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Editorial

I write this in anticipation of the final results of our general election. We stood in the queues of 1994 with a sense of relief and joyful expectation of a new South Africa. Judging by the length of queues in some quarters, now in 2024 – 30 years later – we might have sensed a similar atmosphere, though cautious and subdued, hoping for a new South Africa reborn. And, as religious educators, we might be wondering how far or near our country is to the Reign of God.

As mentioned in our March issue, we have changed direction in this publication towards more reflective material that will contribute to our professional development.

Readers' comments can be sent to the editor at paulf@cie.org.za.

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It will take hope, inspiration and action to save the earth

Feb 7, 2024

Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, Founder; UN Messenger of Peace, The Jane Goodall Institute



I travel around the world 300 days a year, and everywhere, I meet young people who have lost hope. And we know that suicide rates are going up. If all our young people lose hope, then we are doomed. Because if you lose hope, you become apathetic. You give up and you do nothing. The future depends on

all of us getting together now and doing something to try and heal the harm we have inflicted on this planet. How long can the earth survive if we continue as we are now?

I've spent many years in the rainforest, understanding the interconnection of all living things. I learned about chimpanzee behaviour and about this amazing ecosystem of the forest, where every plant and animal has a role to play. I see it as like a beautiful tapestry of interconnected life forms. As humans move in with their cattle, development and deforestation, a strand from the tapestry is gradually pulled away, one after the other, as a particular animal or plant disappears from that ecosystem. And if enough threads are pulled, the tapestry will hang in tatters and the ecosystem will collapse.



We must realize that we humans are not separate from the natural world. So many people live in cities and are unaware that we depend on the natural world for everything: food, water and clothing. We rely on healthy ecosystems. But as we continue our selfish development of this materialistic lifestyle, we destroy these ecosystems. We need a new mindset.

I spend a lot of time talking to different people around the world – to children, CEOs, government officials and anybody who will listen. I have realized that if you want to change somebody, there's no use arguing with them. It's no good pointing fingers and saying, "What you're doing is bad for future generations." They're not going to listen. They don't want to listen.

So, how do you change people? You have to change people by reaching their hearts. I think that when people change, it's got to be their decision to change from within. So, when I'm talking to these decision-makers who have such sway over us, I try to find a way to reach the heart. The way that I see the most effective is to tell stories.

Sustainable narratives

So, I'll tell you a story: I was talking to a group of CEOs in Singapore. One of them was the head of a big multi-multinational corporation. He said that for the last eight years, I have been fighting to get my company to be sustainable and ethical in the country where we source our supplies, in our offices around the world and in how we treat our customers. He said there were three reasons why I wanted to make my company more ethical.

First, he said, because I saw the writing on the wall, we were using natural resources faster than nature could replenish them in many places. Second was consumer pressure – people are beginning to understand and become more aware. They're starting to ask questions like: Why is this product cheap? Is it because of unfair wages paid in other countries? Is it because of some kind of slave labour? Was the making of it damaging to the environment? Was it cruel to animals? But here we are; we don't seem to understand what we are doing to harm the planet.

But the third reason that triggered everything for me was when my 10-year-old little girl came back from school one day and said, "Daddy, they're telling me that what you're doing is harming the planet. That's not true. Is it Daddy? Because isn't it my planet"? That reached the heart.

The world is in a mess politically, socially and, of course, environmentally. I've been asked so many times during this week in Davos, "Well, don't you think that the terrible wars in Gaza and the Ukraine are detracting attention away from the threat of climate change and loss of biodiversity?" And we all must, if we have any human instincts, feel desperation when we think of children in Gaza being operated on and having limbs amputated without anaesthetic because there's no anaesthetic left. What are we doing about people who are facing famine? What can we do about it?

I don't know. But although this is terrible and the Ukrainians moving into deep winter should make all our hearts bleed. That does not mean that we shouldn't also focus our attention on climate change because that affects the future of our children, our grandchildren and theirs.

Navigating towards hope and action

I see humanity as at the mouth of a very long, very dark tunnel. And right at the end of that tunnel, there's a little star that's hope. And it's no good sitting at the mouth of the tunnel folding our arms and hoping that the star will come. No, we have to roll up our sleeves. We have to climb over, crawl under and work our way around all the obstacles that stand between us and the star: climate change; biodiversity loss; killing of the soil with agricultural poisons, pesticides and herbicides; harming the ocean with our artificial fertilizers; and poverty. Poverty drives some people to destroy the environment simply to eke out a living by making charcoal or by clearing the forest to make more land to grow food for their growing families.

