

# Antiqua et Nova and Shifting Religious Authority: The Catholic Church's Response to Artificial Intelligence through a Postmodernist Paradigm

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**Abstract:** This study explores the intersection between artificial intelligence (AI) and religious authority through a critical analysis of *Antiqua et Nova*, an official document issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Catholic Church. The document is examined as a theological and ethical response to the challenges posed by the rapid advancement of AI, particularly its influence on spiritual practices and the potential shift in symbolic authority within religious life. Employing a qualitative content analysis method, this research focuses on how the Catholic Church addresses the tension between technological innovation and the preservation of human dignity, moral responsibility, and spiritual authenticity. The discussion is situated within the framework of postmodern thought, which emphasizes the decentralization of truth claims, the rise of digital mediation, and the erosion of traditional epistemic hierarchies. In this context, *Antiqua et Nova* offers a cautious yet constructive approach: it neither rejects AI outright nor embraces it uncritically. Instead, it affirms the importance of ethical discernment, the primacy of human relationality, and the irreplaceability of embodied spiritual presence. This article concludes that the Catholic Church, through *Antiqua et Nova*, seeks to maintain the integrity of religious authority by articulating a theological framework that critically engages with AI while upholding the foundational principles of Christian anthropology and moral theology.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, *Antiqua et Nova*, Religious Authority, Religion.

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## Introduction

Denny JA in an interview revealed that artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to replace some of the roles of religious leaders such as clerics, pastors, and monks, especially in terms of delivering religious information and answering routine questions of the people. This allows people to gain instant access to religious knowledge through AI's ability to process religious data quickly and widely. However, AI is seen as unable to completely replace the spiritual dimension, inner wisdom, and emotional relationships that so far have only been able to be built through human presence. Therefore, AI will be a complementary instrument that helps the role of religion in the digital era, not a total replacement for human spiritual authority (Media Indonesia, 2024; RRI, 2024).

But a different view comes from Dicky Sofjan through "Religion in the Age of Generative AI" (2024). He views that the presence of Generative AI has entered the space of religious life by bringing new challenges and opportunities in interpreting faith, spirituality, and human existence. AI no longer just comes as a technical tool, but becomes a social agent capable of shaping the way humans interact, search for meaning, and live a religious life. In this context, religious people cannot be seen as an anti-technological group, because they are also active in the process of searching for meaning, defending humanity, and developing ethics. However, Generative AI also raises theological concerns, especially related to the issue of transhumanism, biased algorithms, and threats to human dignity. Apps like the "Messiah App" show the role of AI that is starting to fill the spiritual dimension of humans. Thus, religion is required to be more critical, adaptive, and reflective in responding to increasingly complex technological developments and beyond physical and symbolic boundaries.

Thus, religion is required to be more critical, adaptive, and reflective in responding to increasingly complex technological developments and beyond physical and symbolic boundaries. In this context, Beth Singler (2025: 17-24) offers a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between religion and AI through three main forms of engagement, namely rejection, adoption, and adaptation. Rejection arises when AI is seen as a threat to humanity or religion, adoption is seen in the direct use of AI technology in religious practice, while adaptation reflects the transformation of religious values and structures to align with the presence of AI in the lives of religious people. This typology helps to frame the spectrum of religious responses more comprehensively and shows how

religion is not only reactive, but also creative in responding to technological developments.

The trend of using AI in Indonesia is indeed very significant. A survey by the Katadata Insight Center (KIC) in February 2025 showed that as many as 83.6% of Indonesians are familiar with AI, while as many as 64.7% admitted to using this technology intensely in their daily lives, including to seek information and knowledge. This data shows that AI has been integrated into citizens' daily practices and opens up opportunities also in the religious space, including finding information that is relevant to instant access to religious knowledge.

The development of AI globally has profoundly changed the world's landscape. Starting from a research lab in Silicon Valley, AI has become a new milestone on the journey to technological advancement led by the spirit of innovation. But as the use of AI spreads around the world, the voices of supporters of ethical traditions are getting louder. This view often calls for the need for stricter regulation of technological developments. Moreover, AI's ability to provide information through complex algorithms has raised important questions about the future of humanity in all its aspects. Socially, AI at the Advanced General Intelligence (AGI) and Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI) levels has the potential to surpass human capabilities in many ways. At this point, AI systems not only rely on humans to write algorithm code, but can generate the algorithms themselves. This phenomenon has caused widespread concern among AI developers around the world, including high-profile figures such as Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and Steve Wozniak (Tamuri et al., 2021: 5).

