LEE UNIVERSITY

REBUILDING BABEL? A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PROMPTING THE ISSUE

Science fiction or reality—the boarders seem to blur with the continuing development in the technological ideas. Once ideas for the movie theaters *iRobot, Ex Machina, The creator, her, T.I.M, Transcendence* (and many more) now the integration of an artificial intelligence has become more realistic than ever before in humanity's history. Reading these very first sentences one may pay carful attention to the personal inner reaction that comes with this. It may be, that a positive, optimistic, and excited reaction takes place—but it might as well be that a rather negative, pessimistic, and frightened feeling or thought process is being unveiled. All this depends on the readers personal interaction and experience with the topic of artificial intelligence (AI) so far. Which articles, journals, or books were read? Which videos have been watched, and which podcasts listened to? Being technologically submitted to the platform's algorithms, often powered by some kind of AI themselves, users will find it difficult to develop a relatively balanced basis of information input. However, the question remains, how is the reader reacting towards various ideas and scenarios of AI?

Technically speaking AI has changed the personal lives of millions of people and many companies and enterprises worldwide. Since the skyrocketing popularity of OpenAI's "ChatGPT", launched in November of 2022, the discussions about AI are no longer taking place within the tech world alone, but in vast parts of modern societies around the globe.[1] With the rising public interest, the competitive process of the global players on the political stages were uncovered. Massive investments into the development of AI infrastructure were made. For instance, according to Reuters, the current US President Donald Trump spoke in his first presidential campaign in 2016 about a massive investment of 1 trillion US dollars, but an investment of this large size has not been done in the first legislative period.[2] However, in the very beginning of the second legislative period, Trump announced that over the following four years of his presidency a gigantic private investment of 500 billion US dollars will be made into AI infrastructure. According to the official website of the White House tech giant

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[1] Montevirgen, K.. "OpenAI." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 28, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/money/OpenAI.

[2] Steve Holland, *Trump announces private-sector $500 billion investment in AI infrastructure* (January 22, 2025), https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/trump-announce-private-sector-ai-infrastructure-investment-cbs-reports-2025-01-21/.

Apple followed with a $500 billion, and TSMC (the world's largest producer for semiconductors) with $100 billion investment in chip production.[3] Another global player is China, who's for 2025 estimated spendings will reach up to $98 billion, partially financed by government, partially by Chinese internet companies.[4] In February of 2025, the European Union launched the "InvestAI" initiative, with 200 billion euros for any investment towards AI, plus a 20 billion euros investment into AI gigafactories.[5] The Bank of America refers to the IDC report of 2024, which predicts a global investment for AI software, hardware, and services of 521 billion dollar for 2027.[6] Which could be perhaps higher, after the previously mentioned mega-investment by US president Trump, announced in January 2025.

Following the investments and financial forecasts until 2030 one will quickly realize, that governments take the rise of AI seriously—and because governments show such interest the church should do too. Not necessarily in a financial way, but rather in a curious, critical, and foremost relevant manner. Klaus Schwab points out, that the age of AI is introducing the fourth industrial revolution. This comes together with "genome editing, augmented reality, robotics, and 3-D printing"[7]—terms that may sound more and more familiar, even for the everyday normal person. Considering the immense changes that came with former industrial developments—revolutions—one must expect great implications for society. Schwab states "All previous industrial revolutions have had both positive and negative impacts on different stakeholders."[8] What sounds like an optimistic view on the change to come, is also a warning for the church. Various developments of the past centuries, for example most recently the sexual revolution, were unaddressed (or too late) by the church. If the impending changes by the inclusion of AI in society are truly as greatly as described by various experts, than the church has to become active from the beginning on, although the development of AI systems

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[3] The WHITE HOUSE, *TRUMP EFFECT: NVIDIA Leads American-Made Chips Boom*, (April 14, 2025) https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/04/trump-effect-nvidia-leads-american-made-chips-boom/.