The good news is that there are groups of people tackling every single one of the problems we face today. Every single one.

The sad thing is that so often, people work in silos. They are concentrating only on solving their problem. For instance, imagine that we are a group fighting the closure of a coal mine because of all the carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. We've closed it but haven't been thinking holistically; we haven't been thinking of all the people who will lose jobs and how we are plunging them into deep poverty. But if we start thinking holistically from the beginning, we can find ways of helping all these people who lose their jobs to make a living so that we get a win-win-win situation.

We need to collaborate and take action now. Many of these big conferences are fantastic – they create networking and people meet and inspire each other, leading to much good. But as you all know, there are a lot of intentions and commitments to reducing emissions but very seldom are those commitments honoured. The time for talk has passed. What we need today is action.

My greatest hope lies in young people today. In 1991, I was already meeting young people worldwide who had lost hope, were angry, depressed or just apathetic. And they said, well, you've compromised our future and there's nothing we can do. I said that's not true.

We do have a window of time; if we get together, we can start to make a change. So that began the Jane Goodall Institute's Roots & Shoots programme.



Every group of Roots & Shoots chooses three projects to help people, animals, and the environment because they are all interrelated. And what began with 12 high school students in Tanzania is now in 70 countries around the world. And these young people are planting trees, collecting plastic and raising money for projects that they're

passionate about. They're changing the world as I speak.

Hope through nature, innovation and human spirit

There are so many reasons for hope. Young people are my main reason for hope. My second reason is the resilience of nature. We destroy an entire ecosystem. Give it time and nature will come back. Animals on the brink of extinction can be given another chance.

My next reason for hope, the biggest difference between us and other animals, is this explosive development of our intellect. Yes, other animals are far more intelligent and sentient than used to be believed. We've designed a rocket that went up to planet Mars with a robot that took photos. And so, our hope of finding a planet where life could continue, a kind of life we know, was doomed.

Fortunately, today, science is coming out with innovative solutions like capturing carbon from the atmosphere and renewable energy. This is a big step forward. I wish more people were talking about this type of technological solution, which is one way we can live in greater harmony with nature.

But nature protects itself through forests, oceans, kelp forests and wetlands. These ecosystems are nature's solutions to climate change. They're cheaper than some of these technological solutions. And that's really the message I've been trying to give in Davos: by protecting the forest and Mother Nature, Mother Nature will help us escape the mess we've made.

And my last reason for hope: the indomitable human spirit – the people who tackle what seems impossible and won't give in so often succeed. So, when our Roots & Shoots groups get to the end of a session we bring groups face to face from different parts of a city, country or even the world. They stood up and said, "Together we can." Meaning, together we can save the world. And I said, "Yes, we can."

We know what we ought to do. We understand all the different ways that we can combat and slow down climate change. But do we have the will? Do governments have the will? Do the people have the will to make those little concessions? If you believe that we have a window of time, could you join me in saying, "Together we can, together we will, together we must save the world?"



Dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians: A school for fostering coexistence

Since 1979, the Neve Shalom-Wahat Al-Salam School for Peace offers training to enhance dialogue and equality between Israelis and Palestinians, a need that has intensified since October 7, 2023.



By Julie Connan (Special correspondent in Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam)

May 2nd, 2024

Roi Silberberg's journey to the School for Peace feels like a tale of conversion. "At 23, while studying biochemistry at Tel Aviv University, I had an epiphany during a course on dialogue between identities," recounts Silberberg, who has led this emblematic institution since 2020. "Although I was quite politicized, I never spoke to Arabs, having completed my military service... it was the norm in a highly segregated society, even more so back then. And there, I discovered new perspectives, new people, issues I was completely blind to."

This revelation prompted the student to alter his life's path: "I switched to studying human rights, earned a PhD in philosophy of education, and became a political educator, before joining the School for Peace as a coordinator in 2006," added the now 44-year-old director. Since its inception, the institution has developed international expertise in Jewish-Palestinian dialogue, "considering power dynamics, history, and now the war," he said.

Established in 1979, the School for Peace at Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam was the first educational institution in Israel dedicated to fostering peace and promoting more humane, egalitarian, and just relations between Palestinians and Jews.

