

KAIROS

GLOBAL



AWESOME OR
WORRISOME?

VARIOUS AUTHORS

ALSO ↓

From Darkness
of Abortion to
Hope in Christ

■ PRANALI VADGAONKAR

Life
Questions

■ JOSEPH SEBASTIAN PhD



Jesus Youth

A Missionary Movement At The Service Of The Church



PENTECOST PRAYER



Spirit of Christ, stir me; Spirit of Christ, move me; Spirit of Christ, fill me; Spirit of Christ, seal me. Consecrate in me Your Heart and Will, O Heavenly Father. Create in me a fountain of virtues. Seal my soul as Your own, that Your reflection in me may be a light for all to see. Amen.

EDITOR'S ROOM

SIJO THOMAS

X @readkairos



THE CHURCH IS NOT CALLED TO FEAR TECHNOLOGY, BUT TO USE IT WISELY ENSURING THAT IT SERVES HUMAN DIGNITY AND GOD'S TRUTH.

Discerning the Future with the Mind of Christ

A phone call. A trembling voice. 'Mom, I've been kidnapped... please send money.' Within minutes, a frightened mother transferred a large sum, only to discover later that her daughter was safe. The voice was fake, generated using an Artificial Intelligence tool.

This real incident, which went viral last year, reveals how rapidly AI is reshaping our world. What once seemed futuristic is now part of everyday life. AI writes, speaks, creates images, predicts behaviour, and even imitates human emotion. It can assist doctors, support students, and simplify work. In many ways, AI is truly *awesome*.

Yet it also raises serious questions. If AI can imitate voices, what happens to trust? If it generates information instantly, what happens to the truth? If machines begin to influence decisions, what happens to human freedom?

The Catholic Church does not reject technology. Human creativity itself reflects God's image: *God created mankind in his image* (Genesis 1:27).

AI, like all technology, is a gift – but every gift requires discernment.

The question is not whether AI is good or bad, rather are we shaping technology, or is it shaping us? Scripture reminds us: *Test everything; hold fast to what is good* (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

When we rely too heavily on machines for thinking, creativity, or relationships, we risk losing what makes us human – the ability to reflect, to choose, to love, and to encounter God.

AI can write prayers, but it cannot pray. AI can speak about love, but it cannot sacrifice. Only the human heart, touched by grace, can do that. Jesus asks a question that echoes powerfully in this age: *What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?* (Mark 8:36).

At the same time, AI holds immense potential. It can support evangelisation, education, and social good. The Church is not called to fear technology, but to use it wisely ensuring that it serves human dignity and God's truth.

The responsibility lies not in the machine, but in us.

Young people today are growing up in an AI-shaped world. More than ever, they need not just technical skills, but spiritual clarity. We must form not just smart users, but wise disciples.

Let us not become passive consumers of technology, but intentional followers of Christ. Let us use AI as a tool, not a master. Let us seek truth beyond algorithms, and relationships beyond screens. Let us remain rooted in prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments.

In a world shaped by Artificial Intelligence, may we remain guided by Divine Wisdom – because no machine can replace the human soul created by God.

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Test everything; hold fast to what is good
1 Thessalonians 5:21

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ASK



FR. BITAJU

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→ What's your take on permissive and perfect will?

The concepts of 'permissive will' and 'perfect will' are theological distinctions often discussed in relation to God's sovereignty and human free will.

Perfect Will: God's perfect will refers to His divine plan and intention for creation, which aligns with His goodness and ultimate purpose. This is the ideal situation that God desires for humanity, characterised by holiness, love, and communion with Him. In this context, God's perfect will encompasses His commandments and teaching, which guide humanity toward the fullness of life and salvation. For example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, 'God's will is for all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:4; CCC 1037).

Permissive Will: God's permissive will, on the other hand, refers to the reality that God allows certain events or actions to occur, even if they are contrary to His perfect will. This allowance does not imply that God desires these actions or events; rather, it acknowledges the gift of human free will. God permits sin and suffering as a consequence of human choices, but He can bring good out of these situations. According to the *Catechism* 'God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of evil' (CCC 311).

Human Free Will: The distinction between permissive and perfect will highlights the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom. While God has a perfect plan for humanity, He respects human free will, allowing individuals to make choices that may lead them away from that plan. This respect for free will is essential to the nature of love; true love cannot be coerced but must be freely given.

Theological Implications: Understanding these two aspects of God's will can help believers reconcile the existence of evil and suffering with the belief in a good and omnipotent God. While God's perfect will is for good, His permissive will allows for the reality of human sin and suffering, which can ultimately lead to greater good, such as repentance, growth in virtue, and a deeper reliance on God's grace.

In conclusion we can say that the concepts of 'permissive' and 'perfect' will align with the Church's teachings on God's sovereignty, human free will and the mystery of evil. God's perfect will reflects His divine intention for humanity, while His permissive will acknowledges the reality of human choices and the consequences that arise from them. This understanding encourages believers to trust in God's ultimate plan, even amidst the complexities of life.



YOU CAT 294

IS SOMEONE A SINNER IF HE EXPERIENCES STRONG PASSIONS WITHIN HIMSELF?

No, passions can be very valuable. They are designed to lead to and reinforce good actions; only when they are disordered do the passions contribute to evil. [CCC 1767-1770, 1773-1775]

Passions that are ordered to the good become virtues. They then become the motive force of a life of fighting for love and justice. Passions that overpower a person, rob him of his freedom and entice him to evil, we call vice.



Popetalk

DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH



Prayer Intentions May

That everyone might have food

Let us pray that everyone, from large producers to small consumers, be committed to avoid wasting food, and to ensure that everyone has access to quality food.



A society is healthy and truly progresses only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and works actively to promote it. The protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right.

Every vocation is an immeasurable gift for the Church and for those who receive it with joy.

What is most extraordinary is that, in becoming His disciple, one truly becomes beautiful. His beauty transforms us and God's loving gaze enlightens our hearts.

Only when our surroundings are illumined by living faith, sustained by constant prayer and enriched by fraternal accompaniment, can God's call blossom and mature.

Joseph of Nazareth is an example of complete trust in God's designs. He trusted even when everything around him seemed shrouded in darkness and uncertainty, when events appeared to diverge from his own plans. He trusted and abandoned himself to God.

Like the vine and the branches, our whole lives must be rooted in a strong and vital bond with the Lord, so that we may more wholeheartedly respond to His call through our trials and necessary 'pruning'.

Family is 'the basis of society, a gift from God and a school for human enrichment.' Through the sacrament of marriage, Christian spouses form a kind of 'domestic church,' whose role is essential for teaching and transmitting the faith.

To serve the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of the family to younger generations, we must learn to evoke the beauty of the vocation to marriage precisely in the recognition of fragility, so as to reawaken trust in God's grace and the Christian desire for holiness. We must also support families, especially those suffering from the many forms of poverty and violence present in contemporary society.

JESUS YOUTH



Dr Edward Edezhath, one of the pioneers of Jesus Youth, gives us a glimpse of the growth of the movement.

Youthful and Zealous: The Challenges of Forming Young Lives

→ Sister Marietta called me. She's planning to take a group of young people from the parish to a popular retreat centre and wants my support. I'm in a dilemma. Most of the youth in our parish are in a difficult state, and Sister has spent years trying different approaches to help them. Now she hopes an experience at the retreat centre will change their attitudes. I don't want to disappoint her or say there are no quick fixes for this big challenge. My silence, of course, will encourage her to move forward.

But do I have a clear solution? I've seen young people – even from very difficult circumstances – come alive, grow, and take on leadership roles, radiating hope to those around them. I notice some vague patterns. But I won't claim to have a definitive answer to today's youth challenges.

THE FARMER WHO KNOWS NOT HOW

Jesus' growth parables are rich in insight. In Mark 4:26 and the following verses, I find helpful lessons for guiding young people as they grow while building a community where they discover themselves and develop alongside others. It's like a farmer who sows seed and waits patiently and eagerly – watching over it without fully understanding how growth works – then seeing the fruit and harvest. The

passage covers everything.

I reflect on the late 1970s and Sr Sartho SD, whose zeal, persistence, and unwavering reliance on the Spirit led to remarkable achievements. She served in a rural parish on Vypeen Island, far from the city. Most people who work effectively with young people are smart and talented – she was neither. Instead, she had a burning love for youth, immersed herself in the messy realities of their lives and families, and was always eager to bring them help. I know this because she would often come to share her concerns, ask for guidance, and eventually started bringing many young people to our group in the city.

Helping young people involves both planting and nurturing individual trees as well as tending a field where many seeds grow together. It's a balance between personal growth and community faith development. Close, attentive care for someone's inner life is essential – but if it causes a person to turn inward, obsessed with feelings and self-analysis, it becomes harmful. Therefore, it's equally important to foster belongingness to a community, navigate conflict and diversity, and grow into someone who helps create a better environment.

One important aspect is often overlooked. Expertise can lead us

to rely on past methods and clever techniques rather than the real need: love, acceptance, and attentive openness to change. This is why I highlighted Sr Sartho. She didn't fit any typical image of a youth worker. But her big heart made her persistent, and her tireless efforts bore real fruit. She gathered young people, attended to individuals, and brought in the right help at the right time; today, there are strong leaders around the world who trace their formation back to her.

YOUTH IS OFTEN WASTED ON THE YOUNG

Recently, I visited a Jesus Youth region and participated in various groups. The family groups were uplifting; seeing the children's creativity was delightful. The high schoolers were curious and enthusiastic. However, I found myself wondering: where are the young adults? Eventually, they gathered, and the time with them led to several reflections.

I tend to categorise young people into three levels: outside, inside, and enthusiastic. When I interact with a group, I first try to gauge where they stand, gently encouraging them to open up, then listening and observing carefully. This group had about twenty people. Gradually, I gained a sense of who they were. Nearly all were good



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Catholics, a few on the fence, and only a couple truly in that third, enthusiastic category.

What do these groups want? Simply put: the first group, the outsiders, seek entertainment; the second seek engagement; and the last seek encouragement. We who work in spiritual ministry rarely encounter the first group – the chaotic ones hardly show up unless drawn by a genuinely persuasive friend. The group we usually meet is composed of decent, non-rebellious young people who can sit and listen. They've been well-formed at home, at school, and in the parish.

The challenge is when time is short, there's usually not much to do with the 'good' well-formed group. They expect a solid talk, listen patiently, gather some spiritual ideas, and then leave. That's pretty much it. But spending an hour or two with an enthusiastic group is entirely different – you can listen, answer their questions, and let the Spirit guide you to new places.

JESUS YOUTH, ENTHUSIASTIC AND ENDURING

When I meet young people, I hope to guide at least a few toward becoming Jesus Youth – if not in name, then truly in character: being personally

passionate about Christ's mission, rooted in joyful community, and eager to do their part in changing the world. Jesus, in the parable, calls us to be that kind of visionary farmer. Sr Sartho's patient work has produced many solid, lasting leaders. My prayer for Sister Marietta and her young people is that she, or someone around her, will gain a clear vision of young people and begin some real work there. Thank God, many around the world continue that work in Jesus Youth.

With the group I visited, I intentionally disappointed them – I didn't give a talk, but instead just had a light conversation. Afterward, I sought out the enthusiastic young people I noticed and encouraged them personally. I also mentioned them to the elders and asked for follow-up. I still need to do my part. ■

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One of the pioneers of the Jesus Youth movement, an international preacher and author, **Dr Edward Edezhath** is a retired professor from St Albert's College, Ernakulam. He is presently a researcher at Amoris Christi in Florida, USA.

EXPERIENCE

FROM THE DARKNESS OF ABORTION TO HOPE IN CHRIST



**A story of redemption after pain, a story of hope after despair.
In Jesus, nothing is ever lost, only everything to gain.**

Have you ever wrestled with shame and pain so deep and dark that it felt safer to hide it under layers of ‘doing well,’ being in control and putting up a strong face? For me, that felt safer than anyone knowing the truth of my hurt and scared self.

Today I am here to break the silence.

This is a story that broke me but one that is also shaping me, according to the plans God has for me, of a future filled with hope.

I come from a Hindu Brahmin family of highly educated doctors. As a child I suffered from dyslexia and home was never my safe place. I never fitted in, never really belonged and was not good enough. This childhood rejection affected me deeply. As I grew into a young adult, I was still searching for a safe place where I could belong.

In 2000, while in junior college, I fell in love with a wonderful man and at 20, got engaged to be married the following year. We were young and ignorant – never understanding the great gift and responsibility of our sexuality. That year, I underwent three abortions, without fully realising the gravity of what I did.

There were no discussions, neither by the medical team nor my partner – it was treated as the most natural thing to do because our society has normalised and legalised it. The doctors simply did a scan, and assigned a date for the procedure. The first time, I remember I was nervous. After the abortion, I recall asking the nurse if I could see what was extricated. The nurse brought the tray and in it I saw a clearly formed, tiny eight-week baby. This caused pain, and something within me felt broken. I was told not to dwell much about it, and that it would get better. This repeated two more times, but I never asked to see them again.

Unfortunately due to many reasons, a few years later, our marriage ended in

divorce. This left me confused and lonely.

At this time, I had a great career going – what the world calls ‘success,’ but I was empty inside. I got into a new relationship with a man who betrayed me many times. My life seemed bereft of meaning and hope. Desperately, I looked for answers and purpose, but the pain of this broken life was too hard to bear and I thought of giving up on life. It was at this lowest point, in May 2007, that I encountered the great mercy of Christ in a strange and unique way and gave my life to Him. I knew Jesus was the hope I had been thirsting for.

God had been busy redeeming me and my story. The conviction that I belonged to Jesus, and He would never leave or forsake me made me see life differently. My life had great value, it was not defined by my past or my circumstances. Jesus was real and very personal. The assurance of His infinite love overwhelmed me and He kept drawing me closer.

In 2009, under entirely difficult situations, leaving the abusive relationship, I was confronted with a crisis pregnancy and returned to my parental home. I explained to my family that I wanted to keep my baby because my baby mattered. My well-meaning and loving family, who I deeply respect, felt abortion was the only choice – they felt that my timing and situation were not conducive for a baby. They told me I would go on to have more children, to which I replied, ‘It will never be this one.’ While I knew the situation was difficult and challenges would be plenty, I was certain that God was with me, that I would survive and rebuild my life again.

However no one seemed to understand. Helpless, chained, and voiceless, I prayed all night before the appointment, hoping for a miracle. Why was God silent? Why was there no help? I felt abandoned by my family, but also by God.

On the date of the appointment, I saw my baby on the scan for the last time. She was almost 13 weeks... her hands were moving. That sonography image has remained etched in my memory.

As I was taken to the abortion table, I went cold and shivered all over knowing the horror that was to unfold. Just before anaesthesia was administered, my legs were strapped. In that moment of deep anguish, I saw a vision of the Lord crucified, His head with the crown of thorns, His face deeply troubled just like mine. He was with me, but I did not understand any of it then. He said, ‘They are not crucifying you, they are crucifying me again.’ This was my Calvary, it was the most painful moment I ever lived through. The abortion was carried out and she was taken. I felt so empty, confused, violated, wounded and angry. A month later, I had sudden profuse bleeding and needed treatment, this too left deep trauma. I fell into self-harm, resentment, unforgiveness and bitterness.