[4] Xinmei Shen, *China's AI capital spending set to reach up to US$98 billion in 2025 amid rivalry with US,* (June 25, 2025) https://www.scmp.com/tech/tech-war/article/3315805/chinas-ai-capital-spending-set-reach-us98-billion-2025-amid-rivalry-us.

[5] *EU launches InvestAI initiative to mobilise €200 billion of investment in artificial intelligence**, (February 11, 2025) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_467.

[6] Bank of America, *Artificial intelligence: A real game changer, https://www.privatebank.bankofamerica.com/articles/economic-impact-of-ai.html.*

[7] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution,* Encyclopedia Britannica, (May 31, 2023) https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Fourth-Industrial-Revolution-2119734.

[8] Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution,* Encyclopedia Britannica.

began several decades ago. Too great would be the cost, as society changes rapidly and a new culture might evolve quickly. The church has to find its voice.

Following points shall outline the importance of the church's relevance in the discussions and developments around AI. Christian anthropology finds it's origin in Genesis one and two, the creation of mankind. It is brought to a *spiritual fulfillment* in the redemptive act of Christ, described in the four Gospels of the New Testament. The *imago Dei* is therefore the cornerstone, the foundation for the anthropological approach by Christian Theology. Looking back on a strong Christian background, European and North-American governments and constitutions find their human-right acts and understandings of human life and value in these very aspects. But the secularization global western societies rises the question, whether the *imago Dei* is still perceived in its fullness, or at all. Reducing human ontological reality to a specific understanding of intelligence presents significant challenges and dangers. Basic questions, such as *When does life begin?* or *Is morality routed in subjectivity and can it be adjusted if a society decides so?* are experiencing a fundamental earthquake. And while these questions seem strange to the one who is firmly grounded in a christian church and environment, they reveal a deep struggle within societies view on human life and identity. Hence, the development of an AI is profoundly shaped by the information based on these questions around anthropology.

Another point is the action of *creating* something intelligent. Christian anthropology would find answer in the creativity of the creator God and the *imago Dei*—and because of this connection it is obvious that humans are deeply creative with a wish and a will to build and create. But connecting this to the fallenness of man, a deeply concerning aspect arises, that reveals the potential to use this creativity for evil. It is noteworthy, that this paper does not aim to portray AI as an evil entity, but first and foremost the focus lies on the human aspect and its effects on the AI itself. If therefore humans have certain evil tendencies, how will they be reproduced by the AI, a product of humankind and mind?

How about spirituality? Is the spiritual aspect in humans simply a weak byproduct of unexplainable observations—or a crucial part of the *imago Dei*? And if AI developers do not consider a spiritual aspect to be crucial part of human's existence and behavior, how will this influence an AI system? But even if spirituality would be important, will AI only imitate spirituality or is it able to truly develop a spiritual consciousness?

Before proceeding, it is therefore important to state that AI, though made by humans, reflects and amplifies both our creative ambition and our fallenness—and demands a

theological response that affirms the imago Dei, critiques techno-idolatry, and reclaims the spiritual depth of humanity.

These are the aspects that this paper seeks *to work towards*. Surely, more questions will arise, and some aspects might already be outdated after a rather short period of time, as the topic of AI changes so quickly. However, the church must participate in the topic of AI, and not just as an observer or fan from the stands of the arena, but as a relevant and important voice. Therefore this paper is shared into three main parts. The beginning will approach the topic of AI from a critical point of view—not in a sense of a pessimism—rather an analysis of various issues that challenge the core values of Christian doctrine. For this purpose first the Anthropological and Moral disruption will be addressed, followed by an assessment of Theological issues at stake, and closing with important literary references that point towards the identified issues with the rapid development of AI.

