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Catholic Religious Teachers 'Catechists' in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: Understanding, Challenges, Realities, and Actions

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Abstract

This study examines and describes, the understanding, challenges, realities, and actions of religious teachers as lay/congregants in the work of service in education, the Church, and society. The theoretical basis is based on Church documents such as Christifideles Laici, Evangelii Nuntiandi, and Catechesi Tradendae which emphasize the importance of the role of lay people in the work of evangelization and catechesis. Theories of contextual catechesis and participatory pastoral approaches are also used as an analytical framework. The methodology used is qualitative research conducted through literature analysis and interviews with lay catechists, parish priests, and congregations, participatory observation of catechesis activities, and documentation studies. The results of the study show that religious teachers play an important role in: the implementation of catechesis, assistance in sacramental preparation, the implementation of word worship in basic communities, and family faith formation.

1. Introduction

Based on statistical data and global surveys, it shows that Catholic Church members throughout the world are experiencing significant growth (Vatican iNews.TTU.id). The growth and number of Catholics increased by 1.3% from the previous year. Meanwhile, the growth of Catholics in Indonesia according to katolikku.com data. The number of Catholics is 8.42 million or 3.09% of the total population. And according to statistical data of Catholics in Merauke-South Papua, the number of Catholics is 160,809 people (data from the diocese of Merauke-South Papua). The statistical data above clearly shows the growth of Catholics globally (World, Indonesia, and Merauke).

The growth of the Catholic community is certainly due to a strong faith in Jesus Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit was prophesied to the disciples and apostles, through the preachers of the word, both Clergy, Monks and Nuns, lay Catechists, and the People of God universally based on their baptism and calling as disciples of Christ. And because of the baptism and calling of Christ, Teachers and Catechists (Bible, 1997) [12] become preachers and heirs of His teachings (Bible, 1997; Verbum Domine XVI, 2021) [12, 3]. Exploring the task of preaching in the Catholic Church, lay catechists in the treasure of their vocation and mission, not only their duties are linked to the doctrine of the Church that regulates the rules and preaching but also demands understanding, views, involvement in the service that is actualized in the life of the Church (Michael, 1999) [23]; (Habur, nd) [5]. Highlighting various documents and contents of the decree on lay catechists and their apostolate in the Catholic Church, the Vatican II council document page 351 no. 2 states that lay catechists in the Catholic Church participate in carrying out the priestly, prophetic, and kingly duties of Christ (KWI Documentation and Information, 1993) [19]. Similarly, in the catechism of the Catholic Church it is also stated that lay people/catechists in the Catholic Church carry out the priestly, prophetic, and kingly duties of Christ, fulfilling their duties in the mission of article 4 no. 873 (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2007) [19].

In various public perceptions and responses, as well as based on secondary data, lay catechists in pastoral ministry are required to be role models, "figures" of support, and pillars of support in the pastoral ministry. Lay catechists have a unique and responsible role in serving the Church (Bishops *et al*., 2022) [19].

Tracing the presence of lay catechists who are teachers and preachers of God's word. Lay catechists have been frequently highlighted in recent times, given the need for service and involvement of preachers of God's word within the diocese, parish, station, church-based community, educational, community, and other organizational settings (Network, 2019; Bishops *et al*., 2022) [21, 19]. Lay catechists are expected to be role models and role models, as well as witnesses of Christ.

When considering the role of lay catechists in relation to their duties and accompanying the faith of the congregation, lay catechists are required to be broad-minded, synergistic, prophetic, involved in church life, and spiritual. Due to the increasingly secular and modern era, lay catechists are required to be open to these changes (Commission IT, 2024; Purnomo & Sanjaya, 2020) [9, 28], have spirituality, master theory and broad insight, and understand their mission as evangelists (Gaol, 2023; Gaol *et al*., 2024) [14, 15].

Examining the role of lay catechists in their pastoral care, there are various phenomena from the congregation, which demand lay catechists to be able to be involved in church life. These various and varied demands are briefly apparent and possibly occur at the Mother Maria Butas station, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish, Kuper, Merauke Archdiocese. Based on experience and togetherness with the congregation, and secondary data, it shows that for approximately 6 months carrying out word worship services on Sundays, the congregation seems reluctant and passive in getting involved in taking on church duties such as lectors, psalmists, choir, offering carriers, church cleaning and church-based community activities (KBG). And based on preliminary data, there was a lack of congregation attendance at church on Sundays.