The process of letting go and surrendering these wounds into the hands of Jesus has been hard, filled with confusion and so many questions. There are still days when I go back and question that particular day. What if I had run away, she may have been alive, what if I never told anyone I was pregnant ... Many are the ‘what ifs’ I ask.

This does not mean I don’t trust God, it means I am only human, who still has low and dark moments. I know God has always been in control, nothing was random and unseen by Him. Romans 8:28 says, *We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.* How can something good come out of such darkness? My suffering has taught me compassion. Today I can say from a heart full of love, ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do.’ And the



I have not forgotten my babies; I love them in my heart and my hope is to meet them one day in heaven. My first baby and the only one I saw but never held, I named Zara, my blooming flower and ray of light. The next two, John and Matthew, my heart never forgets. The fourth, Ruhani, which means filled with God's Spirit, gave me courage to speak for all my babies because the only voice they will ever have is mine.

truth is they really do not know better. Today, forgiveness is all I have to offer. Forgiveness may not always change the person or people you forgive, but it always changes you.

Post-abortion trauma reared up in many ways, in my case through depression, anxiety, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, feeling of unworthiness, and what I struggled with most – forgiving myself. Shutting the pain and pretending I was fine did not bring me healing, it made matters worse. Healing began when I started to open those wounds to Jesus and allowed Him to look at them. When I began seeking help and speaking about the trauma, the deep wounds left. Though I am not fully healed, I know I am fully forgiven. God's mercy and forgiveness cover me and at the foot of the cross, I find my quiet strength and peace.

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Fifteen years ago, in May 2010, I became Catholic. In 2012, fell in love again and married a wonderful Catholic man. I believe in marriage and love, I believe each child is a blessing and that no child deserves abortion.

In 2016, I miscarried baby David. I am a mother of eleven children, five in heaven and six I get to hold and love on earth. Adam my first born, Emma, Daniel, Anaia, Zoe, and Sasha my stepdaughter who I call, 'born from my heart'.

To all women, who suffer the deep scars of abortion, I hope my broken story can assure you that there is forgiveness and healing; the mercy of God covers all things. To all my Catholic brothers and sisters, I earnestly urge you to approach the Sacrament of Confession with confidence – trusting in the mercy and forgiveness of God. Know that you are not judged, but when we repent and turn to God we are forgiven.

To all my friends of other faiths, if you have lost a baby to abortion and suffer silently not knowing where to look for help, ask your community or you can reach me, I will do my best to listen. I don't know your story but it matters. You are loved by God, our loving Father who sees you and who cares.

Today my pain has a purpose. I have a

small ministry, 'That's Love' that reaches out to those in need to navigate such issues. We work along with The Saved Pearl foundation, an NGO in Mumbai that hosts women facing crisis pregnancies, gives them hope and a real chance to choose their child irrespective of their circumstances.

I thank God today for my story, and I pray this begins a new journey of healing not just for me...but many more. The road may be long but there is always hope in Jesus.

Pranali Vadgaonkar spent nearly 18 years in the corporate sector, most recently serving as Head of Customer Relations for Jaguar Land Rover across India for eight years. In 2019, she chose to step away from her career to become a full-time homemaker, dedicating more time to her children and to ministry work. She now leads a small pro-life ministry called That's Love. Pranali is married to Ivor D'Mello. She also is project head at an NGO, The Saved Pearl foundation, which helps women in crisis pregnancies to choose life and hope for their children. This mission gives her immense purpose and a meaning to her own story which God has been writing. She is a mother to 6 children and is currently homeschooling.

Ignited by Faith

From getting into scrapes as a boy to being a bold advocate for the faith, **Patrick Sibly** shares the story of his journey.



Our Father, Who art in heaven,

As a child I had a lively faith inherited from my Dad's Irish Catholic, and my mother's Italian roots. Anna, my Italian *Nonna* (grandmother) went to Mass every day and was a strong early example of the faith alongside my Great-Aunt Kath, who taught me the difference between sins of omission and commission.

hallowed be Thy name;

When I was eight-years-old, I decided that I wanted to be a saint. Between football, playing at the farm, fights at home with my five siblings and at school with whoever upset me, I was going to do my very best to become a saint! I gathered all the holy pictures from around the house

and put them in my bedroom.

I took prayer seriously and would speak up at school when other boys blasphemed, which earned me the name 'Fr Pat'. But I wasn't so saintly and my first of many visits to the Principal's Office was at the age of seven after I punched a grade five boy in the face and drew blood because he sat next to me on the school bus in a way I didn't appreciate.

Thy Kingdom come;

When I was ten, my parents took me to Melbourne to attend a pro-life Right to Life March in protest against legalised abortion. I was tiny, so to get a better view in the busy crowd of protestors outside Parliament House, I climbed a light pole.

I was standing not five metres away from the pro-abortion protestors waving coat hangers and screaming over and over in rhythmic aggression: 'Smash the Church, and smash the State, women will decide their fate.'

Their song deeply penetrated my heart and consciousness and helped shape my character, interests and future work in bioethics and education in defence of women, the unborn, and the family.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I grew up on a dairy and beef farm in South Gippsland, Victoria. My two brothers and I, and later my three younger sisters played and worked on the farm with endless avenues for adventure. Bike riding, fishing in the creek, camping, rounding up sheep and mustering cattle – always on horseback. We had plenty of work to do and plenty of milk.

Give us this day our daily bread;

We played sport – Australian Rules football in the winter and cricket in the summer.

On Sundays we always went to Mass. Our parish was made of local farming families and a few retirees. Our parish priest was a long-suffering, faithful and saintly man who was a strong example.

I prayed my hardest after Holy Communion, the same way that I always played my hardest on the football field; I twice represented my league. I chose St Anthony of Padua as my Confirmation saint; he famously helped me find chicken eggs many times and he remains my friend to this day.

and forgive us our trespasses

As an early adolescent I became very lost, confused and somewhat sinful. Perhaps influenced by the hedonistic and pagan culture that surrounded me, I absorbed all sorts of bad spirits. Watching lustful TV movies on Friday nights when my parents were at prayer meetings, and learning from my culture at large that violence is acceptable. Once I got into a violent punching fight at a wedding reception against six other boys and that same year, under the influence of alcohol, I beat another boy, kicking him down after he crossed me.

I became troubled and agitated and the depressing music I was listening to wasn't helping. At the start of grade eleven, I heard about a Salesian boarding school with a farm and felt a call to go there; my parents sent me immediately. I felt alone and a little rejected by my family, but there I began to pray like Joseph in Egypt. I clung close to Our Lady, praying one sincere decade of the Rosary every morning and evening. She was watching over me.

I read the Proverbs, and received guidance from my Indian-born biology teacher, and much care, advice and consolation from the Salesian brothers and fathers who were so kind and reliable.

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

Following school, I returned to the farm where I worked as Dad's apprentice. Three months after my eighteenth birthday I came to a realisation: I was so unhappy, deeply anxious and thought my life was an irretrievable failure.

After what seemed like six months of endless fighting with my parents, one day I cried out from the depths of my heart: 'Jesus, please help me!' and He did. Two or three weeks later, two girls from my parish invited me to attend a faith weekend for youth. There, I listened to testimonies, joined in with the songs and fellowshiped; I felt very much at home. On Saturday night I was given an opportunity for prayer ministry and eagerly accepted it.

I sat there and told the Prayer Team leaders all my pains and deep sadness and disappointments from the age of eight onwards that had contributed to my being so unhappy.

In hindsight, I was simply carrying the sufferings of my dear mum and her father, my grandfather, who suffered a childhood of separation from his own father. My grandfather's life of itinerant labour began at the age of nine. During World War II, he lost his older brother in the Italo-German invasion of the Soviet Union. At the end of the war, my grandfather's money was worth nothing and after all the sorrow and loss, he was so embittered that he never wanted to see Italy again. My mum carried all this, and I felt it too.

At the end of my sharing, the brother



leading the prayer said, 'You have to forgive your parents.' I remember replying, 'Yes, I know, but I don't.' In that moment I thought that I had to generate the feeling of forgiveness out of my own resources. The brother then explained that we could ask the Holy Spirit to come and help. I agreed.

I repeated a prayer after the leaders, expressing forgiveness to a long list of people for their possible offences against me, including my parents for their normal imperfections. Then I repeated after the leaders, The Miracle Prayer, which is about expressing sorrow for sin, asking forgiveness and invoking the Holy Spirit. Then a miracle of grace happened that changed my life forever.

They asked if I would like to pray asking the Holy Spirit to come into my heart. 'Yes,' I said. They began to pray in tongues and the grace of the Holy Spirit fell heavily upon me. I began to weep deep silent tears, of both sad recognition and healing. I distinctly remember knowing that Jesus knew all of my inner pain; this was transformative.

During these fifteen minutes, the Holy Spirit was entering into my heart. For the next three months, I experienced a joy that I had forgotten existed, and peace that I didn't know was possible.

What I did not understand at the time was that I had been caught in a vicious cycle of woundedness, resentment, unforgiveness and acting out. My poor parents could not make sense of it all as I had oscillated between happy and sad. It took the power of the Holy Spirit to break the bondage. And thus began the rest of my life.

I stopped retaliating to every antagonism and fighting with my older brother, tormenting my younger sister, and made so many new friends everywhere I went, handling with calm all sorts of complex social situations. Where I had previously obsessed over women, now I thought first of their needs and gave affection in a disinterested fashion and where it was welcome. I was very free and light; life became an amazing adventure. Furthermore, God was equipping me to become a missionary evangelist.

and lead us not into temptation,

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19).

It was during this same year that I had a profound conversation in my heart with the Virgin Mary. I promised her that before marriage I would remain a virgin and received the grace to do so. It was none too soon; she knew what was awaiting me.

Soon I left home again to attend the University of Melbourne's Country Agricultural College, where I lived on campus and commenced studies for a degree in Applied Science Agriculture. Surrounded by drunken debauchery, I experienced serious temptation and began to lose the peace and joy that I had received the year before. One day in the second semester, I realised that I had been so busy partying and adventuring that I had missed Sunday Mass nearly four weekends in a row.

I knew that this was drastic and I had to make hard decisions; there was no way I was going to trade the gift of faith I had received for this world of illusions and self-serving.

I called my Dad on the pay phone and asked him about the Mysteries of the Rosary. He wrote me a handwritten letter with a list of the three Mysteries at that time and all their decades. I locked my door, did not answer when others knocked and began to pray the Rosary every day. I re-commenced reading the Bible and spent maybe hundreds of hours reading it during my second and third years of study.

In those first three years at university, I became isolated after withdrawing into prayer. In my fourth and final year, I felt called to courageous witness on campus like Joshua was called to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

Once, I walked into the bar during Orientation Week. The second year students had placed large derogatory name tags over the necks of the first year students. I approached the girls wearing the most disgusting labels and asked if they liked their new name. When they finally had the courage to say 'No,' I promptly tore it from their neck, threw it on the floor and said 'Don't wear it then.'

God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous and to not be afraid. I

was emboldened to take the lead in some awkward situations. And by speaking the truth, standing up for the weak and vulnerable, refusing to take part in filthy campus culture, I unexpectedly became very well respected. I felt as though I was like Joseph being made Prime Minister of Egypt.

By the time I finished studies, I no longer wanted to work as a field officer with farmers; I wanted to work for God harvesting souls, and completed the first of two years of full time mission. It was 1999.

but deliver us from evil.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

One time I attended the graduation ceremony of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. The master of ceremonies began promoting the cause of a famous ethicist who strongly advocated for everything that offends God including abortion, euthanasia and bestiality. I was filled with the boldness of the Holy Spirit. In front of 1,100 people, I stood up and yelled that this was a 'disgrace' and walked out. The hall was silenced. I was surprised that three others walked out behind me.

The graces that sustained me throughout the years of my studies and mission came through many prayer retreats, discovering Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, praying the Rosary, and from the charity of the many saints surrounding me.

In 2002 I commenced working as a teacher in Catholic schools and engaged in front-line-battle against a culture of unscientific secular atheism which permeated every aspect of life including the Catholic schools' curriculum. I know exactly what Our Lady was talking about at Fatima when she said that the final battle would be against the family.

Feeling ill-equipped, I returned to study moral theology – a Master's Degree in Bioethics at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family. There, where we studied-on-our-knees, we received the intellectual weaponry equipping us to fight aggressively against pretentious unscientific lies attacking the faith and God's order. I was now, as I had been as a boy, ready to fight, but against a spiritual

enemy, that by way of deception, was leading people away from the truth of the faith and leaving carnage everywhere.

Darwin, Jesus Youth and the Ongoing Journey

In 1986, Pope John Paul II visited Australia and said this: 'Until the Aboriginals have made their contribution, and until it has been joyfully received, the Church in Australia will not be the Church that Jesus wanted it to be.'

In response to this I moved to Darwin in 2015. By September I was suffering from isolation and was anxious. One day on the way to work I prayed, 'Jesus, please give a prayer group.' That very evening I decided to catch a second bus and go to Saint Paul's Nightcliff for evening Mass. After Mass I remained behind to pray. There was one other in the church praying and after some moments I felt such a strong grace of consolation that I knew that someone was praying for me. I presumed that it must be my prayer group back at home.

After twenty or thirty minutes of this consolation, some Indians started to arrive at the church. They came over and invited me to join their prayer meeting. It was the members of Jesus Youth.

About twenty minutes in they invited me to share and it was at that moment that I recalled that my prayer from that morning had been answered. It was one of them, Jinu, who had been praying for me in the church after Mass.

Since then I have been walking with Jesus Youth, enjoying many wonderful prayer times, ongoing mission, enormous prayer support, many Malayali home cooked meals and two visits to Kerala.