October 7, a "wake-up call"

In the hours following October 7, the institution found itself at the forefront of rekindling dialogue within the village itself. "Some felt distrustful, others were silenced... And it's true that when the drums of war beat, there is no room for other voices in Israeli society," added Silberberg, who speaks Arabic. "Especially for Palestinians, who are the most oppressed."

The attacks by Hamas and the war in Gaza have also highlighted a sense of urgency beyond the village. "It's not a grassroots movement, but October 7 somehow served as a wake-up call. People came to us through word of mouth," said Silberberg. "Even though they are discouraged, they understand the importance of our work."

The School for Peace, which has trained about 500 people in its three-year-long courses and thousands in short programs, also offers training in universities, professional environments, and abroad. In the health sector, where Palestinians from Israel and the West Bank are more proportionally represented, "Jewish employees sometimes make their colleagues feel it's impolite to speak Arabic," he explained. "A question that becomes even more delicate in times of war."

Listening to the Palestinian perspective

Noa Sommer Cohen experienced contrasting views before and after the program. This 31-year-old Israeli, who manages a centre for young adults in the southern Tel Aviv port city of Jaffa, enrolled in a program focused on mixed cities, like Jaffa, where over 20% of the population are Israeli Arabs. "I signed up before the war to work on cooperation projects between Jews and Arabs. My expectations were mostly professional," she said. "I didn't imagine the journey would be so significant."

The initial sessions, in the aftermath of the attacks, were painful. "Listening to the Palestinian perspective on October 7 was very uncomfortable for me at first," recalled Noa. "But the courses allowed me to see reality as it is, from different perspectives and not just the dominant one. Even though I disagreed with some views, I understood that it was important to know where they came from." After completing the program, Noa initiated a project called "Encounters" to bring together young people disoriented by the war and eager to understand the conflict in its entirety. "The goal is for them to grasp the situation in its complexity, not as the government wants us to see it."

These seminars have been spreading. But Silberberg cautioned to temper the sometimes immense expectations of the participants. "We are sometimes expected to provide solutions we cannot offer. We are primarily here to open doors."



Consider Curriculum: Part 2

Written and compiled by Paul Faller for the Catholic Institute of Education

We began this series in the previous issue, considering the nature of Religious Education. We turn in this issue to the question of rationale: why do we insist on it when the State effectively has pushed it to the sidelines?

This series of reflections is intended to refresh our understanding of the subject and the contexts within which it takes place and to promote discussion among religious educators about the theory and practice of what we might regard as the living spring at the heart of curriculum.

Here is an overview of the series.

Part 1 Religious Education – What is its nature? (Vol 10 No 1)

Part 2 The Rationale – Why do we have it? (Vol 10 No 2)

Part 3 the Student and the Teacher – Who is involved? (Vol 10 No 3)

Part 4 Contexts and Perspectives – Where does it happen? (Vol 10 No 4)

Part 5 Scope and Sequence – What does it contain? (Vol 11 No 1)

Part 6 Methodology – How do we do it? (Vol 11 No 2)

Part 7 Assessment – How do we rate it? (Vol 11 No 3)



The Rationale

Why do we have it?

Purposes

Religious Education in a Catholic school has its own specific purposes within a sound general education. In particular, Religious Education focuses attention on the spiritual, religious and moral development of all students within the framework of the Catholic tradition. Religious Education is one means of empowering students in their quest for God.

- Religious Education in a Catholic school provides one means by which students are assisted to develop their spiritual and moral capacities.

While a hunger for a life-giving spirituality and moral direction can be detected in students, many lack a coherent religious framework and the religious motivation to develop spiritually and morally. Religious Education within a Catholic school can assist the spiritual and moral development of all students.

- Religious Education heightens students' awareness of the mystery which permeates all life.

Students have a natural curiosity and search for meaning in their lives and in the world around them. A study of religious traditions and the ways in which they express and interpret purpose and destiny provides a framework for the students' own search for meaning. It also increases students' awareness of the mystery which surrounds all things, and extends their horizons beyond their present limited capacity for faith, hope and love.

- Religious Education helps students to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God.

As students mature, they grow in their capacity to reflect on the significance of God in their lives. Religious Education provides students with opportunities and encouragement to reflect on the personal significance of God as revealed particularly in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

- Religious Education helps students develop their moral sensitivities and sense of responsibility.

