

It's Up to You 2025 (Week 4) - How should Christians view artificial intelligence?

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. Yesterday's question was "How should a Christian view A.I. (artificial intelligence)?" Our goal in answering this wasn't to explain A.I. but instead was helping us use our Christian moral principles to navigate this complicated issue (in a very complicated world).



2. A.I. is everywhere in the world - from social media to search engines to intelligent vehicles to chatbots (LLMs or Large Language Models) to self-editing and writing software. All current A.I. is weak A.I., not strong or "AGI" (conscious, free, self-choosing, unbound). As Oxford mathematician and Christian apologist John Lennox puts it, "The word 'artificial' in 'artificial intelligence' is real. AI is really artificial." And on the whole, American Christians are more pessimistic about A.I. than the general public: half of American Christians think A.I. will be bad for Christians, and more than that will be disappointed if their church uses it. (That last tidbit illustrates that people may not understand how much they already use A.I. everyday.)

3. We wanted to use two Christian principles yesterday to help us begin to think through A.I., the first of which is the Latin expression "Cui bono" - "who benefits," which then also brings into focus who doesn't benefit as well. Our Presbyterian creeds summarize the Judeo-Christian and scriptural priority put on hearing, supporting, empowering, and uplifting those who don't benefit. The Confession of 1967, 9.47c says it this way: "The reconciliation of humankind through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples." The Belhar Confession, section 4, expands on that this way: "We believe that God, in a world full of injustice and hostility, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged...And we believe that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others."

4. So who benefits from A.I. and who doesn't? Take the trucking industry as an example: millions of mechanics and drivers are currently employed in this two trillion dollar industry but many project that all this will be turned on its head by self-driving vehicles. So who will benefit from that shift? Owners and shareholders, in the form of increased profit, or all those who will be losing their jobs? For Christians, we'd want champion things like reskilling, profit-sharing, generous replacement and severance pay, and certainly fill in the gaps where companies will not.

5. Here are a few more "cui bono?" A.I. issues (and there are many more than this): a) Right now, any output from a chatbot like ChatGPT is yours, but, that said, we have no idea where the chatbot pulled its answer from, i.e. did it use copyrighted material in its response?; b) Who is benefiting from the engines of social media prioritizing more sensational and divisive content and who doesn't, or, more basically, who benefits from social media itself and who doesn't? (In the latter case, it certainly isn't the developing brains of kids and teens).

6. One last "Cui bono?" issue - will the planet benefit or not from A.I.? Building and maintaining an LLM like ChatGPT produces as many carbon emissions as driving a truck thousands upon thousands of miles. Or, every time you use an LLM, you're using the equivalent of a bottle of water (to keep it cool). One more - could the vast amounts of energy needed to run our more and more powerful A.I. systems be used elsewhere better? That is, who isn't benefiting from the prioritization of A.I. in our energy use?

7. Our second Christian principle for the day is a basic and unfortunate human tendency, part of what "sin" means - "Homo incurvatus in se," that is, "Mankind curves in around itself." The great Reformer Martin Luther made this concept famous; here's how he described it, "Our nature is so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them as an act of self-righteousness and hypocrisy...but it also fails to realize that it wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake." The ancient myth of Narcissus, who becomes mesmerized by his own reflection in a pond, is about this human trait, and, as theologian David Bentley Hart notes, in the digital age we have endlessly repeating images of self to enrapture us.

8. Rev. Dr. Andy Morgan, from whom Pastor Chris took a seminar on Christianity and A.I., offered this short yet layered quote: "A.I. is not neutral; it's us." What's that mean? First, no A.I. system can ever be without bias or flaw because human beings made it. In fact, we should expect A.I. to replicate them. The current most powerful A.I. forms right now cannot work outside of their programmed intent...but therein lies the problem...what's the programmed intent? In this regard, A.I. is curving us around the purposes and whims of those who create it.

