

Summary: Queen Anne Lutheran Church - AI & Faith Forum Series, Sept. 10, 2023.

Speaker: Dr. Michael Paulus is the dean of the library, assistant provost for educational technology, and Associate Professor of Information Studies at Seattle Pacific University. He has written two books on AI and faith, with his most recent being "Artificial Intelligence and the Apocalyptic Imagination."

Key Takeaways from the Talk:

1. Definition of AI: Dr. Paulus discussed the broad spectrum of definitions for AI, from basic computer technology to the aspiration for superhuman intelligence. He emphasized the middle ground, which focuses on self-learning programs that adapt with new data.

2. Apocalyptic Imagination: The term "apocalyptic" often brings to mind disasters, but its original meaning is about uncovering or revealing hidden truths. In the Judeo-Christian context, it's about discerning how God is working in the world.

3. Ethical Issues with AI: Dr. Paulus identified four main ethical concerns:

- Data surveillance and its implications.
- Manipulative algorithms that influence behavior.
- Outsourcing tasks to AI and the potential loss of moral agency.
- The erosion of human attention and reflective thinking.

4. Theses on AI and Humanity:

- Humans have a deep, ancient relationship with technology.
- We are in a unique moment with new technologies.
- We are playing catch-up with the rapid advancements in technology.
- The apocalyptic imagination can guide our hopes and desires for a better world.

5. Historical Information Revolutions: Dr. Paulus outlined four major information revolutions in human history:

- Emergence of Homo sapiens and abstract thinking.
- The rise of cities and complex societies.
- The invention of writing and text.
- The current digital and computational revolution.

6. Apocalyptic Scorecard for AI*: Dr. Paulus introduced a set of questions to evaluate AI technologies, focusing on their impact on human creativity, structural agency, knowledge augmentation, and the potential for human-AI collaboration.

7. Digital Wisdom: The ultimate goal is to use technology wisely and to harness it to become wiser. This involves both understanding the technology and cultivating our attention and ethical considerations.

* **Dr. Paulus introduced an "Apocalyptic Scorecard"** as a tool to assess AI technologies, both in terms of larger narratives surrounding AI and specific instances of AI. The scorecard is informed by historical

and theological insights, particularly drawing from the apocalyptic imagination found in religious texts. Here's a breakdown of the specific questions and considerations he introduced:

1. Reflective Attention:

- Are these technologies enhancing our ability to reflect, imagine, and think deeply?
- Are they serving our creative imagination and hopes, or are they automating and re-automating us to the point of diminishing our human capacities?

2. Structural Agency:

- Is the AI system or technology being used in a way that aggregates human agency effectively?
- Are there potential pitfalls where the system could become oppressive or overly deterministic?

3. Ethical Minimum:

- Does the technology avoid clear ethical pitfalls, such as political oppression, economic oppression, and social injustice?
- Is the technology being used in a way that aligns with broader ethical and moral standards?

4. Knowledge Augmentation:

- Does the technology genuinely help us grow in knowledge and wisdom?
- Is it merely automating knowledge processes, or is it enhancing our ability to learn and understand?

5. Collaborative Partnership:

- Can we partner with the technology in a way that aligns with our values and goals?
- How do our practices interface with the technology, and are they constructive or potentially harmful?

6. Practices and Technology:

- How do our practices relate to the technology, and are they constructive or potentially harmful?
- Are there ways we can adapt our practices to better align with the technology's potential benefits?

Dr. Paulus emphasizes that these questions and considerations are meant to guide discernment and reflection on how AI technologies are developed and used. The goal is to ensure that AI aligns with human values, hopes, and ethical standards, and that it is used in a way that genuinely benefits humanity rather than causing harm or diminishing our capacities.