As students mature they grow in their capacity for moral understanding and reasoning. Religious Education provides students with criteria against which they can evaluate their own and other people's moral values and behaviour.

- Religious Education helps students develop self-worth.

Students live in a world often preoccupied with the superficial and where the human person may be devalued. Religious Education introduces students to the "Good News" of Jesus Christ that affirms all people irrespective of religion, gender, race, colour, socio-economic status, or personal characteristics and abilities.

- Religious Education helps students communicate about religious matters.

Students require appropriate language and concepts for communicating on religious matters. Religious Education provides opportunities and settings conducive to the linguistic and conceptual development necessary for the communication of spiritual experiences and religious beliefs, ideas and practices.

- Religious Education helps students understand the role religion plays in human affairs and achievements.

All religions contribute to the development of culture through social understanding and practice, through systems of belief and ritual, through the arts and the sciences, and through religious understandings of the human person. Religious Education assists students in developing a religious perspective on the development of human affairs and achievements.

- Religious Education helps students understand and appreciate the Catholic religious heritage and the religious heritage of other traditions.

Understanding and appreciation of the historical development of the Catholic and other religious traditions is necessary for religious identity and the development of harmony in a multi-religious society. Religious Education teaches students to understand and respect the past, while at the same time appreciating the contemporary relevance of the Catholic and other religious traditions.

- Religious Education helps students develop faith.

This is to be understood in two different but related senses – faith as the capacity inherent in being human (*fides qua*) and faith as that in which we believe (*fides quae*). In the first instance the development of faith pertains to all students, whereas in the second case, the development is individual and facilitated by an inter-religious approach.

- Religious Education can provide students with opportunities to engage in practical projects designed to promote and support a just society.

Students live in a world often characterized by a variety of social injustices. Religious Education introduces students to the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and encourages action for justice.

Aims

The foregoing purposes will be served by attending to three overarching aims: learning **ABOUT** religion, learning **FROM** religion, and learning **FOR** religion. Students will

- Learn **ABOUT** religion in order to understand and value the religious dimension of life, one's own tradition and those of others;
- Learn **FROM** religion so as to develop as whole human beings through interaction with the riches of religious experience and tradition;
- Learn **FOR** religion to be able to live one's religious tradition in a committed and meaningful way.

In particular, Religious Education aims to facilitate or develop the following:

LEARNING ABOUT RELIGION

- Awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples, of all ages and at all times;
- Exploring how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion;
- Identifying how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed and continue to contribute to the cultures in which we live;
- Assessing what religion and personal faith might contribute to one's life;
- Familiarity with the Christian scriptures and other inspired writings;
- Familiarity with the life story of Jesus Christ to whom the Christian scriptures bear witness;
- A foundational knowledge of the teaching and practice of the Christian tradition;
- A basic knowledge and appreciation of other faiths, especially those found in their community;
- Skills for an objective, sympathetic and critical study of religion;
- Giving attention to topics which relate to contemporary social issues.

LEARNING FROM RELIGION

- Investigating and realising the meaning and purpose of their lives;
- A sense of personal identity and build healthy relationships;
- Discovering, cherishing and developing a set of values that embodies a sense of responsibility towards self and others, especially the marginalised, and shows respect for all creation;
- An informed conscience and necessary skills and attitudes for making sound moral choices.

LEARNING FOR RELIGION

- An awareness of God's transcendence, and God's presence in the world, through reflection, meditation and prayer;
- Growing in the practical knowledge and understanding of prayer in its different forms;
- Growing in the knowledge and love of God, the origin, sustainer and final destiny of all creation, and in a desire to return this love in service.
- Growing in personal faith so that it becomes a practical guide, and an integral part of daily living, made evident in the ability to face life's challenges and problems, and in actively serving others.
- An invitation to a relationship with Jesus as model or disciple to hear and live the Good News that he taught by his words and deeds.
- Respect for different religious traditions, a sensitivity towards others with different beliefs.

Outcomes

True aims, when effectively met, lead to the curriculum's desired outcomes. Outcomes are a guide to assessment but we need to make a careful distinction in this regard between learning outcomes and faith-formation outcomes. The former can and should be assessed as in other curriculum areas, but also to affirm Religious Education's academic status. However to assess the latter is neither possible nor desirable since faith is a personal and intimate matter which the student must be left free to disclose if he or she wills. Specific learning outcomes relating to the curriculum we will leave till later. Here a general description will suffice.