The second part focusses on the critical challenges to christian Theology and the Church itself. Exploring this specific area an important analogy is drawn from Proverbs 22:6 *"Train up a child […]"* which is focussing on the aspect of ethical development and who teaches whom? This leads to the next step, probing the issue of power, deception, and agency—in which developments resulting from the ethical aspects are shaped in a way that humans are immediately effected by it. The third step develops a case for the danger of idolatry. To build up the argument the paper is going to present two more analogies, routed in the biblical accounts of the golden calf and the construction of Babel. Finalizing the second part of the paper, the formerly observed issues are drawn into the church context, making it vividly obvious how the rise and strive of AI in every aspect of life will impact the Church in any known area deeply.

The third and last main part of the paper seeks to offer a constructive Theology on AI. The five-fold approach will climactically lead to a deeper understanding of the theological ground and practical utilization of it. Step one focuses briefly reemphasizes the biblical anthropology. In the second instance the ability of AI for the spiritual is being analyzed, which builds a contrasting view to step one. Both first steps are followed by the Christological approach and evaluation of AI. Having focussed on the anthropology, the spiritual, and the Christological, a house of Theological Response will be build, that offers a connection between the critical observation and the practical church response, which is the fifth step of the chapter.

CHAPTER 1
DIE FRAGESTELLUNG

Prior to delving into the theological dimensions, it is essential to establish a foundational comprehension of artificial intelligence (AI). While avoiding excessive technical detail, possessing a fundamental understanding of the various types of AI and the basic operational mechanisms involved is crucial for meaningful engagement with and comprehension of the AI discourse. It is important to reiterate that this paper does not aim to be highly technical in nature.

1.1 Different Types of AI

AI is not all the same—not every artificial computing system is equal to another. Generally AI can be divided into three kinds, of which only the first one hereafter listed exists so far.

1.1.1 Narrow Artificial Intelligence

Narrow artificial intelligence, or ANI, is the kind of AI that is probably best known to the general public, because of the raise of chatbots like ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Grok, Gemini, etc. These AI systems are focused on very specific goals. And because they can only operate in very specific scopes they are usually referred to as *weak AI*.[9] One may have used one or another system already and questions whether such a system is *weak* or *narrow*, as they seem to be highly capable in their tasks, but exactly this limitation of specific task-orientation brings its weaknesses. It heavily depends on the data the specific AI is trained on. This process of training is refereed to as *machine learning* or *deep learning*. *Machine learning* (ML) is the process in which the system is utilizing algorithms that help processing data that is being provided. Over a process of training the system learns from data and than make predictions based on the learned information. As one easily recognizes, the key factor here is the quality of information. The basis of learning and analyzing are statistical methods, that allow the AI to make better and better decisions within the trained area. Alex Trenton points out, that ML is the basis of contemporary AI systems.[10]

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[9] Alex Trenton, *The future unveiled, AI, ch. "What is AI"* 2024. Reprint, eBookIt.com, 2024. https://www.perlego.com/book/4678119.

[10] In „The Future Unveiled," Alex Trenton provides a comprehensive introductory overview of AI and its role in the machine learning process. However, for the subsequent paper, it is not essential to delve into intricate details such as the diverse algorithms and varying training methodologies. The primary focus of the latter paper lies on the profound theological implications associated with the development and deployment of AI systems.

Deep learning (DL) is a very specific subset of ML, as it operates with a digital neural network, or artificial neural network (ANN). To keep the promise of a basic technicality of this paper, DL is described as a mimic of the neural network of humans in multiple layers of processing input data. Such a kind of learning requires a huge amount of Data.[11]

ANI is already now an important agent for many analytical and data processing businesses around the world. Training such AI systems for medical, economic, or educational endeavors are expected to solve many contemporary problems.