The paradigm of postmodernism provides a framework for understanding the religious response in the face of the presence of disruptive AI. In this view, the single authority and the grand narrative including traditional religious authority no longer have an absolute position. Postmodern societies live in a condition of plurality, fluidity, and fragmentation of meaning, the truth is relative and constantly negotiated. AI as a cutting-edge technological product is present not only as a tool, but as a new agent that participates in the construction of meaning, religion, and social relations. In this context, the presence of AI challenges the legitimacy of religious authority that comes from tradition, as access to religious information is now mediated by technology that is decentralized and personalized.

In this complex situation, the response of religious institutions has an important and decisive position. The Catholic Church as one of the world's religious authorities is also actively involved in responding to these dynamics. One form of that involvement is reflected in the document *Antiqua et Nova*. This document presents an in-depth reflection on the relationship between ethics, faith, and technology, especially in the context of the development of AI. Through the analysis of this text, this study aims to examine the attitude of the Catholic Church in the face of digital transformation, with special emphasis on the issue of the shift in religious authority triggered by the presence and sophistication of AI.

## **Methodology**

The research method in writing this article uses qualitative research to explore religious phenomena so as to produce systematic research works (Fadjar, 2004: 113). The author specifically conducts literature research by analyzing the content of religious manuscripts. This study is useful for bringing the content of religious texts to a context that develops in an up-to-date manner, including respect for religious values and the new knowledge contained in them (Maman Kh., et al., 2006: 108-117). With this approach, the research is directed to be able to reveal the relationship between religion and AI through the study of religious documents that are relevant to the dynamics of the times. The process of creating it opens up space for dialogue between religious texts, religious institutions, and contemporary technological challenges.

On this basis, this study makes the document *Antiqua et Nova: Notes on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence (2025)* as the main reference. This document is the result of the official publication of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Education and Culture of the Vatican which was authorized by Pope Francis and has been translated by the RP. Thomas Eddy Susanto, SCJ and edited by the Department of Documentation and Information of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI). In his introductory note, the editor explained that the translation process was carried out without significant editorial intervention so that the translator's language style was maintained, but still ensured readability and conformity with the original text.

The *Antiqua et Nova* document is the Catholic Church's reflective invitation to respond critically and morally to the development of artificial intelligence (AI), addressed not only to Catholics but also to society at large. This document is not dogmatic or descriptive, but rather offers an ethical and theological guide that emphasizes the importance of positioning human beings as moral and spiritual subjects, not just technocratic objects. This document consists of five main parts: (1) An introduction that underscores the urgency of ethical research on AI; (2) an explanation of the meaning and history of AI; (3) a discussion of human intelligence in the light of Christian philosophy and theology; (4) affirmation of the role of ethics in AI development; and (5) specific questions about the application of AI in various areas of life. Principles such as human dignity, justice, responsibility, and prudence are the main cornerstones of this document, which makes them relevant in re-reading the dynamics of religious authority in the digital age.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Antiqua and Nova dan Pascamodernisme***

The state of society in the postmodernist period was centered on the production and reproduction of information, not the production of goods that appeared physically. Efforts to fulfill a lifestyle are the main thing rather than pursuing basic needs. Of course, this implies changes in various aspects of knowledge from philosophy, aesthetics, literature, to social (Wijayanti & Rachmawati, 2019: 18). At this time, information technology through the internet and social media has also transformed religious life. One of the main impacts is that there is no longer any attention to the value of truth. Now the main focus of human beings lies in justifying something that is considered right (Alimi, 2018: 1–3).

In this context of postmodernism, the *Antiqua et Nova* document exists as a theological response to technological advances, specifically AI which has influenced the structure of human thinking, acting, and religion. The document emphasizes that one of the great challenges of AI is when the technology no longer only conveys information, but also creates a new framework of truth. This is exactly the character of a postmodern society that emphasizes justification rather than truth of objective value (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 6).

In the midst of this conversation, leap after leap continues to occur so that a rapidly moving civilization allows for the creation of space for a shift in discourse from anthropocentric to technocentric. This idea is in the shade of transhumanism that paves the way for the future of human evolution. Of course, there is a connection between philosophy, science, culture, and the development of technology itself. The nature of human needs has undergone a review, including its location in the wider life (Hartanto, 2022: 10).

In response to this, *Antiqua et Nova* reminds that technology must not shift the position of human beings as whole and dignified subjects. In the section "Human Dignity", this document rejects the transhumanistic vision that places the body and mind as technical projects that can be perfected indefinitely (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 8). This rejection is not based on technological conservatism, but rather on the anthropological understanding that human beings are not only rational and productive beings but also relational beings who live on love, forgiveness, and faith.