On the other hand, the presence of lay catechists at this station, in their ministry and outreach work, has been met with antipathy and rejection from the congregation. Furthermore, there has been a sharp response, a sign of disapproval, of lay catechists when the pastor entrusted them with distributing Holy Communion. This perception, which emerged from the congregation of Butas station, is that lay catechists, especially female ones, are unsuitable for distributing Communion.

Based on the theories above and various problems faced by the author, the author found a research gap and attempted to find out what and how the actual role of lay catechists is in the ministry of the word at the Station of Mother Maria Butas, Kuper Parish, Merauke Archdiocese.

2. Method
The approach used in this study is qualitative with in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews involved Lay Catechists, Parish Priests, and Congregations, participatory observation of catechesis activities, as well as documentation studies, a naturalistic approach. The research was conducted in a natural context. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982) [10], and several other experts, the characteristics of qualitative research include: taking place in a natural setting, the researcher as the main instrument in collecting data, descriptive and narrative nature, emphasis on the process rather than the results, inductive data analysis, and emphasis on the meaning contained in the data. According to Sugiyono (2018:213) [10] qualitative research methods are research methods based on natural conditions where the researcher is the key instrument and data collection techniques are

analyzed based on SWOT data analysis techniques, where the SWOT analysis approach is used to obtain data from multiple sources that can minimize bias that may arise from relying on only one type of data. Thus, research information is more holistic, balanced, and reliable for strategic planning and makes it easier for researchers to understand the challenges, realities, and actions of lay catechist ministry in education, society and the Church.

3. Literature search
3.1. Understanding Lay Catechism in the Context of the Catholic Church
Catechesis in Greek Katechein consists of two words, namely kat (meaning: out, towards, broad) and echo (meaning: echo, reverberation) (Canales, 2020; To, 2022; Direttorio per la Catechesi, 2022) [8, 38, 38]. When combined based on etymology, catechesis is an echo and reverberation that can be heard or heard to the public out in a wider direction as adopted by Erly in the spirituality book written by Adolf Heuken, catechesis means echoing-echoing the word (Gaol, nd; Zhai, 2021) [15, 40].

Catechists in the Catholic Church are all members of the Christian faith, whether monks, nuns, clergy, or laypeople, who are called and sent by God Himself to be preachers of God's word. Catechists have several definitions or meanings: dialogue or communication, sharing information, and teaching values or matters related to the proclamation of the faith (Bishops *et al*., 2022) [19].

Meanwhile, exploring the meaning of catechist, a catechist is a person within and on behalf of the Catholic Church entrusted with providing preaching and religious instruction due to special education and possessing the missio canonica. Because of the missio canonica, catechists are entrusted with assisting priests in the work of preaching the church. Catechists have the main task of providing religious instruction to candidates for baptism or baptism, teaching catechumens, and participating in maintaining the faith and religious life of the congregation (Indonesian Bishops' Conference, 1979) [19].

Catechists are workers called by God to work on behalf of the Church and God (Purnomo & Sanjaya, 2020) [28]. Catechists not only teach with words but are also required to have attitudes, words, actions, and deeds.

Due to teaching, catechists are identical to the term preachers of God's word due to the consequences of the baptismal promise or the baptismal sacrament/baptizing sacrament which is believed and accepted (Natalia *et al*., 2024) [26].

Catechists, due to their missio canonica education and baptismal promises, are also required to be faithful and responsible to the task of preaching, to carry out the work they are entrusted with, to be diligent, steadfast, tenacious, trusting, mature, able to work together, and to have Christian values and at all times to maintain the treasure of the Catholic faith (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2007) [19].

Therefore, catechists in the Catholic Church are entrusted by the Church, in this case the Catholic Church Hierarchy to guard the church not the church building in the narrow sense, but in a broader sense, namely the faith of the people (Elaine Rich, 1991) [11]. Because of the calling and mission, catechists are required to take part in the task of the Church and the task of Christ as Priest, King, and Prophet. The calling to preach a catechist is characterized by a holistic character as written in the verse of the Holy Bible Matthew 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I command you." The calling of a catechist is a noble and sublime calling, a calling of the soul and sincerity of heart.