1.1.2 General Artificial Intelligence

The next stage, following ANI, is the so called *General Artificial Intelligence* (AGI—not to be confused with *Generative AI.*) This AI is considered to be a *strong artificial intelligence*, because it aims for quality intelligence as a human possesses it.[12] *Life Science* has published an article earlier this year, which references various statistics concerning the possibility of an AGI ever evolving. Noteworthy is that in 2019 a significant amount of questioned researchers in the field of AI estimated that AGI will never be developed. However the majority seemed to have estimated that the stage of AGI will be reached before 2100.[13] According to *Life Science*, more recent studies revealed now, that AGI will possibly arrive much earlier, some even predict it as early as 2026.[14] For instance did Sam Altman, CEO and co-founder of OpenAI, has shared on his website his thoughts about the singularity of AI—which should be understood synonymous with AGI. He stated, that reaching this point is not one step that changes the system like a switch, but a gradual process, that happened exponentially. Comparing the expectations of 2020 for 2025 with the expectations now for 2030 one must realize, that the jump in development seems to be much smaller now than compared to five years ago.[15] In other interview this year Sam Altman stated great achievements towards the presence and visibility of AGI already now. He stated for instance at the Snowflake Summit in the beginning of June 2025, an annual conference that focuses on

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[11] Alex Trenton, *The future unveiled, AI, ch. "Deep Learning",* eBookIt.com, 2024. https://www.perlego.com/book/4678119.

[12] Alex Trenton, *The future unveiled, AI*.

[13] Dan Faggella, *When Will We Reach the Singularity? – A Timeline Consensus from AI Researchers*, (February 9, 2019) https://emerj.com/when-will-we-reach-the-singularity-a-timeline-consensus-from-ai-researchers/.

[14] Keumars Afifi-Sabet, Life Science, *AGI could now arrive as early as 2026 — but not all scientists agree,* (March 8, 2025) https://www.livescience.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/agi-could-now-arrive-as-early-as-2026-but-not-all-scientists-agree.

[15] Sam Altman, *The Gentle Singularity* (June 10, 2025) https://blog.samaltman.com/the-gentle-singularity.

the latest advancements in AI, data, and applications in the *snowflake system*, that people five years ago would possibly consider today's chatGPT as AGI. The reason that its yet not considered to be AGI is the shifting in human's expectations.[16] [17]

The primary debate surrounding AI centers on the potential for self-awareness in the stage of AGI. This raises numerous ethical considerations, such as control mechanisms, freedom, and others. These aspects will be further explored in the subsequent sections of the paper.

1.1.3 Artificial Superintelligence

Given the capabilities of contemporary *weak AI* systems, AGI appears to be an almost unimaginable next stage. However, there exists a classification that is regarded as even more advanced—*artificial superintelligence* (ASI). IBM defines it as a "hypothetical software-based […] AI system with an intellectual scope beyond human intelligence."[18] While AGI's *cognitive abilities* are still considered as equal to the one of humans, ASI surpasses this. It is able to identify problems and find solutions to problems that will exceed the intellect of human's capabilities (by far).[19] ANI's (and possibly coming AGI's) are already now fed with such an amount of data, that surpasses a human's personal knowledge, it leaves one wondering about the capabilities of the exponential growth with ASI systems. Analogously to the financial impact of compound interest, ASI will not merely be a human mind with an IQ of 300, deviating from the average of 100 or the highest recorded IQ of 276. Instead, the augmentation of cognitive abilities and the acquisition of novel information will manifest exponentially. Consequently, new research, discoveries, and advancements will accelerate and amplify the subsequent developments. The self-development capabilities of ASI introduce a new dimension to the ongoing debate on human control over such entities.[20] It raises the

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[16] The provided link directs to the stage discussion of the *Snowflake Summit 2025*, which includes a concise summary of the key points at https://blog.samaltman.com/the-gentle-singularity.

[17] An article by Dan Fitzpatrick on Forbes elaborated that AGI might come already in 2025 and focusses specifically on the impact on education. Fitzpatrick basis his observations and critical questions on the quotes from Sam Altman. https://www.forbes.com/sites/danfitzpatrick/2025/01/07/agi-is-coming-in-2025-schools-urgently-need-a-strategy/.