The discussion of these changes for today's society is inseparable from the role of AI which often raises questions about its potential to replace the role of humans in various aspects of life, including in the religious realm. Especially considering its extraordinary ability to process information through a series of algorithms. However, it is important to re-explain the concept of the essence of AI and its working mechanisms. In this case, AI is considered a machine capable of thinking and learning from new problems, then coming to its own conclusions. Often AI is also defined as machine intelligence that can operate efficiently in various fields (Jaya et al., 2018: 6).

Through this document, the Catholic Church puts AI in a very critical position. *Antiqua et Nova* states that artificial intelligence is a human creation that should not acquire a moral or spiritual status equivalent to that of humans themselves. AI has no ethical responsibilities and does not have the relational or existential experience on which moral authority is based (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 9–10). The Church does not ignore the benefits of AI, but refuses to leave moral decisions to a system that has no consciousness or free will.

Most of the descriptions that have been presented before, such as the example of AI's ability to classify Paul's letters (Reed, 2021), the development of religious chatbots, to the use of AI sermons in Germany or Virtual Mufti in the UAE, all point to a shift in

symbolic authority in religion. *Antiqua et Nova* does not reject the use of AI in the religious realm, but underscores the importance of human authority as a moral subject that is irreplaceable by machines. AI must still be seen as an instrument, not a person, let alone a source authority of revelation (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 11).

The document also emphasizes the importance of the principle of prudence in ethical decision-making regarding new technologies. The Church encourages people and leaders to consider not only the effectiveness, but also the long-term consequences for human social and spiritual relationships. This principle is reaffirmed in a passage that calls for the need for dialogue between faith and science, so that AI does not distance humans from others or from God (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 10).

On the other hand, the formation of digital ethics is a particular concern in this document. Education that integrates spiritual values, technological understanding, and critical reflection is seen as important, especially for the younger generation. The goal is not only for them to be able to use technology intelligently, but also for them to have moral sensitivity in distinguishing between what is fair, humane, and brings the common good (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 12). Thus, technology is not only responded to passively, but also actively directed through the praxis of faith.

Thus, *Antiqua et Nova* takes a critical position in the paradigm of postmodernism that rejects a single authority but also does not succumb to extreme relativism. The Church affirms that truth can still be found in the light of faith, and AI must not be a shortcut to false spirituality. In a complex postmodern world, this document serves as a moral guide that reaffirms the role of human beings, not only as users of technology, but as guardians of dignity, relationships, and intrinsic spiritual values (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 12).

### ***The Challenges of Transhumanism***

The increasingly complex development of AI is bringing about a major shift in the landscape of human spiritual life. The discourse of postmodernism sees that information technology has changed the way people understand social realities, including in religion. Jean-François Lyotard calls today's society a "computerized society," which no longer relies on a single narrative, but rather on the rapid and fragmented production of information. Knowledge, in this situation, is spread and digitized, making religious

authorities lose their epistemological dominance over the truth (Hidayat, 2019). *Antiqua et Nova* also captures this shift by asserting that AI-generated information is not neutral, as it is shaped by the creator's intentions and specific social goals, and thus has the potential to shape the way of thinking of believers (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 6).

In the context of postmodernism, authority no longer lies in a single religious institution, but is spread across digital networks, algorithms, and non-human agents such as AI. Consequently, the presence of AI in the religious realm, both in the form of chatbots, digital spiritual assistants, and the production of interpretations of sacred texts, has the potential to shift the symbolic and authoritative functions of religious leaders. This raises concerns that AI could present the illusion of "automatic authority", even though it has no moral or spiritual foundation. *Antiqua et Nova* warns that although technology can help the preaching of faith, the authentic role of a preacher remains linked to spiritual experiences, personal dispositions, and faith relationships that cannot be replaced by AI systems (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 10).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of transhumanism that places technology as a means of total human improvement both physically, cognitively, and spiritually is criticized in this document. Transhumanism is believed to bring the promise of improvement and liberation of human beings from their biological weaknesses, but also opens up space for the dominance of the values of technological efficiency that can paralyze the spiritual dimension of man. *Antiqua et Nova* rejects the idea that human beings can be infinitely improved by technical systems, because this negates the essence of humanity as a relational and spiritual being (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 8). In this assumption, the human body and soul are considered to be algorithmically perfected, whereas in Christian teachings, human value is not measured by performance, but by dignity as the image and likeness of God.