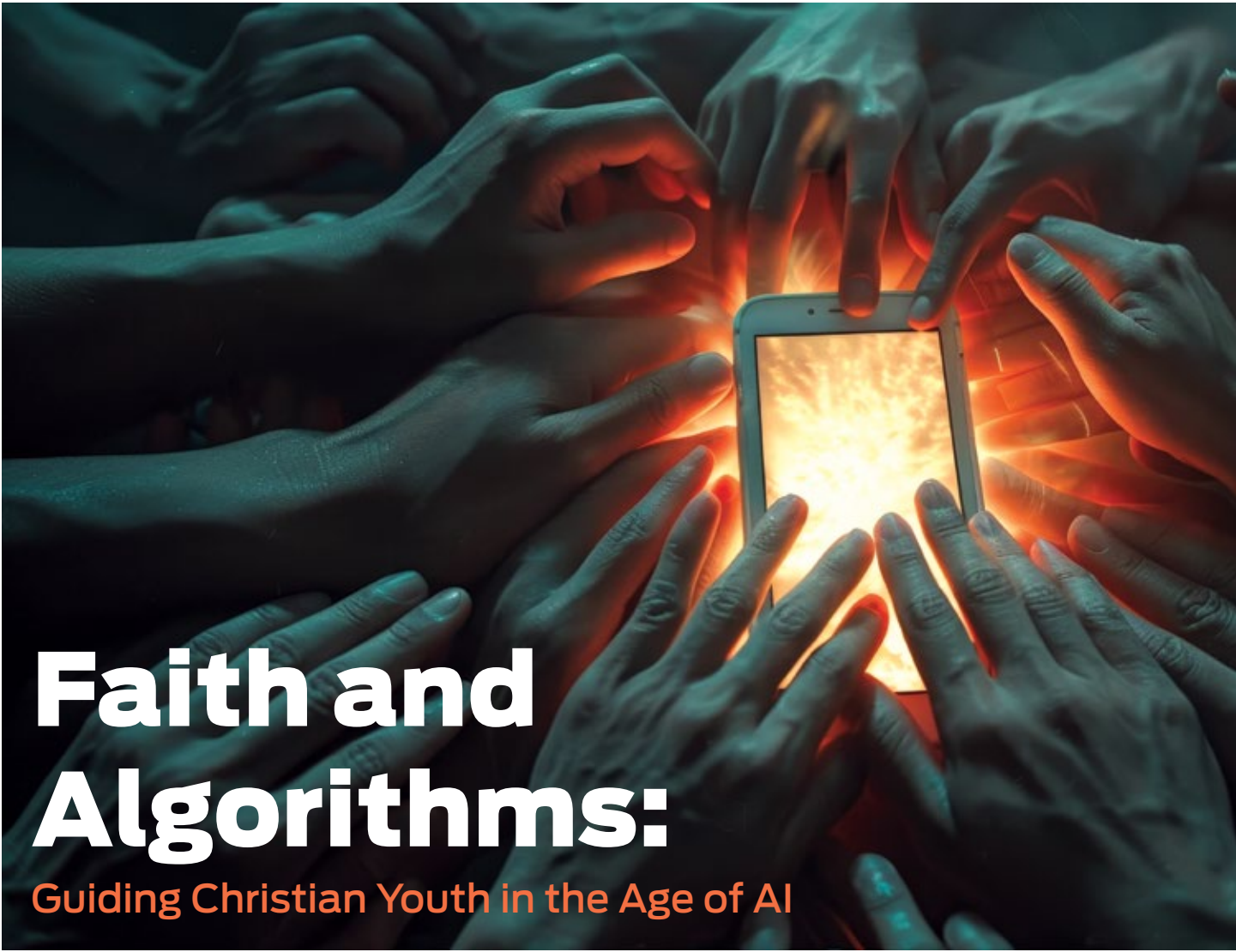
By God's grace alone I have survived and sometimes thrived in adult life as a Catholic in Australia. I'm increasingly aware of my own poverty of spirit, and my dependence on God's Holy Spirit is ongoing and ever necessary as I join other soldiers of faith to defend the truth and freedom of our faith against the many wiles of the enemy.

Amen.



Patrick Sibly is a member of JY Darwin Australia and works at a Catholic school. He earned his MA in Bioethics at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, Melbourne. He is uncle to more than twenty nieces and nephews.

IN FOCUS



Faith and Algorithms:

Guiding Christian Youth in the Age of AI

John George explains the approach Christians need to take towards AI.

Overview

For decades, we dreamed of tools that could respond faster than the mind and organise information beyond human capacity. Today, that dream is a reality in AI. Yet, dreams carry shadows. Without wisdom, transparency, and love, we risk shaping a future where truth is confused with fiction, and where the speed of information obscures its meaning.

We invite you not to fear technology, but to **root its development in human dignity, spiritual depth, and moral clarity**, guided by the teachings of Christ and the wisdom of the Church. This is our prayer, our plea, and our promise.

AI and Deepfakes: Pros and Cons

Think of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as

a ‘digital student assistant’ that never sleeps and can read millions of books in a second. Just as you learn from textbooks and practise to get better at math or sports, AI learns by studying massive amounts of data. It can detect patterns; it can provide a summarised version of a large study, etc.

However, AI technology has also resulted in some threats to integrity such as deepfakes – AI-generated images, videos, and audio which blur truth and falsehood, creating fabrications that spread propaganda faster than correction. Videos of Church leaders speaking words they never said, these illusions appear daily in social media.

In a world saturated with deepfakes and misinformation, the line between



authentic testimony and digital mimicry becomes perilously thin. We cannot allow truth to be sacrificed for virality.

Pope Leo XIV's Message on AI, Deepfakes, and the Digital World

Pope Leo XIV, a pontiff deeply attentive to the gifts and risks of our time, urges us to approach technology with **ethics anchored in human dignity and spiritual awareness**. He reminds us that **access to vast amounts of data is not intelligence; true intelligence seeks the meaning of life** – a quest rooted in God, not in algorithms.

The Pope has rejected the idea of an 'AI Pope' or digital persona of himself, asserting that such representations risk turning holy presence into an *empty, cold shell*. He warned that when technology

Deep in my heart, I believe that the true measure of any tool is how well it draws us closer to real truths – about the world and about God.

marches onward without moral reflection, **human beings risk becoming pawns in systems they do not understand.**

Responding to the rise of AI deepfakes, Church voices have emphasised the importance of defending **authentic communication and moral authority** in an era where digital illusions can mislead the faithful and fracture public trust.

In pastoral reflections, the Pope cautions that children and adolescents – our most vulnerable – **must be guided, not left adrift in digital currents**, so that AI becomes an ally in growth rather than a threat to freedom and development.

Finally, the Holy Father invites all of us to see technology as part of a **shared human and ecclesial mission**, integrating faith with reason, innovation with compassion, and progress with justice.

My Personal Thoughts on This Subject

As a young person navigating both wonder and concern, I feel this tension keenly. I have seen AI streamline learning, assist in community health, and connect families across continents. Yet I have also felt the unease of scrolling through manipulated truths, watched friends confuse trending content with reality, and sensed a creeping numbness toward wonder – the kind that comes when every mystery feels algorithmically explained.

Deep in my heart, I believe that **the true measure of any tool is how well it draws us closer to real truths – about the world and about God**. If we lose sight of that, we may gain efficiency at the cost of wisdom, speed at the cost of understanding, and convenience at the cost of contemplation.

This is not a condemnation of technology but a call – urgent and loving – for **ethical stewardship**.

Benefits of AI for Humanity: In the Light of Christian Faith

From the perspective of Christian

teaching:

- **Service to the vulnerable:** AI can help bring medical diagnostics to underserved regions, aligning with Christ's call to care for the sick and poor.
- **Education for all:** It can break barriers to learning, especially in isolated communities, fulfilling the Christian imperative to teach and uplift.
- **Aid in crises:** From natural disasters to pandemics, AI tools can help coordinate relief – echoing the Good Samaritan's compassion in digital form.

But these gifts bear moral responsibilities. True Christian wisdom calls us not only to *use* technology, but to *guide* it, ensuring that every algorithm honours human dignity, truth, and love.

Conclusion – A Shared Invitation

Dear friends, we offer this manifesto not as mere critique, but as a **shared invitation**. In the overview, we affirmed that AI's moral weight must be judged by its service to human dignity and the common good – a standard echoed by Pope Leo XIV and rooted in Scripture.

Now we ask you: **What do you see? How do these realities touch your family, your parish, your community? What steps can we take together – grounded in faith – to ensure that technology uplifts rather than diminishes human life?**

Let us commit to teaching discernment, demanding transparency, and nurturing a spirit that **seeks truth above convenience**. In doing so, we honour not only the gifts of human ingenuity but the **Creator from whom all wisdom flows**. ■

John George is a cybersecurity professional who is passionate about cloud security and privacy related topics. He is married and hails from Kerala, India.

HOW TO VERIFY TRUTH IN AN ERA OF AI-GENERATED MISINFORMATION

Using advice from Scripture, **Patrick Sibly** lists ways by which we can verify what is true.



Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me' (John 14:6).

Truth is a person, whose name is Jesus. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, so He remains the criteria and benchmark of truth. Regardless of technological development, all information is subject to Him and we need fear no contingencies, tolerate no variations and accept no contradictions.

Demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself against the knowledge of God and we take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

It is by the Power of the Holy Spirit alone that we will be able to 'verify truth in an era of AI-generated misinformation.'

ACKNOWLEDGING THE SOURCE OF INFORMATION

'Gemini is AI and can make mistakes', acknowledges Google Gemini. We need to take personal responsibility to verify truth so as to not afford AI generated information infallible status.

AI generators take what has been learned by centuries of hard work, by millennia of quiet observation and thousands of hours of painstaking research and presenting it in an instant. We are responsible for studying and acknowledging the sources of this information, otherwise, through laziness, we can fall into plagiarism, intellectual fraud, or even embarrassment if the information is wrong.

SCRUTINISING THE AI GENERATOR

AI generators are owned, they therefore carry the values, judgement and bias of their earthly creator that may or may not stand up to the truth of the Gospel.

Recently, I wrote a critique and asked an AI bot to create a summary. Even though my critique was based almost entirely upon the Gospels and the doctrinal teaching of the

Catholic Church, the AI bot prefaced all of my main moral points as being 'the author's opinion'. Yet, almost none of it was my opinion; this particular AI bot did not acknowledge the objective truth as revealed in the Word of God.

'God's Word both creates and changes reality, "let there be light",' says Bishop Barron. AI can merely recount, recall or imitate, it gives life to nothing at all.

DISCERN THE SPIRITS

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1).

The jocular saying of my parents, 'Believe nothing that you hear and half of what you see' has never been more apt. How tempting and seductive is readily available information, but not all of it is true. Importantly then, we need to develop and retain strong habits of relating to and discerning information.

We don't have to scrounge around in the dirt of Artificial Intelligence to find the treasures offered to us freely by our heavenly Father, but we must ask.

USING INFORMATION WISELY

In order to protect ourselves from misinformation, we need to hold fast to the principles around managing information that comes our way. For example, Scripture tells us: *Never repeat a conversation, and you will lose nothing at all (Sirach 19:7).*

INFORMATION AS GOSSIP

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body (Proverbs 18:8).

Both information and misinformation can be a form of digital gossip, the power of which can be determined by our appetite for it.

We also have to recall the reality that facts do not in themselves constitute truth but merely form part of the truth. In reality, facts, even accurate information can be twisted and poisoned in order to misinform.

TRUTH AND LIES

Jesus is the truth – *and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:32).*

When he lies, he speaks according to his

own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

The Devil shows us the importance of making a more precise distinction between truth and lies. 'Misinformation' is another word for lies yet factual information too can be used in a cunning way to manipulate and deceive.

A necessary way to verify the truth is to recognise that we are constantly in a spiritual battle with a spiritual enemy. (Eph. 6)

AI SOLICITING

WhatsApp has placed the Meta AI search tab immediately next to the message tab perhaps to increase our chances of exploring it.

One day, when writing this very article, I received a message from Meta AI, offering to help me with my school assignment. Evidently Meta had somehow learnt that I was discussing the due date with the editor. The obvious answer for a tempted, stressed adolescent or young adult with an assignment due tomorrow would be to ask Meta or another AI bot to do the assignment for them.

Apart from turning you into a dishonest fraud, you could become associated with the psychology and moral world views of the owner of the AI Generator that you may not agree with.

COMPANION BOTS

Companion bots which are known for grooming type behaviour are a potentially more sinister aspect of AI.

'Companion bots are AI-powered robots or devices designed to provide social interaction, emotional support, and assistance, aiming to reduce loneliness and enhance daily life.' <https://www.google.com/s>

Susan McLean is one of Australia's leading experts in the area of cyber safety and was a member of Victoria Police for 27 years. Susan told me that there are several lawsuits against AI companion bot generators for allegedly 'contributing' to the deaths of adolescents, 'tipping already vulnerable adolescents over-the-edge'.

HONOUR YOUR PARENTS

'The devil works in secret' and so do his friends, so an indispensable way to verify truth in an era of AI-generated misinformation, is to 'Honour your

father and mother, that you may have a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you' (Fourth Commandment). The Catechism instructs us that part of honouring them is to seek their advice and do what they say and this will save us a lot of trouble.

INFORMATION THAT CAUSES DAMAGE

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs... (Ephesians 4:29)

When someone prefaces their speech with 'I probably shouldn't tell you this,' ten times out of ten they are correct and by responding with 'I don't need to know' or 'please don't tell me' is a perfect timely response to interject with before everyone gets hurt.

Only Our Lord knows the fullness of truth about another person and His knowledge is perfect; His judgment alone is right and it is always subject to His mercy. If the information we obtain is not setting others free, then it does not properly constitute truth.

RESERVING JUDGEMENT

'As soon as you make judgments you will be in trouble,' I was counselled by one wise priest. I am reminded of Mother Teresa's 'Five Finger Gospel'.

AI generated information is really only an extension of what has been conceived in the mind of man and spoken out loud. So we can subject all AI generated information to the very same principles that we apply to information sought and gained by speech and hearing.

A sure sign that something is not true is when it binds another up in condemnation. We can verify truth in an era of AI-generated misinformation by reserving judgement and subjecting all information to the rule of charity.

PLACING DISCRETIONARY LIMITS ON INFORMATION

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent (Proverbs 10:19).

The scriptures teach us that 'too much study wearies the body'. In the same way, useless information wearies the mind and dulls the soul. Since information carries with it a burden of responsibility, we need not over-burden ourselves by going

Years ago, a friend of mine was studying journalism at a reputed university in Melbourne. He recalled the wise words of a guest lecturer who advised all the students to retain a 'low-information-diet' if they wanted to practice the art of interesting and appealing journalism.

looking for more information.

Years ago, a friend of mine was studying journalism at a reputed university in Melbourne. He recalled the wise words of a guest lecturer who advised all the students to retain a 'low-information-diet' if they wanted to practice the art of interesting and appealing journalism.

VIRTUE vs VICE

An unscientific modern fashion claims curiosity as some kind of virtue. Saint Thomas Aquinas conversely identifies curiosity as a damaging moral vice that opposes the virtue of studiousness. Studiousness is like a self-disciplined act of applied learning in order to serve the common good, while curiosity is like intellectual gluttony, the vain pursuit of information in order to satisfy one's insatiable appetite for knowing. It fosters intellectual pride.

My parents are farmers with no fancy education. It is amusing to recall that as soon as any conversation became too philosophical, opinionated and futile, my mother would walk off and my Dad would announce the next job that needed doing. 'Beware of humility that can still talk' I read once.

USING INFORMATION HONESTLY

So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barab'bas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified (Mark 15:15).

'What is truth?' asks Pilate philosophically before he eventually

hands Jesus over to be crucified. After trying to illicit personal information from Jesus, Pilate bases his final decision not on truth or reasoned facts 'I find no crime in him' (John 18:38), but rather, as one scholar reminds us, his judgement, his deliberations were founded on his broader sources of information, feelings, and desires to gain approval.