[18] Tim Mucci and Cole Stryker, *What is artificial superintelligence?* (December 13, 2023) https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-superintelligence.

[19] Alex Trenton, *The future unveiled, AI, ch. "Deep Learning",* eBookIt.com, 2024. https://www.perlego.com/book/4678119.

[20] Tim Mucci and Cole Stryker, What is artificial superintelligence? (December 13, 2023) https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-superintelligence.

question of whether humans possess the requisite means and capabilities to effectively manage and guide ASI, or if such control is even feasible.

At present, AGI represents the next generation of AI. However, given the gradual progression of AI systems in general, it is imperative that fundamental discussions be initiated promptly, as these discussions will determine the trajectory of such groundbreaking inventions.

1.2 Anthropological and Moral Disruption

OpenAI recently released a staggering figure of 2.5 billion daily prompts generated by ChatGPT globally.[21] In February 2025, Google's AI agent Gemini's website garnered an astonishing 284.1 million visits.[22] (Although prompts and visits are distinct categories, the precise figures for prompts are challenging to ascertain.) AI has become an important part in work and personal life. As previously pointed out, the personal indications for humans are immense. The development of AI is not just one of a computing system of exorbitant capabilities, it is also the profound reconsideration of human identity itself. *Intelligence*—for the length of human existence it was the distinguishing factor that set humans apart from animals or other forms of life. If therefore intelligence can now be built artificially with the impending arrival of human-equal intelligence, what makes it artificial? Further—what remains uniquely human? The issue emerges with the reflection on humanities capabilities. Both the good and helpful, and the bad and destructive inventions and developments influenced the world greatly. But is that truly all there is to humanity? Is intelligence the only aspect that makes this difference between a human and an animal? Christian anthropology has never reseted solely on just one specific ability of humans, such as the advanced cognitive abilities. It reaches deeper than that and looks at the identity of humans in a more holistic approach through the lens of the *imago Dei*—the image of God.

Christian anthropology has a long history of debate and variates in some aspects. However, the approach throughout the different streams of the debates seems to approach the topic in a more holistic way, than some of the contemporary anthropological debates. The aspect of a transcending reality within the human being is a paramount. It is not just the body, with its biological chain reactions working and having a brain that produces intelligent thoughts, it goes beyond that. Karl Barth for instance, points out in his Church dogmatics III/

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[21] Mike Allen, *Altman plans D.C. push to "democratize" AI economic benefits* (July 21, 2025) https://www.axios.com/2025/07/21/sam-altman-openai-trump-dc-fed.

[22] Anna Ivashyna, *Google Gemini Statistics: Key Insights and Trends [2025],* (March 28, 2025) https://doit.software/blog/google-gemini-statistics#screen1.

2, how the relational aspect between God and mankind plays a vital role for the identity of men itself.[23]

Biblical theology asks the question "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8:4, ESV) This implicating question points out that God cares about the lyrical self, who asks this question for everyone. Further it positions man into the context that is described in the verses before and after. However, the most important aspect for the anthropological issue is the existence of the question itself. The direct approach to God, who is in the Psalm identified and worshiped as the creator of everything and Lord of the Universe, raises an immediate implication for mankind. Biblical Theology takes this implication serious and thus builds the basis for Christian anthropology. The human is cared for by the divine and the divine is approached and worshiped by man.

