

sustainability (162). Because the experience of wonder draws attention to the communality of existence—“one is intensely aware of the other and of oneself (difference) and one senses a depth connection with oneself and the other (identity)” (165)—it calls us to stand in solidarity with that which is not-me in creation. Because the human person is fundamentally “opened to” and “opened by the world” (166), one must be vulnerable and not exploitative (167–170).

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Encountering Artificial Intelligence: Ethical and Anthropological Investigations (Theological Investigations of Artificial Intelligence). Edited by Matthew J. Gaudet, Noreen Herzfeld, Paul Scherz, and Jordan J. Wales. Pickwick Publications, 2024. xii + 262. \$52.00 hardcover, \$37.00 paperback, \$9.99 e-book. [This volume can also be downloaded via open-access from the *Journal of Moral Theology* website, doi.org/10.55476/001c.91230.]

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) causes the moral and theological spheres, including pastoral ministry, to address its pervasive influence on human experience. These imperatives form the foundation of the dialogical process that emerged from extensive discussions on AI and human existence, culminating in the publication of the Theological Investigations of Artificial Intelligence series, the first volume of which is *Encountering Artificial Intelligence: Ethical and Anthropological Investigations*.

A collaborative work of inquiry “born from dialogue” by the AI Research Group convened under the Vatican’s Centre for Digital Culture, this work brings theologians, philosophers, and ethicists into conversation to explore and “facilitate further dialogue both within and beyond the Catholic world” about how contemporary artificial intelligence challenges our theological anthropology, moral reasoning, and modes of encounter. The collection thoughtfully explores technological changes through the resources of Catholic social teaching. Working out of Pope Francis’s insistence on a “culture of encounter,” this work does not just offer ethical and policy-oriented reflections through moral inquiry; it also explores pastoral questions regarding AI and culture, which further allows for a deepening of understanding of how AI and human personhood intersect in the twenty-first century’s digital renaissance.

The volume is structured for easy reading, using well-connected thematic arcs. The first arc focuses on theological anthropology, exploring human dignity, personhood, and relationships in the context of AI. Other themes include an examination of AI’s effects upon

family life and social institutions, including those associated with labor, economics, and governance, and how Catholic social thought and moral inquiry can inspire policies responding to growing ethical concerns regarding AI and its use within these same institutions. Common threads throughout the volume include the need to preserve human agency and fragile interpersonal encounters, the dangers of technocratic reductionism, and the possibilities for AI to augment human flourishing if oriented toward the common good.

Given this volume's diverse contributors, it is easy to see that the primary strength of this work lies in its interdisciplinary approach and method. Each chapter engages AI as a social and moral technology with the potential to reconfigure relationships (internally, interpersonally, and within our institutions) while rejecting current trends of optimism which ignore the theological, moral, and pastoral issues surrounding AI-human encounter. This approach naturally lends itself to offering practical recommendations for better implementing these ideas into diverse faith communities. Modeling a mode of ecclesial engagement that is dialogical rather than merely doctrinal, the contributors do well in attending to their stated pastoral priority of equipping the church and wider civic society to engage AI's challenges with rigor and charity.

While the book's breadth is commendable, it sometimes sacrifices depth for coverage. Certain technical claims about machine "consciousness" or cognitive architectures are usefully surveyed but would have benefited from sustained dialogue with working computer scientists. A few chapters rely on philosophical ideas about AI instead of engaging with current empirical research. Although the book wisely avoids common euphemisms, it does occasionally treat certain policy recommendations in abstract terms. Including dialogue with legislators or tech designers might have produced more granular, implementation-focused guidance. Similarly, some proposals for pastoral practice could use additional "fleshing out" through discussion of real-world ministerial applications.

Even if concrete implementation guidance is lacking, still what distinguishes this volume for theologians and ministers is its sustained pastoral orientation. Several essays foreground "encounter" as not merely a sociological category but a theological imperative, laying claim to a technologically engaged world assessed by whether it fosters or erodes genuine encounter with God and neighbor. As many search for answers to questions surrounding the ethics of AI and its intrusion into our everyday lives, parishes, seminaries, and catechetical programs can use the book to introduce clergy and lay leaders to the ethical stakes of AI and as a starting point in equipping ministers to lead parish conversations that are both technically informed and theologically rooted. The book's reflections on dignity

and relationality can inform pastoral responses that validate human suffering, critique dehumanizing uses of technology, and propose ethical alternatives that respect agency and community, movements that can be used by ministers to accompany the faithful in adopting practices that cultivate attentiveness, presence, and care in a digitally saturated environment.

Encountering Artificial Intelligence is an important and timely intervention: measured, theologically serious, and pastorally minded. It supplies a framework for assessing AI that refuses easy binaries, insisting on sustained ethical discernment grounded in doctrine and human praxis. For theologians, ethicists, and ministers seeking resources to navigate the moral landscape of contemporary technology, this volume is indispensable. If the Church is to be a constructive presence in the shaping of technological futures, these are the kinds of conversations it must continue through the twenty-first century.

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The Family as Basic Social Unit: Living Out Catholic Social Teaching. By Kevin Schemenauer. The Catholic University of America Press, 2024, xvi + 277 pages. \$85.00 hardcover, \$34.95 paperback, \$34.95 e-book.

In *The Family as Basic Social Unit: Living Out Catholic Social Teaching*, Kevin Schemenauer offers an exhaustive analysis of the role of the family in society. His argument relies on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching with a particular focus on aspects specifically related to Church teaching on the family. He draws from concepts of the relationship between society and family developed by renowned voices in contemporary scholarship, such as Lisa Sowle Cahill, David Matzko McCarthy, Florence Caffrey Bourg, and Julie Hanlon Rubio. These foundational ideas offer the starting point for Schemenauer to further develop and refine his analysis of the inherent social character and social interdependence of families. From a magisterial perspective, the author finds great value in Pope Francis's teaching on the family's social character and responsibilities of members of the family for society. Francis emphasizes the close relationship between the Church, families, and society, leading Schemenauer to expound upon the significance of their mutual interaction and influence. Ultimately, the author argues that families are the basic cell of society and the Church; thus, he highlights the societal role of families in serving Jesus Christ. Schemenauer's argument both challenges and guides families toward a deeper faith in