3.2. Lay Catechists in the Document Christifideles Laici
Christifideles Laici (CL), on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity, written by Pope John Paul II teaches that the basis of the vocation and mission of the laity is communion with Christ (cf. CL 8) [12]. This mystery of communion with Christ is what reveals the dignity of the vocation and mission of the laity. Therefore, the exercise of the vocation of the laity is essentially 1) the participation of the laity in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet, and king (cf. CL 14) [12], which is the mission we receive after our baptism, 2) as a concrete step taken to grow in holiness (cf. CL 16-17) [12], to which all Christians are called.

Pope John Paul II taught that communion with Christ is found in the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (cf. CL 19) [12]. Furthermore, since the Church is the communion of saints with Christ as its Head, our communion with Christ must also result in communion with the other members of Christ (cf. CL 19) [12], who are diverse and complementary (cf. CL 20-21) [12], each of whom plays his or her part in building up the Church, for the good of humanity and the world (cf. CL 24) [12]. In this connection, all communities of the faithful must commit themselves to overcoming all forms of division and conflict, for these are not in keeping with the essence of communion with Christ and his Body (cf. CL 31) [12].

Therefore, religious teachers in this case "lay catechists" (CL 29, 30) [12] as a lay community have authentic rights and criteria, including; 1) their main goal is to fulfill the call of every believer to holiness, 2) are responsible for confessing the full Catholic faith: the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in accordance with the teachings of the Magisterium, 3) give witness to a strong and authentic communion, in obedience to the Pope and to the faith of the Church, 4) correspond to and participate in the goal of the Church's apostolic work, namely the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the formation of the conscience of Christians, in order to instill the spirit of the Gospel in the joints of human life, 5) are committed to being present in society to serve human dignity - on the basis that all humans are created in the image of God - and to serve life. Furthermore, it is important to note that the laity have a vocation and mission to proclaim the Gospel (cf. CL 33) [12]. Through evangelization, the Church is built into a community of faith, that is, a community that professes a faith that is fully faithful to the Word of God, as celebrated in the sacraments, and a community that lives in love which is the principle of Christian moral teaching (cf. CL 33) [12]. The main principle of this lay proclamation is to bring the light of Christ into the secular world, so that the values of life in this world can be directed towards Christ. The starting point of this vocation and mission begins with the family, which is the nucleus of the smallest cell of society (CL 40) [12], and the goal of this mission is to serve the life of society, for the common good (cf. CL 42) [12].

To carry out the calling and mission of the laity, a process of faith formation/maturation in union with Christ is necessary, just as a branch must always be attached to the vine (cf. John 15; CL 57) [12]. The most fundamental goal of this process is for each person involved to be able to know more clearly their calling in life and have a greater desire to carry out their mission (cf. CL 58) [12]. To be able to know God's will in our lives can only be obtained through: 1) listening to the Word of God and the Church, 2) earnest and continuous prayer, 3) guidance from a wise spiritual director, 4) continuous discernment of the various gifts and talents that God has given us and also the circumstances in which we live (cf. CL 58) [12]. This formation process is essentially a process of self-formation so that we can be more open to God's work (cf. CL 63) [12].

From this calling and mission as Christians, the work of the lay apostolate was born. One of the Church documents (from the Second Vatican Council) that regulates this activity is the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity entitled Apostolicam Actuositatem (Life & Church, 2018) [18]. The Scriptures clearly describe the involvement of the laity, from the very beginning of the Church (see Acts 11:19-21; 18:26; Romans 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3), and the way of life of the early congregation/Church community is written in Acts 2:41-47. Looking back at the Catechism, the task of the lay apostolate teaches that the laity, like all the faithful, receive from God the apostolic office through Baptism and Confirmation; therefore, they have the right and duty, both individually and in community with others, to constantly seek to know and accept the divine message of salvation. This duty is all the more urgent if certain people can only receive the Gospel and know Christ through them (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2007) [19].

Religious teachers as lay catechists can also feel called or can be called to collaborate with their pastors in serving the ecclesial community, for the growth and life of that community. At the same time, they can take on very different ministries, according to the graces and charisms that God has given them (Francis, 2016; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2007) [12, 19].