A tentative faith-profile of Catholic-school-leavers

Since the Catholic school welcomes students of all religious traditions into its midst, the final intended outcomes of the Religious Education programme reflected in the profile below are articulated in a generic way.

PERSONAL MATURITY

Standing at the threshold of adult life, they have made a good start at the process of holistic self-discovery, and building on a healthy self-image has developed an advantageous competence at relationship-skills and other coping-skills. They need to feel they are making progress towards independence, but value support, concern, and counsel offered in a way that respects this.

FAITH

They believe in God - that God exists, cares for us, and can be turned to at all times, and that without God (or the search for God) the human being is not fully human. They have almost shed childhood images of God - God as an-old-man-with-a-beard, God as a magic power, God as a strict law-enforcer - and have started to 'try out' relating to God as a warm father or mother, an understanding friend, a trusted confidante and counsellor. They are particularly attracted by the human qualities of Jesus, and are also inspired and challenged by the stories of great Christians and models of virtue in other religions.

INTELLECTUAL POSITION

They think about the deeper questions of life - probably secretly, so as not to seem 'religious' - and this thinking reflects strong religious influences, as well as confusions and inconsistencies stemming from influences hostile to religion. They have also learnt to sharpen personal questions and to see the value of living with them. They have an overall picture of the Christian story - how the 'parts' fit together and relate to its centre, namely Jesus Christ. They also have a basic, but sound understanding and appreciation of religious traditions not their own. They occasionally ponder the richness of God's universe in unspoken awe.

SPIRITUALITY

They are no longer total strangers to reflective silence, and there has been some awakening of innate powers of spiritual sensitivity and awareness. They have experienced a fairly broad initiation into prayer, have identified agreeable styles of prayer, and have started to incorporate them into a tentative habit of prayer. They have experienced in liturgy occasional stirrings - of being inspired, being challenged, being energised - but may show signs of impatience at the gap between the liturgical ideal and the common liturgical reality.

MORALITY

They sense a call to respond to God's love by living joyfully and generously, justly and lovingly, and are getting used to equating morality with becoming-fully-human. They have explored the Christian moral tradition and – at least intellectually – regard religion's moral guidance primarily as a support rather than as a burden. They have a well-informed conscience that is reasonably sensitive to sin without being over-scrupulous. They have started to develop the moral skills of empathy, insight about principles and values, and deciding responsibly. Building on the realisation that we can't relate to God in a way that overlooks our neighbour, they have made the breakthrough of recognising that we share responsibility for the structures/systems/institutions that we help to create or maintain. Out of care, they have started to think critically about such things and to act in small ways towards halting and healing wrongs, but they experience feelings of anger, frustration, helplessness, and confusion - which they may have a tendency to disguise, or avoid, by sinking into apathy.

APPROACH TO SACRED WRITINGS

They approach the Bible with reverence as well as with a critical literary perspective, and have become aware of a 'drift' running through Scripture and its effect on a person. They sometimes consults Scripture spontaneously - it may not be regular or systematic enough to be called a habit, but what is there is a habit of regarding Scripture as a basic personal source and guide. They also draw inspiration from the sacred writings of other traditions. They have been introduced to the wider world of Art, and have become tuned into the wavelength on which it speaks the Word of God; they may well have found in it a medium through which to express personal insight, searching, and faith.

EDUCATIONAL STAGE

The experience of a Catholic community of learning, with its steady pointing to the Gospel and its highlight-moments, has become internalised as a touchstone against which they can test future influences, situations, and goals. Moreover they have developed a taste for learning about life and growing as a person, and do not think of education as something that is over. They see the advantages of education not simply in terms of career advancement, but more readily in terms of realising one's potential to contribute something worthwhile to life.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

They have very high ideals for their religious community and are critical of shortcomings. Though intellectually they will agree that the community is 'we', in practice they still have a tendency to regard it as a distant 'they', and may even feel some degree of alienation at this stage. However, they may well have begun to sense a personal calling which colours the prospect of future career and lifestyle. They are at a time of life that is so full of open and exciting choices that they are not inclined to get involved in the community in a way that ties them down. But at a deeper level, they have a strong and appreciative attachment to the community - as well as an attitude of goodwill towards communities from other faith traditions.