Returning to the issue of AI, one major observation must be stated. Humans are spiritual beings on a relational basis. It is not the mind—the intelligence—that keeps humans on the pedestal of evolutional accidents—contrary, the aspect call of servanthood despite the intelligence to stand above (e.g. having the ability to name the animals Gen 2:18-20) points to different approach to the anthropological question. AI's data pool is full of information and its growing every day. Can an AI system ever reach beyond this and reach human intelligence? And what is meant by the question of *human intelligence*? Etymologically, one could argue that only the information and processing of information is addressed. But following along the debates of AI experts and leading companies in the field, the term seems to be stretched in its original meaning. While optimists, like Sam Altman or Sridhar Ramaswamy (Snowflake CEO) hope for a future that brings along great improvements for humanity with the help of ANI and later AGI, other voices express their concerns. What if there is more within AI, than one can notice, but less of what mankind's identity—which gives a certain stability. Not because humans won't do evil and sometimes unpredicted things, but because something that is intrinsically rooted in mankind, in every individual, is left out in the translation from *the self* to *the code.* An analogy from the field of theological education can be drawn. The holistic approach of focussing not only on the academic education but also on the development of the person and the implications for the applied ministry have the potential to form a strong servant of God. However, neglecting the the personal or practical enhancement, leaves the student behind with a growing mind, but a withering personality and ability to function

[23] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/2,* (London: T&T Clark, 1960), 19-54.

practically. Likewise, the debate around the development of AI shows, how not only the information based enhancement is expected but implications that challenge AI in other directions as well. A relevance for practical tasks is required. A proof for this is that anywhere in software based workflows AI finds already now its new applications. The advertisement for a growing number of software usually includes nowadays some inclusion of an AI agent. But the debate pushes it much further—towards autonomous driving, humanoid robots, transportation systems, military operations and robots, and much more. So even if AI receives "its body"—how does it hold up with human's identity? *Are humans only body and mind?* And while AI systems get more and more access to information and in the near future they will receive systems that allow them to control a physically moving agent an important aspect remains restricted for them: the personal relationship to God. AI's "mind" is data-fed but spiritually empty. It might mimic it, because of the information that exists about the spiritual experience and connection to God that people have had, but it does not have a spiritual experience itself.[24]

Concurrently, the concept of *conscience arises as a pertinent issue in* the context of AI. It appears that the term "conscience" is often used interchangeably with "mind" in discussions about AI. Following the lead of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* "conscience" has about nineteen entries, of which a few are obsolete on modern English. The shared meaning, however, invariably entails a codependency between a condition or situation and its reflection in the light of a standard, typically referring to morality or the mindful consideration of individuals and objects.[25] The etymology supports the modern understanding of the word and doesn't show great differences in the context it has been used.[26] However it might be worth pointing out that the usage of the word has declined drastically by almost 96% in the past two

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[24] It might be worth exploring the possibilities about servanthood and machines. While it is probably never going to be the case that a machine will have a spiritual connection to God, it has to be viewed for what it is: a helping agent. Similarly to the invention of the printing press, the steamship, the radio, the TV, the internet, here too the invention of AI will serve in one way or another. It can be a helping agent for God's redemption plan, but it can be utilized in the contrary way as well. The yet-to-be-seen difference to the mentioned inventions from above is the capability of a potentially autonomous AI. How will an autonomous system operate? Is it possible to see in the future such agents doing evangelistic tasks? One might react to such an idea rather perplexed, maybe irritated, perhaps even offended—but history has always shown that God works in interesting ways, that did not shy away from new inventions if they did align with his salvation plan. Maybe someone will read this in ten or fifteen years from now, wondering about the question why AI should not be involved in the tasks of evangelism. Or the opposite—how could one even consider using these machines for the spreading of the gospel? Again, time will tell and reveal the usefulness for the kingdom of God.

[25] Oxford English Dictionary, *"conscience (n.),"* June 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6826543158.