3.3. Lay Catechists in Evangeli Nuntiandi
Lay Catechists as evangelizers in Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN, Pope Paul VI, 1975) [12] represent a paradoxical ontology of evangelizers: not hierarchical priests, but people purified by Baptism and the Eucharist, becoming part of the prophetic extension of Christ in the secular world. Its deepest meaning is "faith made flesh and blood" (EN 21) [12] where the process of the incarnation of the Word occurs that transforms lay catechists into sacramentum mundi, a sacrament for a world torn between faith and culture.

Theoretically systematic (Catechesi Tradendae, 1977; EN) [19] Lay catechists are lay people who have received an ecclesiastical mandate through formation (formal education and formation), tasked with "bringing people to recognize, love, and follow Jesus Christ" contextually. Different from clergy, lay catechists operate in a sacred profane space that brings baptism to life as an apostolate. In addition to the contemporary phenomenological aspect, lay catechists as relational agents of proclamation are required to integrate three dimensions of EN; as proclamations of the word who have a mystagogical experience (EN 14; Direttorio per la Catechesi, 2022) [12, 38], catechists who serve in the church (DKU 21) [39] catechists are in the base and the church base community (KBG) as the locus of inculturation.

3.4. Lay Catechists in the Catechesis Tradendae.
The catechist's ministry in catechesis cannot be separated from the Church. The Catechesi Trandendae states that of all

the Church's ministries, catechesis is the most important and special ministry (CT 13) [19]. Catechesis prepares God's people to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. This document further explains that if catechesis is carried out well and systematically, other ministries in the Church will not face many problems (CT 63) [19].

In several Catholic Church documents, lay catechists as religious teachers have an important role, among others, explained in; 1) Catechesi Tradendae (1977) [19] lay catechists are lay people who, due to their formation/courses and life according to the gospel, in short, a catechist is someone who has been sent by the Church, according to local needs, whose task is to bring people to better know, love and recognize Jesus.

4. Results and Discussion

Several key ideas and findings regarding Catholic religious teachers as lay catechists in the era of artificial intelligence reflect understandings, challenges, realities, and actions within the Catholic Church. Based on this background and theoretical support (Antiqua et Nova, 2025) [2], the research method for this reality and action as practice is discussed below.

4.1. The need for collaboration between lay religious teachers and catechists with the Church Hierarchy and the people of God in providing catechesis in the era of Artificial Intelligence.

The Catholic Church's universal pilgrimage in the era of artificial intelligence is characterized by how the Church responds to technological developments, the Church's mission, openness, and dynamic attitude (Rome, 2020; Camerling et al., 2020) [30, 7]. The era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is marked by the acceleration of digital transformation, the need for collaboration between religious teachers, lay catechists, the Church hierarchy (bishops and priests), and the congregation. This collaboration represents the actualization of synodality as emphasized in Synodality (2021-2024) (Life & Church, 2018; Rymarz, 2023; Commission IT, 2024) [18, 31, 9]; the need for synergy to walk together in building a living Church. Catechesis activities are not a hierarchical monopoly but rather collaboration, communal participation and centered on the service of Christ. Theoretically, collaboration focuses on 'pastoral agents in the field' and as witnesses of Christ', where the hierarchy as guardians and actors of the Magisterium, as well as the people as active recipients and actors of church teachings (cf. constructing a participatory ecclesiology ala Lumen Gentium (Vatican Council II, 1964), which is increasingly relevant amidst AI disruption. Critical findings show that without collaboration, AI catechesis can risk dehumanization, as mandated in the Vatican Document Antiquum et Nova (2025) [2] demanding ethics and human oversight of AI to protect relational dignity (Gulati, 2022; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022; Elaine Rich, 1991) [17, 33, 11]. Lay catechists' knowledge of AI used for digital evangelism must be coordinated with the hierarchy to ensure fidelity and conformity to official Church teaching. Critically, this collaboration overcomes the dichotomy: AI is not a substitute for the Holy Spirit or a substitute for anything, but rather a tool of 'aggiornamento' that requires human-AI synergy (Modern et al., 2022; Laupichler et al., 2023; Trovati et al., 2023) [24, 20, 37]. As explained in the (Vatican Catechesis Directory, 2020) [38] lay catechists are the main active subjects in catechesis, not AI, the need for collaboration and participation (McGrath & Gupta, 2018) [22], the principle of subsidiarity as stated in Antiquum et Nova [2], where the decentralization of decision-making is not AI but humans. Without official Church teaching, the Hierarchy, the People and hierarchy-catechist collaboration risks elitism; conversely, a congregation without hierarchy guidance is vulnerable to AI misinformation.