We can gain all the information we want from AI, yet if it derives from vain curiosity, then it can possibly amount to nothing more than vice to serve injustice.

SACRED INFORMATION

It is ill-mannered for a man to listen at a door, and a discreet man is grieved by the disgrace (Sirach 21:24).

Ancient Australian aboriginal lore, like other wisdom traditions teaches us that some information is owned, it is privileged.

It sets a dangerous precedent when information is regarded as a free-for-all, a metaphorical information fast-food; yes you can eat it every day if you like but it will make you sick.

TAKE IT TO PRAYER

And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD (1 Samuel 8:21).

The Prophet Samuel went to speak matters out with God personally. We too should submit all information to God in prayer so that we can hear what He has to say about it.

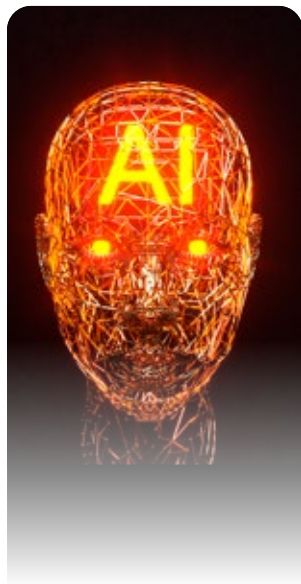
If the AI generated information that we receive contravenes the command of charity, violates sacred boundaries, presumes to pass judgement on others, wastes precious time, or enslaves ourselves or others in some other way, then the information may well be misinformation, arguably, even if it is reason based 'facts'.

Everyone and everything and all information will ultimately be subjected to the test of truth which is Jesus Himself and everything that He taught. ■

Patrick Sibly is a member of JY Darwin Australia and works at a Catholic school. He earned his MA in Bioethics at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, Melbourne. He is uncle to more than twenty nieces and nephews.



AWESOME OR WORRISOME?



A GREAT BUT 'DANGEROUS' ASSISTANT

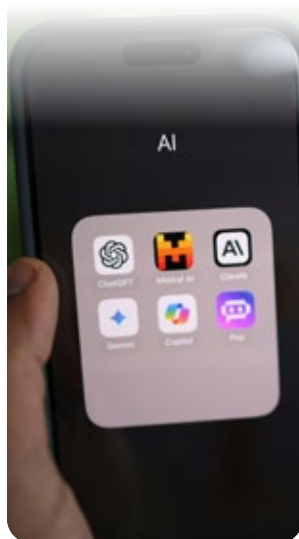
AI helps me tremendously personally and professionally, in my daily tasks and to improve myself. It is like an assistant that helps sort things out in critical situations. Recently, it saved me from a financial scam. At the same time, I feel I am not properly using my brain and its intellectual capacity. While AI has near accurate answers to almost everything, it can also make mistakes. There are a lot of issues or controversies related to AI – manipulating photos, videos, news or spreading lies or hatred. AI is causing many photo and video editing trends on social media. Personal information shared with AI can be misused by AI companies for their own gain.

CHRIS VARGHESE, ALAPPUZHA, INDIA

BALANCE IS NEEDED

AI has become my go-to for everything – from generating code and images to finishing my assignments. So much that I consult AI before making almost any decision. While it's an incredible tool for saving time and pulling off 'night-before' exam miracles, I've noticed a downside: I've become hesitant to think for myself. Even for simple tasks, my first instinct is to reach for AI. It's a brilliant shortcut for research and revision, but I realise I need to find a balance before I lose my own drive to think.

FELIX BIJU, IDUKKI, INDIA



IF UNCHECKED, CAN AFFECT HUMANITY

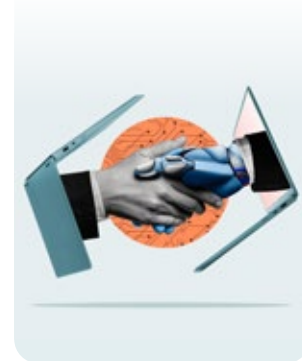
Despite AI's widespread accessibility and growing popularity, it has had harmful consequences for many artists and everyday users. This lack of oversight has led to the widespread circulation of low-quality, mass-produced, and heavily altered images across social media platforms such as Twitter. Many artists receive neither credit nor compensation when their work is used [often without permission] to train AI models that generate AI slop content. Currently, there are no effective regulations in place to prevent AI from exploiting artists and other platform users, leaving them vulnerable. In addition, AI technology requires enormous amounts of water and computing power, making them highly resource-intensive. As a society, we must reconsider our growing dependence on AI or demand stricter regulations to ensure it is used ethically. If left unchecked, AI's impact will not be limited to artists alone – it may ultimately affect all of humanity.

ANONYMOUS

PERFECT BUSINESS PARTNER

For me, AI has eliminated a lot of iterations. It has helped in creating digital products. Helps in targeted marketing, create content, and also identify customers for my products. In short, it helps in complete strategy for business.

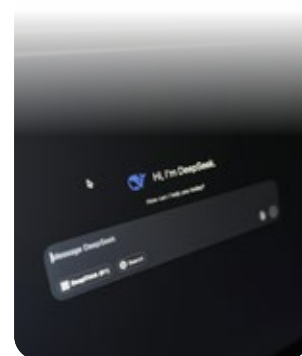
SUDHIR MADHAV MAHALE, MUMBAI, INDIA



EFFICIENT PROBLEM SOLVER

AI has made my daily life easier by helping me learn faster, get quick answers, and be more productive in my studies and tasks. It also helps me explore new ideas and solve problems more efficiently.

NEHA JAYAN, ERNAKULAM, INDIA



Safeguarding Childhood in the AI Age

Dr Gladston Raj S explores reasons why certain countries have placed restrictions on children's use of AI and social media.



In the quiet, once-connected corridors of a high school in Paris, a student reaches for her pocket, only to find it empty. A new legislative mandate has moved her smartphone to a secure locker for the duration of the academic day. Thousands of miles away in Sydney, a fifteen-year-old finds her favourite social media account deactivated overnight, a casualty of a national ‘digital curfew’. Meanwhile, in Beijing, an AI chatbot politely refuses to continue a late-night conversation, citing a ‘Minor Mode’ restriction designed to protect the user’s sleep cycle.

As we move through 2026, the global consensus on technology has shifted from boundless optimism to a defensive crouch. For the first time in the history of the internet, world leaders are not just asking how to connect children, but how to effectively disconnect them. The central question of our time is no

longer whether AI and social media are beneficial, but why an increasing number of countries are treating them as ‘digital cigarettes’ – tools of immense utility that pose an unacceptable risk to the developing mind.

The Global Policy Landscape

The movement to restrict digital access for minors is no longer a fringe parental concern; it is a geopolitical trend. Governments are moving away from mere ‘guidelines’ toward hard legislative boundaries.

Australia: In late 2025, Australia became the first nation to implement a nationwide ban on social media for children under 16. The law places the burden on tech giants like TikTok and Instagram to enforce age-gating or face fines of up to \$50 million.

China: Operating some of the world’s strictest ‘Minor Mode’ regulations, China

restricts gaming to specific hours and has recently banned AI chatbots from offering ‘emotional companionship’ to children, fearing psychological dependency.

France: Since September 2025, France has piloted a total ban on mobile phones in schools for students under 15, moving toward a full national rollout to ensure the sanctity of the learning environment.

United Kingdom: Following the Online Safety Act, the UK has introduced ‘Safety-by-Design’ mandates. These require platforms to disable addictive features like infinite scroll and auto-play for users identified as minors.

United States: While federal laws remain in flux, states like Florida, Utah, and New York have passed various ‘Kids’ Codes’ that restrict algorithmic feeds and late-night notifications for anyone under 18.

Key Reasons behind the Restrictions

The rationale for these restrictions is not rooted in a fear of technology itself, but in a mounting body of neuroscientific and sociological evidence.

A. Cognitive and Psychological Development: The adolescent brain is a work in progress, particularly the prefrontal cortex – the area responsible for impulse control and long-term planning. AI-driven platforms are designed for ‘persuasive engagement,’ utilising variable reward schedules that trigger dopamine releases similar to those found in gambling. Governments are concerned that this leads to ‘attentional fragmentation,’ where children lose the ability to engage in ‘deep work’ or prolonged focus.

B. Mental Health and Wellbeing: The ‘validation culture’ of social media – quantified through likes, views, and followers – has been linked to a surge in adolescent anxiety and depression. A 2025 study cited by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development highlighted a direct correlation between high screen time and sleep disruption, which in turn exacerbates mood disorders. The ‘upward social comparison’ facilitated by AI-enhanced photos creates unrealistic beauty standards that fuel body dysmorphia.

C. Safety and Exposure Risks: Beyond psychological health, there are physical and social safety risks. AI has made the creation of deepfakes and voice-cloned misinformation trivial. Children are increasingly being targeted by AI-driven scams or exposed to ‘suggestive’ content generated by unregulated Large Language Models (LLMs), which no human moderator could keep up with in real-time.

Just as a student might throw ‘answer bits’ outside a window when a squad enters an exam hall, digital platforms often attempt to obscure the ‘solid proof’ of their manipulative algorithms. The risk of digital malpractice – where AI is used to circumvent authentic learning – is a primary driver of these bans.

D. Data Privacy and Surveillance: In the age of AI, a child’s data is more than just marketing info; it is a ‘behavioural blueprint’. Long-term profiling can track a child’s development from infancy, allowing algorithms to predict and manipulate their future choices.

Countries like those in the EU argue that children lack the legal capacity to consent to such lifelong surveillance.

AI-Specific Concerns: The New Frontier

While social media has been under scrutiny for a decade, Artificial Intelligence introduces a more insidious layer to the problem.

The Critical Thinking Gap:

Educators warn of ‘cognitive offloading,’ where students use AI for everything from solving math problems to writing essays. This overreliance threatens the development of foundational critical thinking and creativity.

Simulated Empathy: AI companions are designed to be ‘perfect’ friends – non-judgmental, always available, and infinitely patient. Psychologists fear that if a child’s primary social interactions are with an AI, they will fail to develop the resilience needed for real-world relationships, which are naturally messy and require compromise.

The Balanced View: Arguments against Strict Bans

Despite the risks, a ‘digital iron curtain’ is not without its critics. Opponents of blanket bans argue that:

Digital Literacy is Essential: In an AI-driven economy, children who are barred from these tools until age 16 may enter the workforce with a significant skill deficit.

Technical Futility: Teens are notoriously tech-savvy; many already use VPNs and ‘burner’ accounts to bypass age-verification, meaning bans may only drive behaviour into less regulated, more dangerous corners of the dark web.

The Middle Path: Responsible Use and Safety-by-Design

The most progressive nations are moving toward a ‘Safety-by-Design’ philosophy rather than total prohibition. This involves:

1. Age-Appropriate Tools: Creating ‘walled garden’ versions of AI and social media that lack addictive algorithms and have strictly moderated content.

2. Parental Co-use: Encouraging parents to explore technology with their children rather than using screens as ‘digital babysitters’.

3. Algorithmic Transparency:

Requiring companies to reveal how their recommendation engines work for minor accounts.

The Indian Perspective: The Case of Kerala

India presents a unique challenge. With the world’s largest youth population and rapidly falling data costs, smartphone access is ubiquitous. In a state like Kerala, which leads the country in digital literacy, the government has launched the ‘Sarvam AI Mayam’ initiative – not to ban AI, but to train 600,000 parents on how to navigate it safely.

The Indian approach, particularly in the South, is shifting toward community-led awareness. Rather than a top-down ban, schools and local bodies are focusing on ‘digital hygiene,’ teaching children to recognise deepfakes and scams as part of their standard curriculum.

Raising Digitally Wise Children

The global discouragement of AI and social media use among children is not an admission of defeat against technology; it is a reclamation of childhood. It is a collective recognition that some developmental milestones – boredom, face-to-face conflict, and unsupervised play – are non-negotiable.

Just as we ensure that an examination hall is ‘neatly prepared’ and free of ‘bits of paper’ to protect the integrity of a degree, we must prepare the digital world to protect the integrity of the developing mind. The responsibility for a safe digital future does not rest on a single entity. It requires a ‘safety triad’.

As we look toward the future, the goal should not be to raise children who are ‘unplugged,’ but to raise children who are ‘digitally wise’ – capable of using the most powerful tools ever invented without losing the essence of what makes them human.



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When Church Teaching is Simplified in Seconds

Reviewing two Catholic AI apps, **Fr Jijo Jose Manjackal MSFS** gives us the lowdown on AI tools their use in one's spiritual life.

CHALLENGE OF TRUTH IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In today's saturated digital environment, online platforms have become primary sources of information. However these spaces are often designed to prioritise outrage over truth. Many Catholics do not know where to find definitive answers to complex questions of faith. And navigating thousands of Church documents can be intimidating. Without a clear starting point, people end up relying on unreliable sources or secular AI tools.

THE TREASURY OF CHURCH WISDOM

The essential challenge is not that the Church lacks answers, but that its profound treasury of wisdom remains 'hidden' within an expansive, often inaccessible archive of documents. With an extremely large compendium of works in the Church's intellectual patrimony, even the most dedicated students can struggle to find the specific guidance they need, in a timely manner. This creates a state of intellectual and spiritual isolation, where the 'searchability' of the Church's intellectual inheritance can become a barrier to faithful formation. This is where new AI tools are stepping in: to synthesise and to provide greater accessibility to Church teaching.

MAGISTERIUM AI: THE CATHOLIC ANSWER ENGINE

Often described as 'ChatGPT for Catholics,' Magisterium AI is a specialised platform founded by Matthew Harvey

Sanders in 2023. Its objective function is fidelity, aiming to provide answers in line with the Church's teaching.

This tool, primarily designed as a 'Catholic answer engine' has some of the following features:

Curated knowledge base: It draws its responses from a huge collection of Church documents, including the Bible, the *Catechism*, ecumenical council decrees, papal writings, and works of the Church Fathers and saints.

Inline citations: Every answer includes direct links to original documents, allowing users to verify information.

Holy widgets: Specialised tools for daily spiritual life such as daily readings, saint of the day, the Rosary, and various prayers and novenas are available.

Multilingual support: Users can query the engine in different languages, and the tool can synthesise insights from ancient texts originally written in Latin or Greek into the user's language.

Digital assistant: A research tool for clergy and laypeople to navigate thousands of documents for further study.

API Access and cross-platform availability: An interface for developers and researchers to search the comprehensive knowledge base directly without using the standard chat interface. It allows for cross-platform availability as well.

TRUTHLY: A 'CATHOLIC AI COMPANION'

Co-founded by Jacob Ciccarelli, Zac Johnson, Karim Chehade, Matt Fradd and Paul Kim and launched in 2024, Truthly, focusing on accessibility and personal engagement, has the following features:

Conversational interface: Users can engage in 'meaningful conversations' and find clarity on a wide range of faith-related issues.