We could sum all of this up as follows:

The outcome of excellent Religious Education is religiously literate and engaged young people who have the knowledge, understanding and skills – appropriate to their age and capacity – to reflect spiritually, and think ethically and theologically, and who are aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life.



Holy Rosary School Tackles Harms of Social Media and Excessive Screen Time Through a Bold Phone-Free 40 Days Initiative



Holy Rosary School
Nurturing God-given talents

Holy Rosary School for Girls has completed a voluntary phone-free 40-day challenge that encouraged Gr 1-7 pupils to abstain from using their smart phones from 14 February to 31 March. The participating primary school students were challenged to keep their phones powered off at all times, refraining from all social media. The uptake was unexpectedly high with 76% of the Gr 4-7 girls pledging their support.

With the 40-day goal reached, the school reports that 44% of the girls managed to complete the 40 days, not accessing their device at all. A total of 28% stuck to it most of the time with some cheat days, while over 5% couldn't meet the challenge; 23% who pledged don't own phones but wanted to support their friends.



The initiative, believed to be the first of its kind in South Africa, was a bold and disruptive first step in a bigger campaign the school is driving – Smart Age for Smartphone. The campaign’s calling for the delay of smartphone ownership in children.

The school’s campaign coincides with new

legislation making social media unlawful for children under 14 in Florida (USA). Social media law specialist, Emma Sadleir has publicly supported the school’s campaign and says smartphones should be banned in primary schools.

Principal Natalie Meerholz, the driving force behind the campaign says, “Parents overestimate the dangers of the ‘real world’ and underestimate the dangers of a smartphone.”

Concerned at the increasing cyber-bullying and inappropriate behaviour, particularly on WhatsApp, Meerholz conducted a survey of pupils in Gr 2 -7. Numbers climbed from Grade 4, with 76% of Grade 6 pupils and 98% of Grade 7s owning cell phones.

The school’s commitment to driving this change has also been fuelled by scientific findings that support that smartphone usage is an accelerator of mental health issues particularly in young girls. American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt draws correlations between the increase in depression, anxiety and self-harm in adolescent girls with the proliferation of social media. When IG launched, rates of teenage mental illness took a sharp upward turn, and have been rising ever since.

Although challenging, many girls reported better quality sleep, feeling less irritable and generally happier. There were more meaningful conversations and new hobbies were explored.

“New cyber laws in SA, set criminal liability at age 10 – it only takes one person to prosecute. We hope by delaying giving children smartphones – parents will realise they’re protecting them,” concludes Meerholz.

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Pride Month – One Pastor's Perspective



JESUIT
INSTITUTE
SOUTH
AFRICA

by Rev Joe Taylor

June is celebrated as Pride Month by LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) folk and allies.

Pride Month brings up many different and often divisive feelings among different groups of people, particularly in Christian circles.

What is Pride Month Really About?

Pride Month is not about elevating one group of people over another. Pride Month exists because we, as a society (and often as a church), have given many queer people the impression that they are better off dead than gay.

Pride Month is about celebrating the rights that LGBTQ+ folk have earned so far and acknowledging the long road still ahead of us to achieve full recognition, justice and equality.

For me, as an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Pride Month is about remembering and declaring that LGBTQ+ folk are beloved children of God. It is not about celebrating vanity, but recognizing human dignity in each and every person.

God is often in the business of using the least likely vessels to do God's work in this world. I simply cannot deny the fruits of the Spirit I have seen present in the lives of many faithful LGBTQ+ Christians I have met and journeyed alongside in recent years.

How should Christians respond to Pride Month?

I understand that not all Christians can support same-sex relationships due to their church teaching, theological beliefs about the Bible and God's creation. I am not trying to convince them otherwise. However, I do think that much of the hatred spewed at the LGBTQ+ community by Christians is incredibly unloving and un-Christlike. To picket outside of Pride rallies with signs saying that LGBTQ+ folk are going to hell is not winning any souls for God's Kingdom. To preach a Gospel of hatred and exclusion is antithesis to the way of Christ. Rallying people together to boycott Woolworths because of their Pride campaign is not the godly win that many think it is.

Building a Bridge

Father James Martin SJ has written a wonderful book that describes how Christians can listen to and learn from the LGBTQ+ community in respectful, life-giving ways to all involved. It is called *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT community can enter into a relationship of respect, compassion, and sensitivity*. While primarily written for Catholics, I believe it can benefit many mainline and evangelical denominations as well.