The idea of superintelligence, which in some discourses AI juxtaposes with theological attributes such as omniscient, omniscient, and omnipotent, shows how technology is beginning to enter territory traditionally occupied by the concept of divinity. Mercer and Trothen (2021) call this a covert attempt by humans to create an "artificial god" as a form of outrage against limited human nature. In this context, *Antiqua et Nova* emphatically states that AI cannot be a bridge of transcendence. The relationship between man and the divine cannot be replaced by interaction with digital systems. Faith is not the

result of logical engineering, but rather an openness to mystery and deep relational experience.

The document *Antiqua et Nova* proposes a theological framework that reaffirms that human dignity cannot be converted into an algorithmic project. In this context, AI cannot be given absolute trust in matters related to life, morality, or faith. Even when AI shows higher performance than humans in processing religious data, its role must still be limited by the principles of prudence and moral judgment conducted by humans as ethical subjects (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 10–11).

In addition, this document calls for the people not only to consume technology passively, but also to actively build moral responsibility towards it. One of the suggestions is to strengthen the principle of the common good in all decisions involving the use of AI. The common good is not seen merely as efficiency or collective benefit, but as an integral vision that values human vulnerability, uniqueness, and interpersonal relationships in the light of the Gospel. Therefore, AI development must be directed at the service of love, social justice, and solidarity, not at the accumulation of data or economic power alone (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 11).

*Antiqua et Nova* voices the importance of spiritual formation and digital ethics, especially for the younger generation who are often the most active users of technology. This document encourages the development of a curriculum and education of the faith that not only contains doctrine, but also equips the ability to distinguish between authentic and manipulative, as well as fostering sensitivity to human justice and dignity (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 12). With this formation, it is hoped that the faithful can live a digital life responsibly, not get caught up in technological illusions, and remain faithful to the prophetic mission of the Church.

### ***Between Ethics and Authenticity***

The involvement of AI in the religious realm has given rise to a variety of discussions related to in-depth ethical considerations. The integration of AI into religious practices raises concerns about the potential reduction of individual autonomy and the role of humans in a personal nature. With AI capabilities becoming more sophisticated, there is a need for ethical governance and regulation to control potential consequences. Close collaboration between religious leaders, technologists, ethicists, and policymakers

is critical in establishing clear guidelines, ethical frameworks, and effective regulatory mechanisms. The goal is to ensure that the use of AI in religious contexts runs responsibly and accountably. Through this cross-disciplinary dialogue, it is hoped that a balanced approach can be produced between technological innovation and religious values and ethics that are upheld in society (Alkhouri, 2024: 18).

In response to the promises and risks associated with AI, various stakeholders from the government, private sector, and academia have conducted research with the aim of aligning AI systems with the ethical and normative frameworks embraced by society. They refer to classical Western ethical theories, such as consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, to provide direction in ethical considerations around AI. These principles, such as transparency, fairness, non-harm, responsibility, and privacy, have an important role to play in discussions about AI ethics, as they serve as a guide for creators and users of AI systems. Nonetheless, a more in-depth theoretical assessment shows the existence of fundamental ambiguity in the ethical terms used to evaluate and justify the use of AI within existing frameworks. One significant ambiguity is in determining the ethical values that should be the basis for moral judgments regarding the application of AI. For example, proponents of utilitarian arguments are often unable to precisely define the form of utilitarianism they embrace. Simply prioritizing efficiency improvement does not cover all aspects of utilitarian or consequentialist analysis.

Utilitarianism as a moral theory asserts that there is an intrinsic good that must be maximized, but there is still debate among utilitarians about this intrinsic nature at the metaethical level. Some scholars adhere to hedonistic value theory, which emphasizes that pleasure and happiness are primary intrinsic value holders, in line with classical utilitarian theory (Kousar et al., 2024: 104).

Improvements in the development of AI provide new opportunities in the interpretation of religious texts. However, this also presents significant challenges, one of which is its impact on the traditional role of religious leaders. If AI is able to provide similar or even more in-depth interpretations of sacred texts, then the position and function of religious leaders can be questioned. In addition, another challenge is how religion, which is considered sacred and full of spiritual value, can integrate with technology that is rational and data-driven. There may be a tension between the rational logic of AI and religious beliefs that often involve mystical and spiritual elements. It is possible that the advancement of AI will affect the understanding and practice of religion

in the digital age, which means that religious values and ethics will have to be adjusted (Gustamal et al., 2022: 4-5).

