 2022. He is pictured (left) in the garden of the home where he now lives in Bury St Edmunds.

Fr John (pictured right) was visited in August ahead of his retirement from Felixstowe Parish on 8<sup>th</sup> September. He was very much looking forward to his retirement.



# Parish Magazine of the Sacred Heart & St Margaret Mary

## The Shack

... from humble beginnings

September 2024

Issue No. 8

[www.sacredheartdereham.org.uk](http://www.sacredheartdereham.org.uk)

### Picture Gallery



Altar Servers' Fun Day Out  
31<sup>st</sup> August 2024



Yard Sale  
14<sup>th</sup> September 2024



### Pets Corner – A new addition to our Picture Gallery!

Send us your favourite / humorous pictures of your pets, with their name for inclusion in future issues. *If you'd like to have a professional photograph of your pet taken, Jenny can provide a professional service. Contact Jenny for details at email: [jennyfotos@aol.co.uk](mailto:jennyfotos@aol.co.uk).*

Jenny's own dog, Shane, is pictured on the left.



### In this Issue

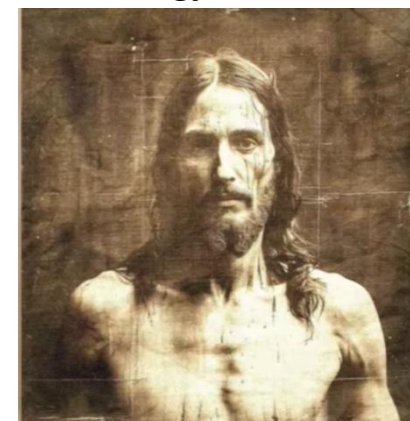
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Community of Our Lady of Walsingham  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 14 July 2024  
The Sisters with Bishop Alan Williams

### The Shepherd's Corner

### Ethical AI in the Theological World: A Reflection on the Crossroads of Faith and Technology



AI-generated image from the Shroud of Turin

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to reshape society, its ethical implications have prompted important conversations across various fields, including theology. The rise of AI has sparked debates about the nature of humanity, free will, and the role of ethics in an increasingly automated world. For religious communities and theologians, the challenge is not only to adapt to these advancements but to critically engage with AI's impact through a lens of faith and morality.

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## Theological Anthropology and AI

At the heart of theological inquiry is the question of what it means to be human. In Christian theology, man is seen as made in the "imago Dei" —the image of God. This unique status implies a distinct dignity, freedom, and moral responsibility. AI, which mimics and generates certain aspects of human reasoning and creativity, pushes theologians to reconsider the boundaries between humans and machines. Can machines possess qualities like creativity, empathy, or moral judgment? And if so, what does that mean for our understanding of the soul, personhood, and God?

From a theological perspective, AI challenges the traditional distinction between humans and the rest of creation. If machines become increasingly autonomous and capable of making decisions, some might wonder whether they could ever possess a "spirit" or consciousness. Most religious traditions would argue that, regardless of AI's sophistication, machines lack the intrinsic soul that is foundational to human identity. However, the capabilities of AI require deeper reflection on the human responsibility to guide and govern such technologies ethically.

## Moral Agency and AI

A key ethical concern is AI's growing role in making decisions that affect human lives —whether in healthcare, finance, or even warfare. As AI systems evolve, they increasingly make autonomous decisions that have moral consequences. This raises the question: who is morally accountable when AI makes decisions that lead to harm or injustice?

Theological ethics emphasizes the moral agency of individuals and communities. Humans, gifted with free will, are responsible for their actions. However, when algorithms are entrusted with decision-making, it blurs the line between human and machine responsibility. Religious traditions might argue that, since AI lacks free will, the onus of moral responsibility lies with the human creators and operators of these systems. This ethical mandate calls for greater scrutiny, regulation, and accountability in the development and use of AI technologies.

## The AI "God Complex"

One particularly sensitive issue is the potential for AI to assume roles that encroach on domains traditionally reserved for God. AI's predictive capabilities in health, psychology, or even personal decision-making can foster a "God complex," where human reliance on AI becomes excessive, bordering on reverence. In the theological world, this raises concerns about idolatry and the overreach of technology.

For example, can AI systems that predict future behaviour or outcomes be seen as infringing upon the God's role of providence? Is reliance on AI for moral or spiritual guidance compatible with religious teachings about divine wisdom and discernment? Theological reflections caution against placing AI in positions that might diminish human reliance on God, prayer, and discernment.

## AI, Justice, and the Common Good

Most major religious traditions advocate for justice, compassion, and the common good. From a theological standpoint, any ethical AI must align with these values. This means ensuring that AI systems do not perpetuate bias, inequality, or exploitation. Unfortunately, many current AI models have been shown to reproduce the biases of their human creators, exacerbating discrimination and marginalization.

Theological ethics demands a technology that serves the marginalized and protects the vulnerable. Religious communities can play a role in advocating for AI that promotes equity, inclusion, and human dignity. Moreover, theological traditions emphasize that technological progress must never come at the expense of the common good and human integrity. This echoes Pope Francis' call for ethical governance of technology, reminding us that "technology, when detached from ethics, can produce more harm than good."

## A Call for Discernment

Ultimately, the intersection of ethical AI and theology requires discernment. As AI continues to develop, religious communities are uniquely positioned to offer wisdom on how to use this powerful tool for good. This may involve engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue between theologians, ethicists, and technologists, exploring the potential for AI to serve humanity without undermining core theological principles.

The future of AI should not just be shaped by efficiency or innovation, but by a deep commitment to human flourishing and ethical integrity. Faith traditions remind us that technology must serve humanity, not the other way around. As AI advances, theologians, religious leaders, and faith-based institutions can provide valuable insights into how to align this new frontier with values of justice, compassion, and moral accountability.

In an era of rapid technological change, theological reflection on ethical AI is not just timely—it is essential. It invites us to ask profound questions about our relationship with technology, our responsibility to one another, and our ultimate purpose in a world, as designed by God for his greater glory, where the lines between human and machine are increasingly blurred.

## Parish Calendar 2024 - Remaining Parish events for this year:

- Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October - Parish General Meeting at 1830 in the Emmaus Room
- Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> October – SVP Parish Mass for the Sick at 1330, followed by lunch.
- Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> November – Parish Wednesday Scripture Study: *James and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* by Brian Pitre. Meeting in the Emmaus Room at 1730.
- Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> December – Parish Christmas Party at Yaxham Hall, from 12 Noon.
- Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> December: St Stephen – Parish Altar Servers' Mass at 1030.

## First Religious Profession of Mairead Perkins

The Parish was delighted to join the Sisters of the Community of Our Lady of Walsingham on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024 for the First Religious Profession of Mairead Perkins at the Vigil Mass on the Solemnity of Our Lady of Walsingham. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Mark Hackeson, who was joined by Fr Paulinus and was a joyous occasion. After the Mass, those present were invited to join the Sisters for a celebratory supper at the convent.



## Feedback

We would really like to encourage more contributions, especially from parish groups along with any photos of parish events. Any ideas for regular features would also be welcomed. We look forward to your feedback and articles for future editions.