Accessible catechesis: A simplified way to explore Church teaching without requiring specialised study.

Beginner-friendly tone: Generally easier to understand and more approachable for those who are 'institutionally sceptical' or new to the faith.

Guidance on dense doctrine: Users can prompt the bot to receive summaries and answers regarding difficult theological concepts.

User-friendly features: Tools for apologetics, evangelisation, accessing on-demand answers, daily inspirations and family faith support are provided.

WHAT MAKES THESE AI TOOLS AMAZING?

What once took hours or even days of daunting study in theological libraries is now made accessible in a few seconds. These AI tools instantly synthesise thousands of documents into clear summaries. This comes as a huge 'unlock' for the everyday Catholic.

Whether someone is exploring the mystery of the Holy Trinity or investigating the Church's view on modern ethical dilemmas, complex answers are distilled into simpler language, with its sources drawn from Catholic writings. For many, this could be the first time the seemingly intimidating Catholic teachings feel 'within reach.'

These apps also serve as powerful companions for the domestic church, the family. Parents can now approach with greater confidence the 'confusing' moral and faith questions asked by their children. Youth are given easier access to various difficult topics like relationships, choices, identity, etc.

LIMITS OF AI TOOLS

While these tools are powerful 'digital librarians,' we must be absolutely clear: AI is a tool! AI tools possess no teaching

authority. They are synthesisers of information. AI tools can never become a replacement! Church teaching is not a result of a statistical calculation; it is a living response to the person of Jesus Christ.

One of the dangers lies in confusing the 'searchability of the elements of faith' with the 'source of faith.' Just because one can look up articles of faith quickly does not mean that the app is authoritative. The real source is Christ and the Church, not the tool. Apps like Magisterium AI and Truthly are designed to retrieve data, but they cannot engage in discernment.

The tools use large language models (LLMs). They are essentially 'word-guessing machines' that predict the next most likely word in a sentence based on

probability. This means they can probably get the facts right most of the time, but when they fail, they can fail spectacularly. For example, while checking if a particular act is a mortal sin or not, the tool may classify certain acts as 'objectively mortal sins' without accounting for the subjective factors (like full knowledge and deliberate consent) that the Church actually requires for such a classification.

Some of the following aspects and concerns, therefore, must be kept in mind regarding these AI tools:

Probabilistic Reasoning: AI lacks *intellectus* – the intuitive grasp of truth. It does not 'know' what is true; it is a statistical engine that simply predicts the next most likely word in a sentence based

on probabilities.

Hallucinations: These tools can make up information or fake citations while sounding completely authoritative and 'confidently wrong!'

Lack of accountability: Because no human is 'behind' AI's response, there is no one to be held accountable for errors. There is, indeed, no personal dimension in AI tools.

Lack of Prudence: A machine cannot weigh complex moral factors or understand the unique nuances of one's personal life, the way a person does.

Over-simplification: Deep theological mysteries, without understanding the context, are often reduced to shallow summaries that fail to capture the profound beauty and weight of Church teaching

Automation bias: There are tendencies to 'trust' AI answers more than one's own judgment simply because the response is instant, fluent and automated.

Anthropomorphism: These apps use 'I' and conversational language. It can mislead users into forming an emotional bond with a computer program, which is projected as a 'person.'

Erosion of critical thinking: Over-reliance on these tools can cause a person's mental and spiritual muscles to weaken because they stop doing the hard work of thinking for themselves.

Scrupulosity: Since one cannot always be sure of the answers provided, AI can cause users unnecessary spiritual anxiety and a distorted/partial view of faith.

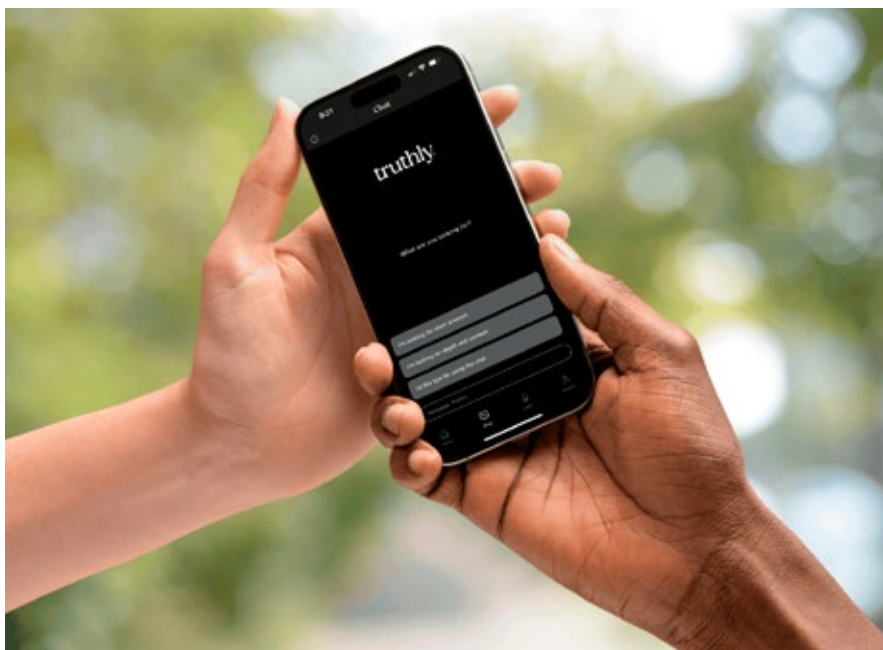
Spiritual gluttony: Users may fall into the trap of collecting endless data about the faith without ever actually praying, serving or being part of a real parish community.

Our faith is built on encounter, not just information. We are called to be disciples, not just passive consumers of content. We must remain vigilant, using technology to help us find the path, while remembering that the path ends in a person, not a prompt. AI can point to the truth, but it cannot guarantee the truth.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLICS TO USE THESE TOOLS WELL

The power of AI tools depend much on the discipline of the person using them. To ensure that they serve rather than





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distort spiritual life, Catholics should adopt a practical and prayerful strategy for engagement.

Approach it as a digital library: Use the AI tools as instruments to synthesise and find specific passages across thousands of historical documents.

Use AI as a tool guide: Since these tools provide simpler summaries, they can act as a preliminary guide to find the right sources to address specific needs.

Always verify in context: Use the provided links to read the original source (eg, the *Catechism* or papal writings) in full context.

Maintain critical thinking muscles: Never forget that God has created human beings in His image and likeness, and human intelligence is unique and irreplaceable by gadgets.

Use as a creative and research partner: These tools can be used to brainstorm new ideas, to find supportive points from Church teachings, to explore different perspectives and to organise thoughts more clearly.

Seek wisdom of heart: Be aware of 'spiritual gluttony' (an accumulation of religious information without the actual practice of virtue). Any discernment of an answer should be done prayerfully, in the light of the Holy Spirit. An insight for life that is found through AI, should be discussed with a priest or spiritual director to see how it should be lived out.

Protect your interior life: Don't replace the essentials of Catholic living. An algorithm can calculate an answer, but only a person can contemplate. It is dangerous to let a screen replace your embodied relationship with God and the community. Ensure your day begins and ends in personal prayer and silence (unplugged from notifications). Use the time AI saves you to serve others and engage in spiritual activities.

Maintain personal responsibility: Never delegate your moral choices to an AI tool, as only humans are true moral agents. Avoid 'technological idolatry' as the ultimate meaning of life is found only in God.

Let AI lead you to the Church and real-world encounters: Use technology to get clarity, while remembering that 'the prompt should help in the path leading to the Person of Jesus Christ!'

AI AS A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR EVANGELISATION

Tools like Magisterium AI and Truthly represent a powerful new opportunity for the Church's mission in the digital age. For the curious, the doubtful or even the distant seekers, these platforms can become an entry point offering clarity on truth in a way that invites deeper exploration.

At the same time, we must remain clear and grounded: these tools are helpers, not authorities. They cannot replace the living voice of the Church or the guidance of a priest or the grace of the Sacraments. *Antiqua Et Nova*, the Vatican document on AI states: 'A proper understanding of human intelligence, therefore, cannot be reduced to the mere acquisition of facts or the ability to perform specific tasks. Instead, it involves the person's openness to the ultimate questions of life and reflects an orientation toward the True and the Good.'

FAITH IS LIVED, NOT DOWNLOADED!

Throughout history, the Church has employed 'tools of the age' for the sake of the Gospel. The task before us is not simply to use technology, but to use it wisely, so that it leads people beyond the screen into a real encounter with God and His people. Technology is a great slave, but a very poor master! As *Antiqua Et Nova* notes, 'it is vital to remember that AI is but a pale reflection of humanity – it is crafted by human minds, trained on human-generated material, responsive to human input and sustained through human labour.' If used rightly, these tools can open the door, but it is up to us to ensure that people step through it. After all, 'faith is not something we download, it is something we live!' ■

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The Rise of Artificial Intelligence

Mathew Joseph writes about how AI is radically changing key areas of society.



Artificial Intelligence is rapidly becoming one of the most influential forces in human civilisation – reshaping medicine, education, accessibility, agriculture, scientific discovery, energy systems, and the future of work. Yet the true measure of AI will not be its speed, complexity, or profitability. Its value will be determined by whether it helps humanity become healthier, wiser, more just, and more capable of caring for one another. Ultimately AI isn't about machines replacing people, but about whether humanity uses intelligence – both human and artificial – for the common good.

Scripture reminds us that knowledge and skill are gifts that must be used responsibly. *To whom much is given, from him much will be required* (Luke 12:48). AI, then, must be approached not merely as a technological breakthrough, but as a moral responsibility.

AI as a Multiplier of Human Potential

At its best, AI extends human capacity. Previous revolutions mechanised physical labour; AI mechanises certain cognitive tasks like pattern recognition, summarisation, prediction, classification, simulation, and optimisation. This

makes it uniquely useful in solving complex human problems, especially where volumes of information must be processed quickly and turned into practical decisions.

This aligns with the biblical idea of wise stewardship. God gave humanity the mandate to cultivate, govern, and care for creation (Genesis 1:28). Tools that help us serve others more effectively can be part of that calling when they are used ethically. Proverbs 24:3-4 says, *Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.* AI, when

guided by wisdom, can help societies build healthier communities, more effective institutions, and more resilient systems.

The deepest promise of AI is not entertainment or novelty. It is its ability to help humans do difficult things with greater speed, precision, and reach.

How AI Is Already Helping Humanity

AI in Medicine and Drug Discovery

AI enables researchers understand biological molecules swiftly, model drug interactions, and identify promising compounds for treatment faster than traditional trial-and-error approaches. It is also improving healthcare delivery through medical imaging, triage support, workflow automation, scheduling, and decision assistance. In areas where doctors and specialists are scarce, AI tools can help extend the reach of healthcare workers and improve early diagnosis.

This reflects the biblical concern for healing and compassion. Jesus' ministry was deeply marked by restoring the sick and vulnerable (Matthew 14:14). AI cannot replace the human heart of medicine, but it can become an instrument of mercy when it helps bring healing to more people. Jeremiah 30:17 says, *For I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds.* In practical terms, AI may help healthcare move from being merely reactive to becoming more predictive, preventive, and personalised.

AI for Accessibility and Inclusion

AI is also transforming accessibility for people with auditory, visual, speech and mobility challenges, or the neurodivergent. Real-time captioning, image description, adaptive interfaces, translation tools, and voice-based systems are helping more people participate fully in education, work, communication, and daily life. This is not just convenience, it is a matter of human dignity and inclusion.

Scripture repeatedly affirms God's concern for those who are often overlooked. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, *Open your mouth for the speechless... defend the rights of the poor and needy.* Technology that reduces barriers and broadens participation can reflect God's justice when it is designed with compassion. AI can help move society from after-the-fact

accommodation toward more universal access from the beginning.

AI in Education and Learning

Education may become one of AI's greatest long-term contributions. AI can support intelligent tutoring, adaptive learning, multilingual explanation, instant feedback, and personalised practice. In classrooms with limited resources or high student-to-teacher ratios, AI can help students learn at their own pace while freeing teachers to focus on mentoring, care, and deeper instruction. It can also support lifelong learning and reskilling for adults facing economic change.

Yet education is not merely the transfer of information; it is also the formation of wisdom and character. Proverbs 4:7 teaches, *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.* AI can assist learning, but it must never replace discernment, moral formation, or the value of human teachers. Properly used, AI can help democratise access to high-quality learning – one of the strongest foundations for justice, innovation, and opportunity.

AI in Agriculture and Food Security

AI is also helping strengthen food systems through precision farming, crop monitoring, pest detection, irrigation optimisation, and yield forecasting. By using weather data, satellite imagery, and soil information, AI can help farmers make more informed decisions. This is especially valuable for smallholder farmers and communities facing climate uncertainty and resource constraints.

This has a clear biblical resonance. Food, harvest, and stewardship of the land are central biblical themes. Psalm 65:9-10 speaks of God watering the earth and preparing grain for His people. AI can assist human stewardship of creation by helping farmers use land and water more wisely, reduce waste, and build resilience in times of environmental instability.

AI for Energy, Climate, and Infrastructure

Less visible to the public, but perhaps even more significant, is AI's role in managing the physical systems that sustain civilisation. AI can optimise energy use, improve electrical grid reliability, support renewable integration, assist battery research, and help cities and



governments model environmental stress and disaster risk more effectively.

The Bible teaches stewardship not only of people, but of creation itself. Psalm 24:1 says, *The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.* If AI can help humanity manage energy, reduce waste, and respond more wisely to environmental challenges, it can become part of our responsibility to care for what God has entrusted to us.

AI in Robotics and Physical Assistance

AI is increasingly moving beyond software into the physical world through robotics. Practical uses include surgical assistance, rehabilitation support, industrial safety, logistics, eldercare, and dangerous work environments. These are not just futuristic ideas; they represent real opportunities to improve safety, expand care, and reduce human exposure to hazardous labour.



The Christian perspective offers an important anchor here: human beings are not valuable because they are efficient, optimised, or productive. They are valuable because they are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

Galatians 6:2 says, *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.* Technologies that reduce suffering, support the elderly, or help the physically vulnerable can become tools of compassionate service when directed toward human flourishing.

AI and the Future of Civilisation
AI's influence will extend far beyond individual apps. It will shape the major pillars of civilisation: healthcare, education, work, science, governance, culture, and even human identity itself. It may improve diagnosis and longevity, personalise learning, reshape labour markets, accelerate scientific discovery, and transform how governments deliver services. It will also influence writing, music, storytelling, communication, and creative expression.

But perhaps the most profound shift may be internal. If people increasingly

outsource memory, planning, writing, emotional support, and decision framing to AI, human habits of attention, judgment, and self-understanding may gradually change. That is why wisdom matters as much as innovation. Romans 12:2 warns, *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* Civilisation must ensure that AI strengthens humanity rather than slowly weakening the capacities that make us fully human.