4.2 The need for knowledge, commitment, and loyalty in catechesis services in the Artificial Intelligence Era

As outlined in the 2020 Vatican Catechesis Directory [38], the need for adaptation and learning in the digital age is evident. Antiquum et Nova (2025) [2] reinforces this by reflecting on the relationship between AI and human intelligence, making AI a tool that assists catechists in their ministry within the Church while remaining centered on the dignity of human beings as God's essential creation.

Referring to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the catechetical ministry of lay catechists is not merely 'responsibility, teaching, and fulfillment of doctrine', but rather a 'missio canonica' calling that demands knowledge, commitment, and loyalty. These three form the ontological foundation for catechists as living witnesses of the faith, as emphasized in the Vatican's Catechesis Directory (2020) [38] which emphasizes holistic formation and guidance for catechists to face the challenges of contemporary secularization.

The critical review above is strengthened by the theory and findings of Canales (2020) [8], the need for models, reinforcement, understanding in catechesis, in this case knowledge supported by valid but humanistic data. In addition, pastoral principles are needed in various forms of catechetical services (Benini, 2024; Trier & Trier, 2024) [4, 36]. Although Church doctrine demands moral-intellectual perfection from catechists, the human reality of catechists—with their fragility and cultural context—requires knowledge and empathy in pastoral care, not 'just emphasizing legalistic' but knowledge, role, commitment, and loyalty and their duties in the Church (Widyawati & Kanja, 2023; Gaol & Noerjanto, 2024; Gaol et al., 2023) [39, 15, 16].

In addition, theological and pedagogical knowledge of catechism is needed, including mastery of the Holy Scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) [19]; (Indonesian Bishops' Conference, 1979; Direttorio per la Catechesi, 2022; Apostolic S et al., 2022) [19, 38, 2], as well as contextual hermeneutics of faith. Without in-depth knowledge, catechesis risks becoming reductionist, ignoring the dynamics of inculturation as outlined in Ad Gentes (Vatican Council II, 1965) [19]. In catechetical education, knowledge is not merely a 'static accumulation' and service of faith, but rather how to maintain the apostolic tradition in millennial realities. In this regard, millennial catechists must be effective in hermeneutic dialogue to transmit the faith. Critically, catechist knowledge in the digital age is not sufficient through doctrinal knowledge alone but requires ongoing formation to avoid inconsistencies.

Referring to research on catechesis in the era of artificial intelligence, AI is a tool to support accessibility and reach, enabling the Church to provide more accessible pastoral care to the congregation through digital platforms and AI applications (Natalia et al., 2024; Apul, n.d.) [26, 3].

4.3. The form of catechesis requires reality and strategic action.

To realize catechesis requires commitment from the catechist. The total dedication of the catechist as implied in Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI, 1975) [12], catechists are called to be "great preachers" willing to sacrifice for the people. This commitment is relational-humanist, reflecting the love of Christ who was willing to die for the people (John 15:13), in addition, catechists are at the forefront in maintaining the faith of the people, participation and understanding are needed in the midst of a crisis of faith (Camerling *et al*., 2020; Fredrikus Djelahu Maigahoaku, 2023; Gaol *et al*., 2023) [7, 1, 16]. Pope Francis also emphasized in (Apostolic S *et al*., 2022) [2] that lay catechists in their duties and work in the era of artificial intelligence are like servants of the Church who are constantly developing, learning continuously and selflessly (Rome, 2020; Davis *et al*., 2014; Odi & Darianto, 2023; Gaol *et al*., 2025) [30, 10, 27, 16].

Discussing the need for catechist loyalty, in the Church's magisterium and missiocanonical mission, the catechist's mission is expressed through the "faithful word" of Christ and his Church. This requires loyalty and sacrifice, whether through thought, energy, time, or other means. In this regard, lay catechists position themselves as active participants in Christ's mission.