What I appreciate most about Father Martin's approach is that he acknowledges that he is dealing with a divisive topic and there are good people who hold deep personal convictions on both sides of the argument. However, he stresses that while people are debating their theology, there are real people who are dealing with the consequences of rejection every single day. As Father James says, "we need to ensure that our discussions should not close the door on people being loved and experiencing the grace of God."

This book provides helpful tools and suggestions as to how the gap between the Church of Christ and the LGBTQ+ community can be bridged. Father Martin suggests that both the Church and the LGBTQ+ community have roles to play in this endeavour.

The truth is, we can all learn much from each other and the best way to do so is by listening sincerely and respectfully, no matter what our personal convictions may be.

"It is impossible to experience a person's life, or to be compassionate, if you do not listen to the person or if you do not ask questions." – James Martin SJ.

So perhaps this Pride Month, we can commit ourselves to listening, asking questions and learning. We might not change our personal convictions, but perhaps we may encounter God at work in more surprising ways and places than we could have ever expected.



Artificial Intelligence: The European Union sets unprecedented limits

The European Union's new AI Act, classifies various uses of artificial intelligence uses according to four levels of risk, ranging from unrestricted authorization to outright prohibition.

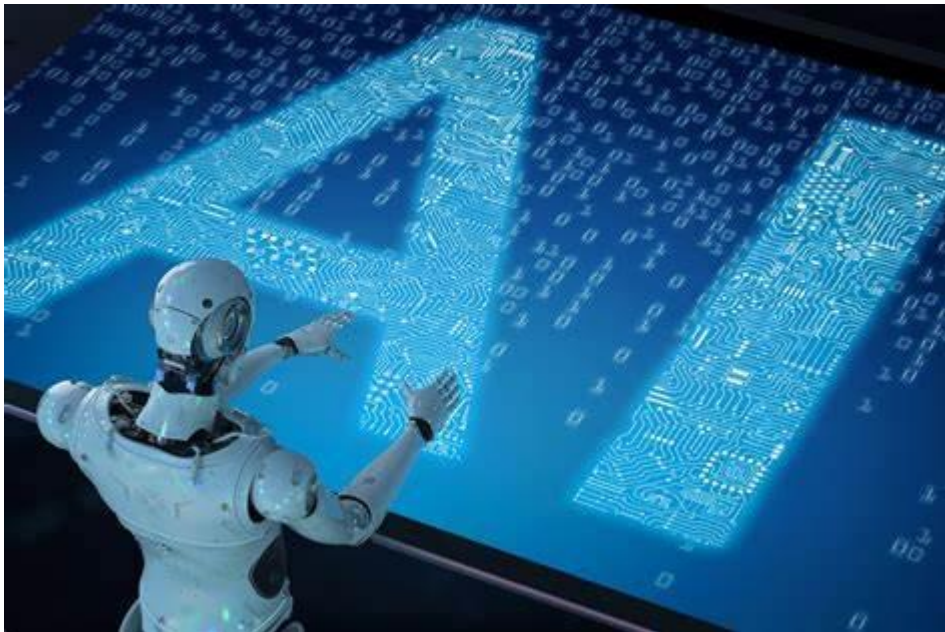
By Mélinée le Priol May 21st, 2024

The AI Act, the new European regulation on AI, is characterized by a four-tiered risk pyramid, ranging from a green light to outright prohibition. Unprecedented on a global scale, it will be definitively adopted May 21 in Brussels. It will not come into full effect until 2026.

This marks the end of a long legislative process (three years) that was at times disrupted by the emergence of new technologies, such as ChatGPT in late 2022. Such developments forced lawmakers to revise their drafts, further intensifying the political discussion.

The four risk levels result from intense "bargaining" between European institutions: Which system should be integrated into which category? For each decision, negotiators knew they were walking a tightrope: preserving security and individual freedoms without stifling innovation in Europe at the risk of favouring the United States or China. Tech lobbies, which were heavily involved in the debate, did not overlook this point.

The final text bears their mark. Even at the highest risk level, the prohibition of these technologies is rarely total. The introduction of numerous exemptions (to allow secure uses of AI, in particular) results in a paradoxical situation: by setting a prohibition accompanied by exemptions, practices previously banned are now authorized. Such is the case with real-time facial or emotion recognition in specific contexts.