Academic discussions about religious authority and the new media show a split in religious authority in Islam. The question of who has the right to lead Islamic discussions in the midst of the development of modern information technology and mass education is becoming increasingly complex and challenging to answer. Modern information technology encourages more democratic forms of religious practice, so that Muslim communities can eventually be directly involved in the creation of religious narratives or access religious information through new media. The implication is that religious authority is no longer only owned by traditional scholars, who were born out of the traditional higher education system and have a deep knowledge of the Islamic holy book. This democratization of religious practice has resulted in the emergence of new actors involved in the creation of new religious discourse, often referred to as religious youth. They have the ability to convey religious messages in a way that appeals to younger generations, and their popularity in the public sphere is determined by their ability to adapt to new media and package religious messages in a more modern and accessible way (Triantoro et al., 2023: 172).

The ethical challenges that arise from the integration of AI in religious practice, such as concerns about the diminishing autonomy of individuals and the role of humans as moral agents, have also been highlighted by the *Antiqua et Nova* document. This document confirms that technology is not a neutral phenomenon. Its presence always contains values, ideologies, and directions that need to be critically realized by the people of faith (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 6). Therefore, ethical and theological reflection are inseparable from the development of technology itself.

In response to these challenges, *Antiqua et Nova* offers an approach that encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration, especially between the Church, experts, policymakers, and communities of people. The goal is not to hinder innovation, but to put human dignity at the center of every digitalization process. The ethical framework offered by the Church in this document is in harmony with the values of justice, prudence, responsibility, and transparency, which in public discourse are also key principles in the philosophy of applied ethics (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 11).

But in contrast to the normative and often abstract approach of Western ethics, this document places a strong emphasis on personal and spiritual relationships. Truth in the context of faith is not merely the result of moral evaluation or consequentialist impacts, but the fruit of inner dialogue, spiritual experience, and openness to the transcendent. Therefore, *Antiqua et Nova* rejects attempts to make AI a stand-alone source of ethical and religious authority, because this system lacks moral conviction or capacity to respond to human suffering (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 9–10).

As shown in studies on the involvement of AI in the interpretation of religious texts, such as AI's ability to interpret Paul's letters or answer questions of Muslims through Virtual Mufti. Challenges to spiritual authority are becoming more and more real. In such cases, AI begins to enter the realm of interpretation, providing instant answers, and even imitating sermons that are usually the exclusive domain of religious leaders. Although efficient, this kind of practice opens up profound questions about the boundaries between information and wisdom, as well as between machines and the testimony of faith. *Antiqua et Nova* unequivocally states that religious experience cannot be reduced to data, and the proclamation of faith cannot be carried out by entities that do not know sacrifice and love (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 10).

In addition, this document affirms that the use of AI in religious contexts should be based on the principles of honesty and transparency. Ummah have the right to know if the religious content they consume is produced or moderated by a digital system. This aspect is important to maintain public trust and prevent spiritual manipulation. The ethics of faith communication, for the Church, is not only about conveying the message, but also how to maintain the authenticity, intention, and integrity of its proclamation (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 11).

In the context of democratizing religious discourse, as is the case in Muslim communities or other religious groups, this document does not explicitly reject such reforms. But *Antiqua et Nova* reminds that any form of participation must remain rooted in a solid formation of faith. When religious narratives are disseminated through new media and packaged in popular form, there is a very likely shift from preaching to mere spiritual consumption. The Church emphasizes that faith education and the deepening of digital ethics are a shared responsibility among communities, ecclesiastical authorities, and even technology developers to ensure that the digital space remains a field of witness, not just a marketplace of symbols (*Antiqua et Nova*, 2025: 12).

## Conclusion

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) in the context of religious life presents a dilemma as well as an opportunity that challenges traditional religious authority structures. AI not only serves as a technical tool, but has also transformed into a symbolic agent capable of accessing, disseminating, and even interpreting religious information. This symptom reflects the face of the postmodern world, which is characterized by the fragmentation of authority, the collapse of a single narrative, and a shift from objective truth to personal justification. In various examples such as religious chatbots, virtual mufti, and AI sermons, there are human attempts to automate religious authorities, which demand a serious response from religious institutions.

The *Antiqua et Nova* documents analyzed in this study offer critical reflections and theological alternatives that favor human dignity. The Catholic Church does not reject technological advances, but affirms ethical and spiritual boundaries so that AI does not replace the role of humans as moral subjects and preachers of the faith. Emphasizing the principles of prudence, digital ethics, and deep spiritual formation, this document comes as a guide to integrating faith and technology responsibly. In a world full of hyperreality, *Antiqua et Nova* emphasizes that religious authority is not just a matter of information, but a matter of relationships, testimony, and presence that cannot be replaced by algorithmic systems.

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