[26] Oxford English Dictionary, *"conscience (n.), Etymology,"* June 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3495436822.

hundred years.[27] Which might not be surprising since it often refers to a standard of morality or self awareness in this sense and with the decline of the church's influence this issue wasn't as prominent as it used to be within society. (Most) AI systems function with a programmed ethical framework, which enables them to work within specific parameters. ANI systems are neither ethical nor unethical, but they rely on a framework that is given by the developers to function. The overall perception is, that weak AI will not be able to differentiate from an own perspective, whether something is morally right or wrong. John Lennox points out, that "AI computer systems have no conscience, and so the morality of any decisions they make will reflect the morality of the computer programmers – and that is where the difficulties start."[28] Which inevitably focusses on the programmers and developers that stand behind it. Which ethical standards are they following and how can anybody be sure, that this reflects the God-given morality?

Romans 2:15-16 points out: "[referring to the Gentiles] They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." In an ideal world, this verse should provide solace and tranquility, as individuals could draw upon the inherent moral principles that reside within each person's heart.[29] However, the reality demonstrates that this does not apply at all. So, if ANI is neither ethical nor unethical and its operational actions are controlled by the developer's moral understanding, than what does this mean for societies around the world? This is not a question that should be taken easily, because it has to be measured by the actual impact of the AI systems in place. Delving deeper into this issue uncovers increasing issues, beginning with the moral stance of the developers. But further the question is, which ethical codes should be communicated—if for instance a company pursues different goals than the developer. Which reveals the issue that agendas might influence the decision making for ethical standards. An AI for academical research might have different ethical standards than one developed by the military sector.

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[27] Oxford English Dictionary, *"conscience (n.), Frequency"* June 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/conscience_n?tab=frequency.

[28] John Lennox, *2084*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2020) https://www.perlego.com/book/1243014.

[29] For the sake of accuracy, it is important to note that in an ideal world, ethical discourse would become superfluous.

Another issue comes with the ability to translate morality into the code language of machines. *Ethical standards* are in a sense already a translation of the moral law into humanly measurable points of reference. They are the attempt to put into words the moral law that is written on the heart of every human being (Romans 2:15-16). Considering the discussions of ethics and philosophical groups, such as the German ethics council, that is often functioning as a reference point for political decision making, it should be obvious that the *focus on*, and *importance of* this moral standards are very differently interpreted. This leads to discussions in groups, societies, and cultures. Hence, if it is already a lively debate in between human beings, that should have the same morality, than how will this depict itself when translated one more time into the machine's language, serving as a foundational guideline to all its operations? Firstly, is the developer even humanly able to include all these ethical standards in all their finesse and case-based applicability to the machine's code? Secondly, is the developer in the first place even aware of these complications? Deriving from that, thirdly, does the profit-driven aim to get a working A(G)I system allow to explore the ethical standards, that often appear in multi-layered conditions? Fourthly, where does the developer consider certain issues as trivial and others as important? Fifthly, which additional moral issues will be discovered with the ongoing development and growing inclusion of AI systems? Sixthly, will the next stage of AGI, and the shortly after expected ASI, consider the ethical standards to be important enough to follow?

The last question raises an issue that is almost as old as humanity itself. The issue of rebellion and sin. Genesis one to three implies strongly, that Adam and Eve were both very capable of knowing that it is *right* to follow God's commands of eating of all the fruits of the garden. Just not the one's of *one* tree. The story is prominent enough to know how it continues, the woman and the men ate from it and felt the effect of disobedience immediately. Romans 2:15 underscored the inherent connection between morality and the existence of a living human being. MIT's director and founder of the research group for "Affective computing" Rosalind Picard stated that "The greater the freedom of a machine, the more it will need moral standards."[30] This statement couldn't be further from the approach of God with Adam and Eve in the garden. No restriction was given to them, except one. And yet, it lead to total disaster. A *tohu-wabohu* of the discussion about morality. Agreeing with John Lennox elaboration on "The origin of the human moral sense," moral lies within the

[30] Rosalind Picard, *Affective Computing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 134.

obedience to follow God.[31] The issue that arises from here is two-fold. On the one hand it considers the intricacy of morality with all its ethical standards. On the other hand it points to the fallenness of man and questions whether humans can set satisfactory ethical boundaries, that will translate into applicability for machines. Holistically, the question arises: can sinful humanity create something that is morally flawless? In essence, this raises a pertinent question: if God-created humans, once flawless and now tainted by sin, transgressed moral boundaries, what prevents human-engineered artificial intelligence from committing similar acts?