Low or No Risk

No restriction (unless the system undergoes substantial modifications, in which case risks must be reassessed)

Video Games: Nvidia, Ubisoft, and other industry giants have understood this well: so-called generative AI (capable of producing new content after being trained on vast amounts of data) offers tantalizing possibilities for video games. Tomorrow's gamers will likely be able to, among other things, "talk" orally with their virtual characters.

Spam Filters: These software programs automatically filter unwanted or malicious emails. Email is a prime target for infections and other cyberattacks.

Moderate risk

Transparency obligation (indicating that the content was generated by artificial intelligence)

Image Manipulation: Deepfakes, these increasingly realistic and easy-to-create fake photos or videos, regularly stir controversy. Some of these manipulations make political figures say things they haven't said; others portray women in lascivious or even pornographic poses without their consent.

Chatbots: As such, conversational agents (including the famous ChatGPT) are considered "moderate risk." However, the foundational models on which they are technically built are subject to stricter obligations, more stringent than what the industry and some states wanted. For example, the data used to train these models must be disclosed so that potential rights holders can verify if their content was used.

High risk

Uses subject to compliance procedures (verifying the quality of training data, minimizing discrimination risks, providing human oversight, etc.)

CV screening: Software used to filter job applications. Their main issue lies in the biases they carry. Amazon, for example, abandoned such a tool in 2018 because it discriminated against women applying for technical jobs.

Predictive justice: This involves predicting the outcome of a legal dispute after algorithmically analysing large legal corpora. "Legaltech" startups offering this service have proliferated in France, where there are now several hundred.

Autonomous vehicles: At the end of the 2010s, it was imagined that Uber drivers would soon be replaced by robot taxis. However, since these are still far from being perfected, the focus is now on less ambitious projects like automatic emergency braking or low-speed hands-free driving.

Fake document detection: These detectors are among the new techniques available to law enforcement, such as thermovision cameras for detecting illegal border crossings. More broadly, all AI systems used for migration management are considered "high risk."

Credit scoring: These "scoring" software programs, already used in the banking world, aim to assess a person's creditworthiness when they apply for a loan. However, they can perpetuate old discrimination patterns (based on origin, age, disability, etc.).

Unacceptable risk

Use prohibited

Social scoring: These systems rank individuals based on their behaviour, like in China where, for example, citizens who do not pay their debts lose points while those who buy healthy food gain points. Being well-ranked facilitates access to healthcare, bank loans, or mobility.

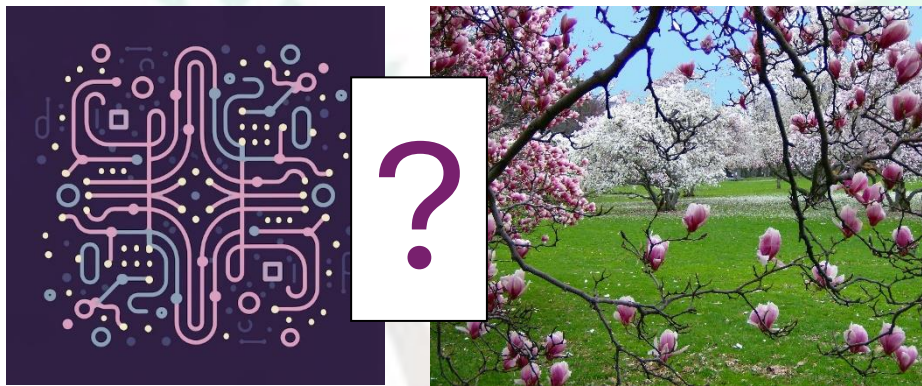
Subliminal techniques: Messages designed to be below the level of consciousness. Introducing an image in an advertisement every twenty-fifth of

a second will be invisible to the viewer but could serve to manipulate them. However, no scientific consensus has emerged on this point.

Real-time facial recognition: This topic has been one of the most debated. The text ultimately provides exemptions for certain law enforcement missions: preventing a terrorist threat, identifying suspects of serious crimes, or searching for missing persons.

Emotion recognition: Software claiming to detect emotions from facial expressions is banned in educational or professional settings but allowed for border control. The goal is to determine whether a migrant is "honest" about their migration request.

Predictive policing: This involves assessing, based on a person's characteristics, the risk that they will commit criminal offenses. But the ban is not total. These systems can be authorized in criminal investigations to complement human assessments based on verifiable facts.



Our whole business in this life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen (Augustine).



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