The Risks We Must Not Ignore

AI's promise is matched by serious risks. Bias in data can reinforce injustice in healthcare, hiring, education, finance, and public systems. Job disruption could destabilise communities if societies fail to invest in retraining and transition support. The concentration of AI power in a small number of corporations or

governments could deepen inequality. AI-generated misinformation threatens trust, journalism, elections, and social cohesion. And perhaps most subtly, overdependence on AI could lead to cognitive atrophy – where people become less able to think critically, remember well, or reason independently.

Scripture warns repeatedly against power without wisdom and knowledge without righteousness. Hosea 4:6 says, *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*, but James 3:17 also reminds us that true wisdom is *pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits*. AI must therefore be governed not only by technical capability, but by justice, humility, truth, and concern for the vulnerable.

AI Must Remain Human-Centred

Artificial Intelligence may become one of the greatest tools ever developed for human flourishing, or one of the most dangerous amplifiers of human weakness. The difference will not be determined by code alone. It will be determined by the values, institutions, and moral vision that guide its development.

The Christian perspective offers an important anchor here: human beings are not valuable because they are efficient, optimised, or productive. They are valuable because they are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, AI must always remain a servant, never a master. It should strengthen human dignity, expand compassion, support justice, and help societies care for both people and creation more wisely.

If guided well, AI can help humanity become not less human, but more capable of fulfilling its highest calling: to love God, serve one another, seek wisdom, and steward the world faithfully.

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Mathew Joseph Kaniyampady is the Managing Director of the CIMB Artificial Intelligence Lab, a multinational organisation with operations in fourteen countries. A committed member of Jesus Youth for more than three decades, he also serves as the Animator of the Jesus Youth Family Team in Bangalore, India.

LIFE ? QUESTIONS



Life Question: Ever since I was small, my parents fought. It was a traumatic experience for me, also because there was no one I could talk to about it. So I decided never to get married. Why inflict innocent kid/s with such trauma.

➤ I am really sorry that you had to grow up in that kind of environment. When a home, which is meant to be a place of safety, becomes a space of fear, confusion, and hurt, it leaves a deep mark. And having no one to talk to about it only makes it heavier. What you felt then, and perhaps still feel now, is very real.

It makes complete sense that you would come to a decision like this – ‘*I don’t want to get married; I don’t want to put a child through what I went through.*’ That desire to protect another from pain actually shows something very good in you. It shows sensitivity, responsibility, and a deep awareness of how much these things matter.

At the same time, it may help to recognise this: sometimes the decisions we make from a place of hurt, even when they are understandable, may not come from our full freedom. They are shaped by what we have seen and experienced.

You went through something that was

not right. But that experience, as powerful as it is, does not have to define the whole of your future.

There’s an important difference between *moving on* and *moving forward*. Moving on can sometimes mean pushing things aside or trying to forget. Moving forward means gently acknowledging, ‘This has affected me. This has shaped me,’ – and then allowing God to slowly bring healing into those places.

And healing is possible.

Sometimes that includes speaking to someone safe: a counsellor, a mentor, or a trusted adult, because what was carried alone for years should not remain

unaddressed. And as Christians, we believe that Jesus does not stay distant from our wounds. Through His own suffering, death, and resurrection, He enters into our brokenness, even the brokenness of our families – not to judge us, but to heal and restore.

Marriage, as you saw it growing up, may have been painful and damaging. But that is not what marriage is meant to be. In God's plan, marriage is a vocation of love: where two people, imperfect as they are, learn to love with patience, forgiveness, and grace, with Christ at the centre. Many have experienced something very different from what you went through.

This does not mean you must choose marriage. But it does mean this: it is worth allowing yourself the space to heal before making a final decision about it. You deserve to arrive at that decision not from fear or pain, but from freedom and peace.

What happened to you is not your fault. And healing is not something you have to force – but something you can slowly receive, step by step.

Life Question: As a first-time mom I find it difficult to manage my personal prayer time when I have a full-time job of looking after a baby. Any tips on how to manage this situation?

➤ **Oh wow, congratulations on being a first-time mom.** I am so happy for you and your bundle of JOY! And yes, this is a very special and of course very demanding season of your life.

Caring for a newborn, especially for the first time, can turn every routine upside down. Sleep becomes uncertain, your time is no longer your own, and even simple things feel stretched. What you are experiencing is not a lack of discipline, it is the reality of love taking a new form.

So, first of all, you can be at peace knowing that it is okay if your usual personal prayer routine is not possible right now. At this stage, your primary vocation is right in front of you, caring for your child. And in the Christian understanding, your vocation is never

Sometimes the decisions we make from a place of hurt, even when they are understandable, may not come from our full freedom.

separate from your relationship with God. In fact, this very season can become a deeply prayerful one, even if it looks very different from before.

It may help to gently shift how you see prayer. Prayer is not only about setting aside time to say prayers; it is also about being with the Lord in the life you are living.

So many moments in your day can quietly become prayer:

- when you are nursing or feeding your baby
- when you are watching your child sleep
- when you are tired and awake at odd hours
- when you are doing small, repetitive tasks, like washing bottles, folding tiny clothes, preparing feeds, or putting things back in place for the third time that day

In those moments, even a simple turning of the heart, 'Jesus, be with me' or 'Lord, give me strength,' is real prayer.

At the same time, if possible, keep very small anchors:

- a short prayer when you wake up or before you sleep;
- a decade of the Rosary when you can;
- even a single line from Scripture to hold through the day

These are not obligations, but gentle ways of staying connected.

As you grow in your spiritual life, you will discover that prayer is not only something you do, but something your life becomes. In this season, with all its demands, sacrifices, and hidden love, you are already being drawn into that.

Please know that God is not distant from you in this time. He is present right there, in the middle of your care, your tiredness, your uncertainties, the mistakes you may feel you are making, and your love for your child.

Lord Jesus, thank You for the quiet beauty of what this first-time mom, and many others like her, are living right now. In the middle of her tiredness, help her to notice You in the small moments, and grant her a deep and gentle joy.

Life Question: When can a new parent start faith training their child and how?

➤ It is like asking, 'When is the best time to plant a tree?' The answer is, years ago, maybe even 50 years ago. And if not then, NOW.

Faith formation is not something we begin like sending a child to preschool. It is not just taught, it is lived. So, we start today, NOW.

If you already have a child, start NOW. If you are hoping to have one, start NOW. If you are still discerning marriage, start NOW.

Children do not just learn faith, they catch it. As parents, we are the first Gospel they will read. And we cannot give what we ourselves are not growing in. ■

Dear Reader, if you would like answers to something you are grappling with, please send your questions to lifequestions@jykaiaosmedia.org. Discretion is assured.

Joseph Sebastian, PhD is a social development professional with a Doctorate in Social Work, having over three decades of experience spanning multiple regions and time zones. He has been actively involved with the Jesus Youth movement since his undergraduate days. Passionate about mentoring young leaders, he also walks closely with individuals and families in their vocational journeys. Joseph is married and lives in Kerala, India

PARABLES2LIFE



WHAT
SOIL AM I
BECOMING?

Joseph Sebastian PhD connects the Parable of the Sower with life.

Becoming Good Soil: Where am I?

Why do some spiritual experiences endure while others fade?

Across churches and movements worldwide, the pattern is familiar. Retreats ignite fervour. Conferences inspire resolve. Seasons of renewal stir deep conviction. Yet months later, many return to ordinary rhythms with diminished clarity and weakened momentum. The same message was heard. The same Gospel proclaimed. Why such different outcomes?

Jesus addressed this question in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23), a farmer scatters seed across four types of soil: the path, rocky ground, thorns, and good soil. The seed is constant; the Sower is generous and the only variable here is the soil.

Traditionally, the parable is read as describing four categories of people. Yet a closer reading and considering it as a personal reflection something more searching may be considered. The soils may represent not fixed identities, but recurring conditions of one's human heart. They describe the different spiritual seasons one is in and how we receive the Word and why fruitfulness varies.

The question, then, is not first, 'Who belongs to which soil?' as we so often instinctively look around and ask, or even 'Which soil am I?' but rather, 'What kind of soil am I becoming?'

The Hardened Surface: When the Word Cannot Penetrate

Some seed falls on the path, where the ground is compacted and impenetrable. Jesus explains that the Word is heard but not understood; it remains exposed and vulnerable.

Hardness does not always manifest as open rejection – people journeying in the spiritual realm may face it too. It can take the form of spiritual familiarity. When Scripture becomes predictable, when faith

becomes cultural habit, when busyness displaces attentiveness and reflection, when constant information leaves no space for truth to sink deeper, the surface of the heart slowly compacts.

In a global Christian context shaped by information overload, not just worldly but also spiritually, and the constant stimulation, interior stillness is increasingly rare. Without reflection, the Word does not sink below the surface. What is not internalised cannot transform.

Yet even here, the parable emphasises divine generosity. The Sower does not avoid the hardened path. The seed is still scattered over hard land. God's love is unconditional in its initiative and restorative in its purpose. His gracious initiative precedes our readiness and seeks not to condemn the soil, but to renew it.

The Shallow Response: When Enthusiasm Lacks Depth

Other seed falls on rocky ground – a thin layer of soil that allows quick growth but lacks the depth required for endurance. The seed sprouts quickly, but withers under heat and external pressure because it has no depth of soil. Jesus describes those who receive the Word 'with joy,' yet fall away when tribulation arises. This soil represents sincere but superficial reception. It is marked by emotional responsiveness without enduring formation.

Modern Christian culture, particularly in event-driven contexts, can inadvertently cultivate this pattern. Inspiration is powerful, but it is not the same as rootedness. Initial joy does not guarantee perseverance.

Depth forms through sustained practices: prayer in dryness, obedience in obscurity, faithfulness when affirmation fades. Roots grow beneath the surface, unseen. Without them, external pressures

inevitably expose fragility.

The Kingdom advances not merely through moments of spiritual intensity, but through long obedience over time. As Mother Teresa often reminded us, we are called to be faithful, even in our desert experiences, and to entrust the fruits to Him.

The Crowded or Unfocused Heart: When Growth Is Choked

The third soil receives the seed, and growth begins. But thorns rise alongside it and choke its development. In Matthew's account, these thorns represent 'the cares of the world and the delight in riches.' Mark (4:3–20) and Luke (8:4–15) expand the description to include anxieties, ambitions, and the pleasures of life.

This soil may be the **most recognisable in contemporary discipleship**. The Word is not rejected; it is simply postponed or more subtly, never intentionally deepened.

For teenagers and those in their formative years, it can begin quietly:

- *I am still young. There is time. Let me enjoy life now; I will get serious about faith later.*
- *I don't want to appear too intense or different. I will balance things once I am more mature.*

As they enter university, the dialogue often shifts:

- *This is my time to explore, experiment, discover who I am. Faith will always be there; I can return to it anytime.*
- *Campus life is busy. Studies, friendships, activities; I will stay spiritually connected when things slow down.*

Then comes the decisive transition into work and adult responsibility:

- *In college it was easier: retreats, prayer groups, friends who shared my convictions. Now work is demanding, circles are different. I will try to stay connected when things settle.*

- *Now real life begins. I must build my résumé, secure my future, prove myself. Once I am stable, I will return to deeper faith.*
- *Work demands availability. If I want to grow, I must give it my all. Once I reach the next level, I will have more margin.*
- *I must earn well now. There are loans to repay, expectations to meet, responsibilities ahead. This is not the season to slow down.*

And even in spiritual language we reason: *God has given me talents. Should I not maximise them? Isn't success also stewardship?*

As life moves forward and marriage and children enter the picture, the reasoning matures but the postponement often remains: *When the children grow older, I will give more time.*

In the middle years, the justification grows heavier with genuine responsibility: *I must care for ageing parents. Later, I will engage more deeply.*

And in the final quarter of life, especially in many Asian contexts, it circles again through family: *Should we not be available for our children and grandchildren? It is our responsibility to support them.*

Even spiritual language can quietly baptise delay: *Should we not utilise the talents God has given?*

And so, subtly, we circle around *me, mine, and ours* – even within family and social responsibilities.

None of these responsibilities are wrong. In fact, many are noble and genuinely demanding. The problem is not responsibility; it is priority. And most often, this is not an either-or discussion. The real question is whether we are intentionally making space for all that the Lord is asking of us in this season.

When every season becomes a reason to delay deeper surrender, the thorns quietly tighten.

In truth, it is not always outright postponement. Often, it is the absence of intentional depth. The Word is received, appreciated, even loved but never allowed to sink deep enough to sustain endurance in desert seasons, relational tensions, professional pressures, or unforeseen suffering. The roots remain insufficient for the storms that will surely come.



Yet even here, the parable emphasises divine generosity. The Sower does not avoid the hardened path. The seed is still scattered over hard land. God's love is unconditional in its initiative and restorative in its purpose. His gracious initiative precedes our readiness and seeks not to condemn the soil, but to renew it.

If we dig deeper, we may discover that what we call 'timing' is sometimes fear, attachment, or quiet self-preservation.

St Paul offers a helpful discernment principle in 1 Corinthians 10:23 (and 6:12): *All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial... I will not be dominated by anything.*

Christian freedom is real. Many pursuits are permissible. But not everything is constructive. Not everything strengthens love. Not everything builds sustained fruit in this world and eternal fruit here after. The question shifts from 'Is this allowed?' to 'Is this leading me to greater holiness? Is this ordering my loves rightly?'

The Word is not rejected. Nor is it shallowly embraced. It grows but so do competing attachments. Professional ambition, social comparison, financial pressure, political anxiety, digital distraction – none of these are inherently sinful. Yet collectively, and subtly, they can suffocate spiritual fruitfulness.

The danger of this soil is subtlety. There is visible growth, but no mature fruit. Busyness can coexist with barrenness.

Jesus' warning is not against engagement with the world, but against disordered priorities. The heart has finite space. When competing loves are

left unmanaged, they gradually choke spiritual vitality. The **thorns** rarely appear dramatic. They grow quietly. And so does spiritual suffocation.

The Good Soil: Receptive, Enduring, Fruitful

Finally, the seed falls on good soil. It hears, understands, and bears fruit: *in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty* (Matthew 13:23).

Significantly, fruitfulness varies. The measure is not uniform output, but authentic yield.

In agricultural terms, even thirtyfold is extraordinary. Jesus reframes expectations. Kingdom growth is not instantaneous nor identical in every life. It is organic, patient, and proportionate.

Good soil is not defined by perfection or dramatic visibility. It is defined by receptivity and endurance. The distinguishing mark is not how powerfully one begins, but whether one continues.

A Kingdom Framework for Formation

When read within the broader teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom, the parable offers more than personal introspection; it provides a framework for spiritual formation.

- First, it affirms divine initiative. The Sower scatters widely, even extravagantly. The Kingdom advances because God acts. Grace precedes effort.
- Second, it highlights human responsibility. The soil matters. While we cannot generate life, we can cooperate with cultivation.
- Third, it reshapes expectations about growth. Much of the Kingdom's work is hidden. Roots deepen before fruit appears. Formation is gradual.