Lay catechists, as Kings, Faith, and Prophets, are required to be loyal in the service and growth of the Church (Purnomo & Sanjaya, 2020) [28], reminding us that true loyalty is measured by the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). The demand for loyalty from lay catechists means the need for spiritual guidance from the Church (in this case experts and the Church Hierarchy) to make catechists 'icons' of the Church who learn from Christ and are able to transform the congregation towards maturity of faith (Heb 5:14).

In the era of artificial intelligence, as outlined in the Vatican Catechesis Directory (2020) [38], catechesis is a contextual accompaniment of faith, rooted in the incarnation of Christ incarnated into human reality (John 1:14). Its form must be responsive to disruptions in the digital era and Artificial Intelligence (AI). This specific analysis emphasizes that realities—such as secularization, community fragmentation, and the dominance of algorithms—demand strategic action based on synodality, where catechesis becomes a participatory laboratory for the people of God.

Framing the current embodiment of catechesis is marked by three crucial phenomena: (1) digital transformation that creates a pastoral digital divide; (2) a crisis of relational authenticity due to generative AI; and (3) the demands of post-Synod synod (2024). First, the Society 5.0 era demands hybrid catechesis—combining offline and online—as the "contextual digital catechesis" model emphasizes participatory dialogue amidst information overload. In Indonesia, a KWI survey (2025) [26] showed that 65% of young people consume spiritual content via Instagram Reels, but only 20% are involved in parish communities, indicating ecclesial fragmentation. Second, AI such as ChatGPT offers efficiency (e.g., instant Gospel interpretation), but has the potential for dehumanization, as warned by Antiquum et Nova (2025) [2] which demands human oversight of algorithms to protect relational dignity. Third, synodality makes the reality of the congregation as co-creators of catechesis, in line with Lumen Gentium (1964) [19] which positions the layperson as an active subject of the sensus fidelium.

A form of catechesis that is responsive to this reality requires multidimensional strategic actions such as continuous formation, inculturation, and evaluation where lay catechists must be trained in AI literacy to critically respond to AI culture (Kanisius, 2024) [26], catechesis must be adaptive and performative, integrating catechesis into local culture. Theoretically, this form reflects Trinitarian ontology: the Father as the source of reality, the Son as the incarnator of action, and the Holy Spirit as the communal dynamic.

4.4. Pastoral ethical challenges of the manifestation of catechetical growth in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

Catechesis in the Catholic Church is a process of faith education aimed at helping the faithful understand, internalize, and embody the Christian faith in their daily lives. In Church tradition, catechesis is not only understood as the transmission of doctrine, but also as an integral faith formation encompassing intellectual, spiritual, moral, and pastoral dimensions. Therefore, social and technological developments that impact human life also have implications for the dynamics of catechesis. In the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Church faces various ethical-pastoral challenges that influence the manifestation of catechetical growth, both in terms of methods of preaching, pastoral relationships, and the formation of the faith of the people.

One of the main ethical-pastoral challenges is the shift in communication paradigms in the process of spreading the faith. Artificial Intelligence enables the rapid, widespread, and personalized dissemination of information through various digital platforms. This technology can aid the catechesis process through faith-learning apps, religious chatbots, or spiritual content recommendation systems. However, the ease of access to religious information also raises ethical challenges related to the authority and authenticity of teachings. In this context, people can obtain religious knowledge from various digital sources that do not necessarily align with official Church teachings. This situation can lead to fragmented understanding of the faith and even the spread of inappropriate theological interpretations. Therefore, pastoral ministers are required to ensure that the use of AI technology in catechesis remains rooted in the teachings of the Church's Magisterium and is accompanied by adequate faith formation (Mandarić, 2025; Bin Jenis *et al*., n.d.) [21, 5].

Furthermore, the use of Artificial Intelligence in religious life also raises ethical challenges related to personal relationships in the Church's pastoral care. Catechesis is essentially a process of faith dialogue involving a personal encounter between the preacher and the recipient of the message. In the Church's tradition, this encounter has a profound relational dimension because faith is transmitted not only through information but also through the lived witness and experience of the community. As AI technology begins to replace some of the functions of human communication, there is a risk that personal relationships in the pastoral process will become increasingly diminished. Excessive use of technology can shift the dialogical and communitarian dimensions of catechesis into merely impersonal digital interactions. In this context, the ethical challenge for the Church is how to utilize technology without sacrificing the relational values that are at the heart of ecclesial life (Morrison, 2023; Sala, 2020) [25, 32].