9. But, as Dr. Morgan pointed out, A.I., especially chatbots and search engines, do NOT represent all of us. In fact, current A.I. is representative of only certain segments of society and the world: the educated, those who are digitally-connected, those who are white and Western (European and North American), etc. Who's left out? Those in lower socioeconomic classes, the digitally-disconnected, many less technologically-advanced cultures around the world, and so on. So A.I. is currently curving some parts of society and humanity around itself, and allowing them to believe they represent all of us.

10. The most optimistic voices about A.I. can almost sound theological or worshipful in their claims about it. For the biblically-informed it should ring familiar - the desire to be free of our creaturely limitations and rival or usurp God has been around since the opening pages of scripture ([Genesis 3.5](#)) and the Tower of Babel story ([Genesis 11](#)). To cite John Lennox again, he observes that a) things like living forever or perpetual, guaranteed happiness are not recent human desires, but ancient, and b) A.I. for some is no less than the newest idol intended to replace God or a god of our own making. This kind of thinking or hoping about A.I. may well be "homo incurvatus in se" in its most exaggerated expression.

11. Ilia Delio, a theologian at Villanova U., offers up how Christians might embrace a more benevolent, intentional use of A.I. within the bounds of their principles and worldview: "It is time to take the reins of our own evolution in hand and ask where we are going as a species and if we are going together. Despite our incredible discoveries in technology, we still lack a sense of belonging together...In the words of Father Thomas Berry, "We will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will perish together in the desert." Technology like A.I. can improve our lives, but more so, it can move us toward new wholeness, but only if at its center is compassionate love."

A Prayer for The Week

This is one of the prayers Pastor Chris created using ChatGPT and then edited - thanks to this well-known LLM for giving us such a great prayer...

"Lord God, thank You for entrusting us with Your beloved created order. This includes our own human capacity to create, explore, learn, and develop. Help us especially to be good stewards of every technology, small and large, that saturates our world. May we use it not for selfish gain or harm, but to build up, to heal, to educate, and to bring light into the world. Give us wisdom to discern what is best not just for ourselves but for all, courage to stand against the misuse of human intelligence and technology, and humility to recognize our responsibility in shaping a better, more compassionate world, both physical and digital. May our every innovation reflect Your truth, love, and justice, amen."

More This Week

- As you navigate your week in our very complicated world, try to view everything through those two Christian interpretive lenses: 1) Who is benefiting, even if it's not named, and who isn't?; and 2) How is the human tendency to "curve in around ourselves" being seen or influencing things here?

- Pastor Chris mentioned that he took a two hour seminar from Rev. Dr. Andy Morgan on Christianity and A.I. Here's a free one hour version of the same seminar, done by Dr. Morgan for an Episcopal diocese. It's a basic, easy to understand introduction to what A.I. is and some of the challenges it represents: [Sunday Forum: AI, Faith, and You](#)

- Here are a couple of helpful articles on how Christians should come at A.I., none overly dense or difficult:

- [AI Will Shape Your Soul - Christianity Today](#)
- [What Does AI Mean for the Church and Society? - BioLogos](#)
- [Artificial Intelligence and Its Impacts on Humanity - C.S. Lewis Institute](#)

- A couple of book suggestions, both manageable and not too technical:

- [AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference: Narayanan, Arvind, Kapoor, Sayash](#)
- [2084 and the AI Revolution, Updated and Expanded Edition: How Artificial Intelligence Informs Our Future: Lennox, John C.](#)

- A great documentary on the effect of social media on the human brain, especially adolescents (the 1st link is the trailer; the 2nd is a long-form interview with those who are behind it):

- [The Social Dilemma | Official Trailer | Netflix](#)
- [Netflix's The Social Dilemma: Filmmaker and Tech Experts in Conversation with Katie Couric](#)

- Some of Pastor Chris' favorite movies about A.I.: Blade Runner (1982), The Matrix (1999), I Robot (2004), Her (2013), and Ex Machina (2014)