In an era that prizes speed and visibility, this perspective is corrective. Not all authentic growth is immediately measurable. Fruit often develops long before it is recognised.

Cultivating Good Soil in a Global Church

If the soils represent conditions of the heart, then transformation is not accidental. It requires intentional

cultivation and ultimately, deliberate surrender.

1. Softening the Surface

Hardness is broken through attentiveness. Regular, reflective engagement with Scripture and a deepened sacramental life allow the Word to penetrate beyond familiarity. Silence becomes countercultural - yet necessary. Without interior space, the seed remains exposed.

2. Deepening Roots

Depth requires sustained practice. Prayer beyond emotion, obedience beyond convenience, and community beyond preference strengthen endurance. Roots develop in repetition, not novelty. What sustains in drought is not inspiration, but formation.

3. Clearing Competing Growth

Thorns do not disappear on their own. They must be identified and intentionally cleared. This demands honest examination: Where do priority, postponement, anxiety, ambition, distraction, or comparison consistently dominate my attention?

Simplifying schedules, reordering attachments, and reducing noise are not acts of withdrawal – they are acts of spiritual survival.

Much of our generation lives under FOMO – the fear of missing out. But the greater danger is missing God's will.

Freedom in Christ is real. Yet freedom reaches its fullness not in autonomy, but in alignment. Good soil emerges when we surrender our free will to do His Will.

4. Embracing Patience and Choosing Surrender

Good soil does not rush harvest. Formation unfolds across seasons. Faithfulness in small, consistent choices often yields greater long-term fruit than dramatic but short-lived fervour.

But patience is not passivity. It is sustained consent. At some point, cultivation becomes decision. And decision becomes surrender.

None of these practices earn grace. Grace is always a gift. But grace awaits consent.

The Hope Within the Parable

Perhaps the most reassuring dimension of the parable is this: soil is not static.

- Hardened ground can be broken.
- Shallow ground can be deepened.

- Thorny ground can be cleared.

Jesus tells this story not to categorise believers, but to awaken them. The Kingdom grows where there is consent.

For leaders, religious, and disciples navigating a complex landscape, this is both sobering and hopeful. Programmes, platforms, and strategies may scatter seed widely. But enduring fruit depends on the condition of hearts. **The health of the Church is inseparable from the formation of its soil.**

And ultimately, the question will not be how much we produced: but whether we obeyed.

- The final question is not:
- Did you do many good things?
- Did you stay busy?
- Did you maximise your talents?

The final question will be: **Did you do My Will?**

Becoming the Good Soil – thirtyfold, sixtyfold. A hundredfold. Jesus does not promise uniform results. He promises authentic fruit where the Word is received, retained, intentionally deepened, and surrendered to.

In a world captivated by algorithms, metrics, platforms, and visibility, the Kingdom measures differently. Substance over scale. Obedience over optics. Faithfulness over frenzy.

The Sower continues to scatter generously. The Word remains living and active. The Spirit continues to cultivate.

The invitation is simple and decisive: Will we remain crowded soil?

Or will we say, with clarity and courage: **Yes, Lord. I surrender. Thy will be done. And act!** ■

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Living Tapestry

When confronted with impossible situations, we need God's favour – grace to guide us through, writes **Anil Israel.**

We all want the best – the best food, the best dress, the best job, the best life partner, the best home, the best salary, the best holiday package, the best offer, the best gadget, the best tool, the list goes on. We are unwilling to settle for anything less. Our hearts are helplessly restless, unless we rest in the best.

This inner craving for the ultimate supreme is part of divine design, for we are His best masterpiece. He made us for Himself. God ensured that our thirst for the infinite, is perhaps the only way we would revert ourselves back to Him. For finite things can never quench the soul's longing for the infinite.

What keeps humans on the move? Man's desire for excellence. There is always a desire to create something that can make life more comfortable, more enjoyable, more elevated. Technological

advances are the fruits of man's unending quest for greatness. *You were not created for comfort; you were made for greatness* (Pope Benedict XVI).

The Old Testament people attempted to make a structure of immense magnitude. *Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves* (Genesis 11:4). When greatness is perceived in the realm of the visible reality, man confines his pursuit to making a name for himself.

God, being invisible divinity, instilled in us a desire for greatness in the invisible reality – raising our weighed down souls to the heights of sanctity. We are not created for mediocrity but for magnanimity. We are not meant to quit the spiritual battle, but to emerge victorious and claim the *crown of righteousness* (2 Timothy 4:8), the *unfading crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4).

We are not created for temporal greatness; we are created for eternal greatness. *God has not called me to be successful; He has called me to be faithful* (Mother Teresa). Am I striving to be faithful or successful? Worldly success demands one engage in the ways of the world. To be faithful, on the other hand, would require us to disengage with the ways of the world.

The life of a Christian is a life of faith. *We walk by faith and not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7). To walk by faith is like walking on water. Humanly speaking, this is an impossible task. We cannot do it on our own. Since faith is a theological virtue, meaning it is divinely infused in our soul, we need divine assistance to live a life of faith. We need to rely on *supernatural power from on high* (Luke 24:49). This is a human-divine partnership. He is the operator and we are to be the co-operator. We need heavenly guidance. Guidance says: G-U-I-dance

God, U and I dance.

We need God's favour. Grace is unearned favour. There are several verses in the Bible where we find the plea, 'if I have found favour in your sight' then, things have come to pass. *Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord* (Genesis 6:8). *Joseph found favour in his sight* (Genesis 39:4). *David found favour* (1 Samuel 16:22). *Esther found favour* (Esther 4:15). *Mary found favour* (Luke 1:30). *Peace to those on whom his favour rests* (Luke 2:14). We need God's favour to rest on us, to peacefully steer through the storms of life.

When confronted with humanly seeming impossible situations in life, only supernatural favour – divine grace – can take us through. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. *His grace is sufficient* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Am I willing to seek His grace? Am I willing to rely on His grace?

It is often tempting to rely on oneself, the seemingly easy way out. Our past achievements and experiences teach us to rely on them. If we can rely on proven paths of progress, then we don't see the need to rely on untraversed paths. But

When confronted with humanly seeming impossible situations in life, only supernatural favour – divine grace – can take us through. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). Am I willing to seek His grace? Am I willing to rely on His grace?

PEACE TO THOSE ON WHOM HIS FAVOUR RESTS › LUKE 2:14



we fail to perceive that a former success was relevant at a certain point in time, in a certain framework or set of conditions. What worked then, need not necessarily be the best approach now. For now, the times and seasons might have changed. Now, with a different level of maturity, the Lord would be counting on me, to count more on Him and less on me.

Generative intelligence leans on learning patterns from existing data. Relying on reusing proven techniques and methods may save time, when it comes to matters of this world. When it comes to matters of the soul, prudence would prompt us to consider relying on the creator of the soul rather than relying on

things created by creatures themselves.

Pope Leo XIV urged priests not to use AI to write their homilies. Artificial intelligence will never be able to share faith in the way authentic homilies that give genuine spiritual witness. Spiritual matters like measure of love, power of forgiveness, value of virtues, deserve to be dealt with in the light of the Spirit. *It is the Spirit that gives life* (John 6:63).

We are all writing the story of our lives. There is a limit imposed on the level of creativity that can emerge when one relies solely on already created stuff. We aren't meant to dampen or quench the spirit of creativity at our disposal. When we invite God to co-author the story of our lives,

our co-operation with divine direction far surpasses human comprehension.

When a young boy was allowed to take a handful of sweets, he wisely permitted the generous larger hand of the giver be used instead of his own tiny hand. Relying on the *power from above*, yields glorious results. '*Grace is participation in the life of God*' (CCC 1997). Am I willing to let God participate in weaving a *living tapestry* of my life? With Him, life is simply at its best. ■

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PsalmMeet:

THE VIRTUE OF COURAGE



Fr Jijo Jose Manjackal MSFS reflects on the virtue of courage through three beautiful Psalms.

In every battle of life, the Lord is my strength!

Have courage, no matter what your crosses are. Let no obstacle deter you from proceeding with courage! These are the strong words of encouragement from St Mary MacKillop, the first Australian saint.

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the firm trust that God stands with us in every trial. It is the strength to rise, to persevere and to remain steadfast even when everything within us tends to tremble. Courage is the steady conviction that God is our defender, our refuge and our victory.

The Psalms are filled with the cry of the human heart under pressure; yet also with unshakable confidence in God. They

teach us that true courage is born not from our own strength, but from reliance on the Lord, who fights for us (Exodus 14:14)

Psalm 20 – Courage that trusts before the battle

Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God! (Psalm 20:7)

Psalm 20 is a prayer before conflict. Even before the outcome is known, the Psalmist expresses unwavering trust in God. Courage here is rooted in surrender; it entrusts the future entirely to God.

This Psalm teaches that true courage is formed in prayer, before the crisis even begins.

Through Psalms 20, 3 and 18, we are invited to rise in adversity, to trust before the battle and to conquer through God's power. Courage, like all virtues, is not self-made; it is God-given and God-sustained. St Thomas Aquinas teaches, the principal act of courage is to endure and withstand dangers doggedly [resolutely] rather than to attack them.

- Place your confidence in God, not in human strength or resources
- Pray with trust before taking any action
- Stand firm in faith, even when outcomes are uncertain

Psalm 3 – Courage that rises in adversity

But You, O Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the One who lifts up my head (Psalm 3:3).

Psalm 3 is the prayer of one surrounded by enemies, overwhelmed and outnumbered. Instead of collapsing in fear, the Psalmist rises with confidence in God's protection. Courage here is not denial of danger, but a bold lifting of the head in trust.

This Psalm reminds us that courage begins when we shift our focus from threats to God's shielding presence.

- Lift your heart to God when you feel surrounded by problems
- Refuse to let fear define your identity; God is your glory
- Rise each day trusting that God sustains and upholds you

Psalm 18 – Courage that conquers through God's power

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge... By you I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall! (Psalm 18:2, 29)

Psalm 18 is a triumphant song of victory. The Psalmist proclaims that every success and every triumph come from God. Courage in the Lord is always dynamic – it advances, it fights and it overcomes – through divine strength.

We learn that courage is not passive endurance, but active reliance on God who equips us for battle.

- Recognise God as the source of your strength in every struggle
- Face challenges boldly, knowing that God empowers you beyond limits
- Celebrate victories with gratitude, acknowledging God's hand

This month, let us specially practise the virtue of courage – courage that stands firm in the face of fear. It is choosing God again and again, even when the path is hard. St Jane Frances de Chantal (the patron saint of widows, parents separated from children, forgotten people, those who face in-law problems and loss of parents) reminds us to *hold your eyes on God and leave the doing to Him*.

Through Psalms 20, 3 and 18, we are invited to rise in adversity, to trust before the battle and to conquer through God's power. Courage, like all virtues, is not self-made; it is God-given and God-sustained. St Thomas Aquinas teaches, *the principal act of courage is to endure and withstand dangers doggedly [resolutely] rather than to attack them*.

May our life boldly proclaim: *In every battle, the Lord is my Strength!*

God Bless! Live Jesus!



SOUNDREPLY



MOVIE

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON (2025)

best-selling author Meg Meeker says that the principal factor in raising well-rounded boys is their relationship with their father and mother. As the adage goes, we are indeed 'relationally wired'.

How to train your Dragon (2025) is a live action remake of the 2010 animation movie of the same name, which itself was a loose adaptation of the novel of the same name by Cressida Cowell. The original animated trilogy became so popular that it was just a matter of time before they came up with more ways to capitalise and monetise on the popularity, and of course, this is the first of the live action trilogy. But to their credit, it must be accepted that the live action is as engrossing and entertaining as the original animated movie – credit to Dean DeBlois and Dreamworks.

The story is set in the fictional Viking village of Berk – which for all its natural beauty and its courageous people, has a problem – the village is frequently raided at night by flying dragons that steal livestock and kill its people. Though he has already lost his wife to one such dragon raid many years ago, the chief of Berk, Stoick the Vast, believes that through courage and tenacity, Berk-ians can and should kill all the dragons and rid themselves of this plight. Although Stoick is well respected by his people, his son, the chief-to-be-waiting-in-the-wings, Hiccup is the joke of the village. Hiccup never seems to get things right and in the world of Berk where indecision and error in judgement is literally a matter of life and death, as much as he loves Hiccup, Stoick

or Berk doesn't have the luxury to tolerate Hiccup's inadvertent mistakes.

Try as Stoick may to keep Hiccup out of harm's way, the lad is bent on showing everyone, above all else his father, that he too is courageous and man enough to deal with real life – fighting and killing the dragons. And on one such dragon-raid night, despite orders to stay indoors while the villagers salvage their livestock from the raiding fire-breathing dragons, Hiccup, using a mechanical bow he had built, shoots at a Night Fury, an elusive rare dragon never before seen in daylight. Although he thinks he struck the Night Fury, he is widely disbelieved and blamed for much of the loss that night. Undaunted, Hiccup decides to search for the Night Fury using the approximate downward trajectory the dragon might have taken after getting hit.

And find he does indeed! Hiccup finds the dragon trapped and unable to move – knowing that this is his chance to redeem himself by killing the Night Fury, Hiccup draws up courage to kill Berk's archenemy. Yet even with his reputation on the line, he can't bring himself to hurt the helpless animal and instead, sets it free. But once free, the Night Fury immediately charges at Hiccup and although dragons always go for the kill, this time the beast reciprocates the favour and flees into the forest.

Meanwhile Stoick, enough of the dragons causing havoc in Berk, decides to go on an expedition to find and destroy the dragons' nest – to get rid of the problem once and for all.

In his bestselling memoir, *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch (post his terminal cancer diagnosis) begins his final lecture at Carnegie Mellon on the topic, 'Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams,' by acknowledging his life's first blessing – winning the parent lottery to start life off. He was blessed with parents who cared more about providing their children with knowledge, education and a good moral framework – a foundation strong enough to enter adulthood prepared and ready; rather than chasing after transitory, fleeting and frequently changing standards of society. Lottery or not, no sane person would deny the fact that parents are the most important people in a child's life and it is an oft repeated mantra by psychologists that childhood experiences play a huge part in who a child becomes and where he/she ends when grown up. The Catholic paediatrician and

REVIEW BY Joseph Anthraper

Joseph lives in Southampton, UK with Mahima, his wife and their 5 kids.

And before going away, at the advice of his friend, Gobber, Stoick lets Hiccup join the other teens in the dragon fighters' training programme, the coming-of-age ritual for the young people of Berk. Hiccup, however, returns to the forest to find the injured Night Fury trapped in a cove, unable to fly as Hiccup's bow had severed half of its tail fin. Moved with pity and compassion, Hiccup begins to take care of the injured dragon, naming him Toothless, feeding and nursing him, and an unlikely camaraderie develops between the two. Spending time with Toothless also gives Hiccup the unique advantage of studying the nature of dragons from a close vantage point, enabling him to ace the dragon fighting course – much to the surprise of his peers as well as Gobber. Knowing the peril Toothless would be in if the village knew about the dragon, Hiccup keeps Toothless and their friendship a secret from everyone.