The next challenge relates to the issue of moral formation and wisdom in the use of technology. Artificial Intelligence not

only functions as a technical tool, but also shapes ways of thinking, communication patterns, and even decision-making structures in modern society (Zhai *et al.*, 2021; Critical Reflection on Artificial Intelligence as a New Technology, 2023) [40, 29]. Young generations living in a digital culture often rely on technology as a primary source of information and knowledge. This can impact how they understand faith and morality. In this situation, catechesis has a responsibility to help people develop critical thinking skills and moral wisdom in using digital technology. As Pope Francis stated in Fratelli Tutti, without adequate ethical formation, AI technology has the potential to strengthen value relativism, information manipulation, and irresponsible use of technology (Francis, 2020; Sullivan, 2023) [13, 35].

In addition, the development of Artificial Intelligence also presents anthropological and theological challenges for catechesis (Natalia *et al.*, 2024) [26]. AI technology often raises fundamental questions about human identity, freedom, creativity, and moral responsibility. From a Christian perspective, humans are understood as God's creations with unique dignity because they are created in the image and likeness of God (imago Dei) (Shadiqin *et al.*, 2023) [34]. As technology increasingly mimics human cognitive abilities, a tendency arises to view humans in a reductionist manner as mere information systems or biological entities that can be replicated technologically. The challenge for catechesis is to help people re-understand human dignity in the light of Christian faith and to clearly distinguish between artificial intelligence and human wisdom rooted in a relationship with God (Critical Reflection on Artificial Intelligence as a New Technology, 2023; Francis, 2016) [29, 12].

Furthermore, there are pastoral challenges related to the digital divide in Church life. Not all communities have equal access to digital technology and Artificial Intelligence. In some regions, limited technological infrastructure can hinder the use of digital media in the catechesis process. Conversely, in highly digitally connected regions, people can experience information overload, which actually reduces the depth of faith reflection. In this context, the Church is faced with the task of developing an inclusive and contextual approach to catechesis, so that the use of technology does not create new inequalities in pastoral life. Catechesis must continue to pay attention to the dimensions of local communities, liturgical experiences, and interpersonal relationships as primary means of faith growth (Directory for Catechesis, 1997; Bryan, 2000; Michael, 1999) [38, 6, 23].

In addition to these challenges, Artificial Intelligence also presents new opportunities for the growth of catechesis if used wisely. This technology can help the Church provide more accessible catechesis materials, expand the reach of evangelization, and support a more interactive faith learning process. However, the use of this technology must always be placed within a Christian ethical framework that respects human dignity, the truth of the doctrine of the faith, and communitarian relationships in the life of the Church. In this regard, the role of catechists and pastoral ministers becomes increasingly important as companions of the faith who are able to integrate technological developments with Gospel values.

Thus, the manifestation of catechesis in the era of Artificial Intelligence cannot be separated from various complex ethical-pastoral challenges. The Church is called to develop a catechetical approach that can utilize technology creatively and critically. This effort requires in-depth theological reflection, ongoing ethical formation, and a pastoral commitment to maintaining a balance between technological innovation and fidelity to the Church's evangelizing mission. With the right approach, Artificial Intelligence technology can become not only a technical tool but also a new means for the Church to proclaim the Gospel and guide people toward maturity in the faith amidst a constantly changing world.

5. Conclusion
In the context of the artificial intelligence (AI) era, this study confirms that lay catechists play an increasingly complex and important role in catechesis, sacramental accompaniment, community-based worship of the word, and family faith formation. Based on Church documents such as Christifideles Laici, Evangelii Nuntiandi, and Catechesi Tradendae, lay catechists are called to echo the Word of God and be witnesses of Christ. In the AI era, collaboration between lay catechists, the Church hierarchy, and the faithful is crucial to reflect synodality and prevent the dehumanization of catechesis. However, this study also emphasizes that the use of AI must be wise, critical, rooted in Church teaching, and respectful of human dignity. In this way, lay catechists can foster a maturity of faith that is contextual, authentic, and relevant in this increasingly complex digital and AI era.

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