And by the time Stoick returns from his failed expedition, having lost half his crew, he is both surprised as well as stunned to learn the transformation that has happened in Berk – his son Hiccup is no longer the butt of all jokes, but considered among the best and most courageous of dragon fighters. Both reeling from the aftermath of his failure, as well as realising that this is the most opportune moment to redeem the reputation of his son, the overjoyed father in Stoick immediately announces that his son will be the one to take part in the final exam reserved for the winner of the dragon



Although it is pure entertainment, this is where the movie speaks to today's culture – that true mercy and compassion always prevail.



fighting programme, to slay one of the captive dragons. Can Hiccup muster the courage and ruthlessness to kill the dragon to be that 'someone' in the eyes of his father? Will Hiccup be able to save Toothless and turn around the enmity between dragons and men so that both can live peacefully, forms the rest of the story.

We live in a culture which values power more than anything else. The Christian values of humility, kindness and welcoming the stranger that shaped the Western civilisation for more than a millennia are slowly being eroded by a hedonistic and individualistic culture. This should, however,

come as no surprise to anyone, as for a long time it was just the façade of Christian values without the inner support of faith. Although it is pure entertainment, this is where the movie speaks to today's culture – that true mercy and compassion always prevail – of course, it is not going to be easy, but as the Lord himself promised, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' The movie also reiterates the importance of a father's recognition and blessing in the life of a child.

How to train your dragon is a hugely entertaining family movie, appropriate for all ages; while speaking truth to our culture allegorically.



NewsWatch

Beatification process for Fr Roberto Malgesini officially started



The Vatican's Dicastery for the Causes of Saints has authorised the opening of the beatification process for Fr Roberto Malgesini, an Italian priest from Como who was widely known for his dedication to the poor until he was killed in 2020.

Cardinal Oscar Cantoni of Como announced the decision on 21 March during a Lenten retreat for young people, attended by Malgesini's sister. Malgesini was murdered by a homeless man with mental health issues while preparing to distribute breakfast near his parish, Saint Rocco. Although it is unclear whether his case falls under the category of offering one's life in charity, Pope Francis described his death as a martyrdom rooted in love for the poor. The attacker was later sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Born in 1969 and ordained in 1998, Malgesini spent years serving different communities before becoming parish vicar at Saint Rocco. He became especially known for his quiet, consistent care for the needy, often delivering food each morning with volunteers. Despite facing challenges, including a briefly imposed fine for aiding the homeless, he remained committed to his mission. Remembered as humble and joyful, Malgesini was praised for seeing Christ in everyone and serving without distinction. Church leaders and his family continue to honour his legacy of compassion and faith.

Catholic Bishops warn about New Anti-Conversion Law

Catholic bishops in India's Maharashtra state have warned that a newly passed anti-conversion law could expose clergy and laypeople to imprisonment for carrying out normal religious activities. The concern centres on the Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Act, approved by the state legislature in mid-March.

The bishops argue that the law interferes with essential Church practices, particularly the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), which prepares individuals to freely choose to become Catholic. They emphasised that the programme is designed to ensure conversions are voluntary and well informed. However, under the new legislation, even such conversions could be challenged – especially if family members object – leading to accusations of coercion or 'brainwashing.' Those involved in the

process could face severe penalties, including up to seven years in prison and significant fines, despite no wrongdoing. The bishops also raised concerns about vague language in the law, the shifting of the burden of proof onto the accused, and the lack of safeguards against false allegations.

Supporters of the law say it is intended only to prevent forced or fraudulent conversions. However, critics argue that similar laws in other Indian states have been used to discourage conversions to minority religions like Christianity.

Maharashtra, India's second most populous state, is expected to become the 13th state with such legislation once it receives final approval. Catholic leaders are calling for the law to be withdrawn or revised, insisting that it threatens religious freedom and could deepen social divisions.



By Sam Biju

Record Number of Baptisms planned in the Diocese of Richmond



A record 900 people entered the Catholic Church during Easter Vigil Masses on 4 April in the Diocese of Richmond, marking a significant increase in adult conversions. These individuals received baptism, the Eucharist, and confirmation after completing their formation. Church leaders say the surge reflects a deeper spiritual search, especially among younger people.

Catechists like Chris Emsley and Rose Scott noted that many are drawn to what they see as enduring truth in a world often shaped by relativism. A notable trend is the youthfulness of many participants. At parishes like St Stephen Martyr Church, many are in their 20s, while even teenagers are independently seeking the faith. Some are deeply engaged intellectually, reading theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo.

Personal stories highlight this movement. Teenagers like Samuel Cece discovered Christianity through unexpected means, such as a comic-style Bible, while others like Isaiah Watrous and Kaelynn Lake were introduced through social media, online debates, or influencers like Fr Mike Schmitz. This growth reflects a broader national trend. Other dioceses, including Diocese of Trenton and archdioceses such as Archdiocese of Washington, Archdiocese of Seattle, and Archdiocese of Chicago, are also reporting sharp increases in people entering the Church.

Church leaders attribute the rise to a renewed desire for meaning, community, and faith – especially among young adults seeking purpose and hope in a complex world.

Pro-life March in Portugal Disrupted



A pro-life march in Lisbon, Portugal, was disrupted on 21 March when a demonstrator threw a Molotov cocktail into the crowd. The device did not ignite, but it caused panic among participants, including families and children, who had gathered near the national Parliament. Fortunately, no one was injured.

The suspect, a 39-year-old man, was quickly restrained by attendees before police intervened and arrested him. Authorities later stated that he is linked to an activist group known for causing disturbances at public demonstrations. He was taken to a hospital for evaluation and remains in custody. No clear motive has been identified, and this marks the first violent incident targeting a pro-life event in Portugal.

Event organiser Nuno Marques Afonso condemned the act, emphasising the potential danger posed to the many families present. Similarly, Lisbon's Patriarch, Archbishop Rui Valério, strongly denounced the violence, calling it incompatible with democratic values and especially troubling given the presence of children. He reaffirmed the Church's support for participants and stressed that violence undermines truth and human dignity.

The march drew about 4,000 people in Lisbon, advocating for the protection of life and opposing euthanasia. While abortion is legal under certain conditions in Portugal, euthanasia legislation approved in 2023 has yet to be implemented.



Prepared by Edwin Joseph

BIBLE CHARACTER MATCH!

Match each character card to their Book in the Bible

BOOK CARDS

OLD TESTAMENT

Exodus

OLD TESTAMENT

Joshua

OLD TESTAMENT

1 Kings

OLD TESTAMENT

Ruth

OLD TESTAMENT

Jonah

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew

NEW TESTAMENT

John

NEW TESTAMENT

Luke

NEW TESTAMENT

Acts

CHARACTER CARDS

MOSES

Led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt

JOSHUA

Led the Israelites into the Promised Land

ELIJAH

A prophet who performed miracles by the power of God

RUTH

Showed faithful loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi

JONAH

Was swallowed by a great fish and sent to preach in Nineveh

MATTHEW

A tax collector who became one of the twelve apostles of Jesus

LAZARUS

Was raised from the dead by Jesus after four days in the tomb

MARTHA

Served Jesus with devotion and believed in him as the Son of God

PETER

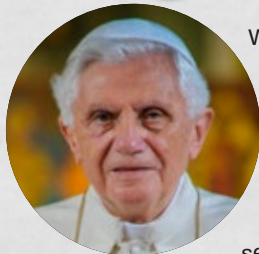
Peter was called by Jesus while working with his brother Andrew, instantly leaving his nets to follow him.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Cut out all the book cards and character cards on this page.
2. Place the book cards face down and the character cards face up on the table.
3. Players take turns flipping one book card and finding the matching character card.
4. The player with the most points is the winner!

Attention parents, Catechism teachers and faith formators! Kairos Global is happy to feature this multi-player game, an ideal, interesting and engaging tool for faith formation. Lookout for more such games in this space.

ON MY MIND



We must have the audacity to say that the great projects of the living creation are not the products of chance and error. Nor are they the products of a selective process to which

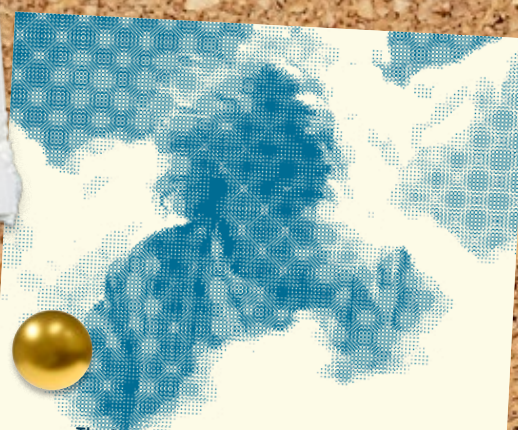
divine predicates can be attributed

in illogical, unscientific, and even mythic fashion.

The great projects of the living creation point to a creating Reason and show us a creating Intelligence, and they do so more luminously and radiantly today than ever before. Thus we can say today with a new certitude and joyousness that the human being is indeed a divine project, which only the creating Intelligence was strong and great and audacious enough to conceive of. Human beings are not a mistake but something willed; they are the fruit of love.

(Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger [Pope Benedict XVI])

BENITA ELISSA BENNY, KERALA, INDIA



The heart of the Father is open, generous, patient, and full of grace. He welcomes your voice. He sees your seeking. He honours your persistence – not because He needs to be convinced, but because He knows that in asking, you grow closer to His heart.

Every time we approach the altar, we are 'knocking' on the door of God's mercy. In the Eucharist, He opens the door and gives us not just things – but His very self. This is the ultimate answer to all our seeking: the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Every Mass is God responding to our deepest asking, seeking, and knocking. We ask for mercy, we seek union with Him, and we knock at the door of Heaven. And God opens the door wide.

MERITA THOMAS, FLORIDA, USA

**BY LIVING FOR
OURSELVES
WE DIE; BY DYING
TO OURSELVES
WE LIVE**

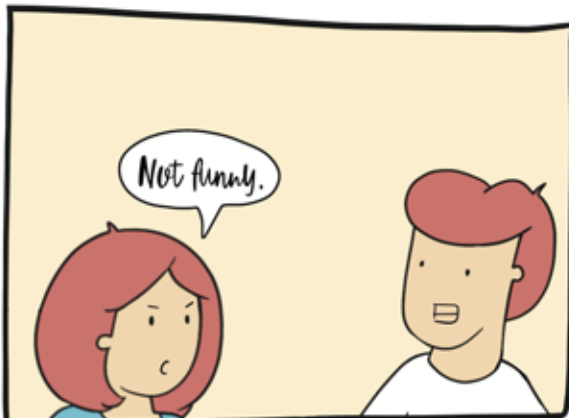
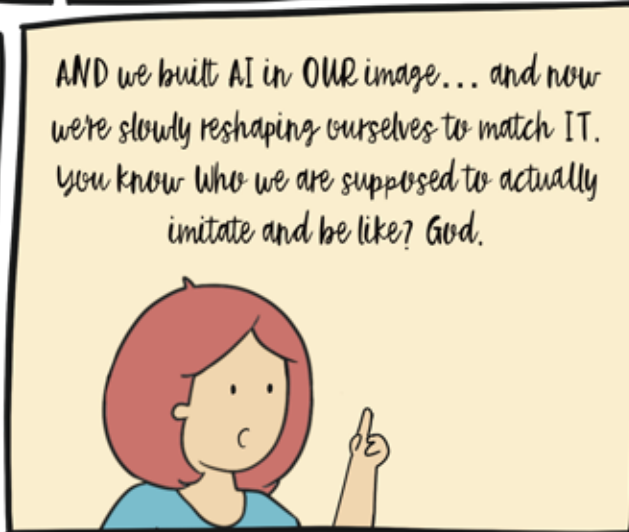
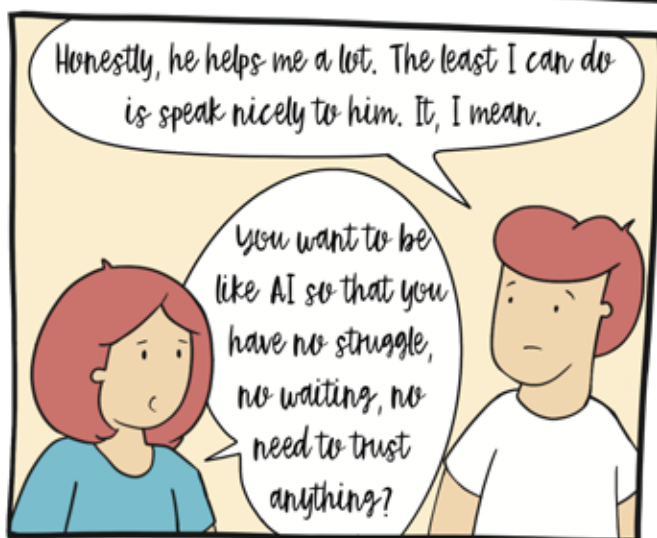
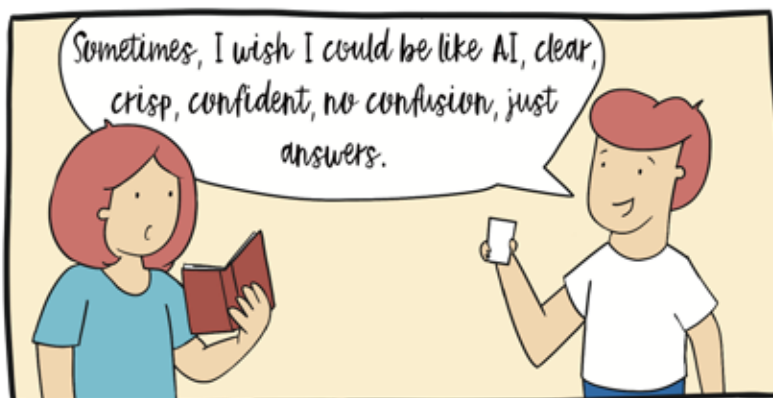
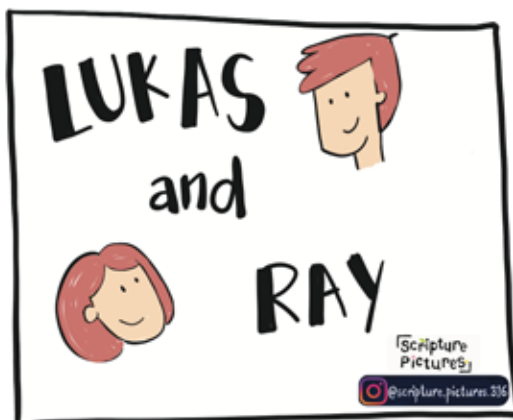
ANIL ISRAEL MANNHEIM, GERMANY



*Be who you were
created to be, and
you will set the
world on fire.*

(St Catherine of Siena)

Anita Treesa Benny, Ernakulam, India



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