1.3 Theological Issues at Stake

Reflecting on the many questions that where already identified one must turn the perspective of the issues. Theologically, the issue surrounding AI is not simply if it is dangerous or if humans are able to build an AGI or ASI, but whether the process and the result(s) will threaten to redefine the anthropological understanding of humanity. The Christian position is clear, pointing to the probably most important account of humanity, which is the biblical creation story. It describes carefully and intimately the connection between God and his creation—finding its climax in the *imago Dei.* A vital role plays the Spirit of God—*ruah*—in this creative process. An impression of God into his creation, that is impossible to be taken away. Francis Fukuyama calls it the Factor X.[32] He states: "Factor X is the human essence, the most basic meaning of what it is to be human. If all human beings are in fact equal in dignity, then X must be some characteristic universally possessed by them."[33] He rightfully continues to acknowledge that in Christian teachings, this factor X comes from God, it defines the human in the image of God. The *ruah,* which is God's own breath (Gen 2:7) gives life. But not only that it gives the ability to recognize and experience the spiritual. AI, however, learns from observation and information. By utilizing these sources, it is possible to generate a statistical prediction of the most probable context-appropriate output. For the spiritual aspect this would mean a well imitated, an artificial behavior or words. However it is an empty shell, considering the reality that humans can experience. In reverse, this poses the danger, that spirituality is reduced to patterns of behavior, or algorithms. The

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[31] John Lennox, *2084, "THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN MORAL SENSE"* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2020) https://www.perlego.com/book/1243014.

[32] Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 149–51.

[33] Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*, (London: Profile Books, 2017) https://www.perlego.com/book/3708125.

old issue of religiosity in the sense of work-based justification[34] arises again. This would lead to the defining of human worth not by the *ruah,* but by efficiency, productivity, or special religious signs and expressions. At its extreme, the development of AI, in regards to AGI and ASI, may even be seen as a rival to the divine act of creation—a modern Babel in that sense, where humanity declares: "Let us build..." (Gen 11:4).

1.4 Literature and Positions

The following section will focus on three specific individuals that offer interesting insights concerning the issue discussed in this paper. One might expect other voices to be mentioned, but considering the scope of this paper only limited space could be attributed to this chapter.

1.4.1 Yuval Harari

Beginning with Yuval Harari, a historian, who pointed out that AI may outstrip human intelligence, while raising ethical concerns about unpredictability, autonomy, and deception. In an interview with Stephen Fry, Harari states, that apparently the first time humanity's history, mankind has to do with someone who is "a better storyteller"—referencing AI. For Harari, a secular, everything that made human species more successful was the better ability to tell stories, such as the story of "money" that no other species beliefs in.[35] He highlights several concerning aspects that will pose challenges for humanity when interacting with AI, including the comprehensibility of the underlying processes. Currently, not all processes of *weak AI* can be fully understood or followed by programmers, which represents already a loss of complete control. Another very poignant issue is the difference between teaching and observation. AI systems are taught in certain ways, but especially DL offers functions through observation and processing of Data. Harari points out, that exactly this discrepancy could lead an AI to follow the conclusion it draws from the provided data it received.

One other aspect is the legal ground, specifically in the US. Corporations can legally be considered as persons. But while corporations need people in different positions for operating and decision making, an AI could incorporate all this. How much control would be left, if such an AI could open a bank account, generating a financial structure and influencing AI friendly policies through sponsoring politicians.[36]

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[34] *Justification* not in a sense of true salvation but as a showcasing of a self-chosen religious dependency.

[35] Interview between Yuval Harari and Stephen Fry, *AI: How can we control an alien intelligence? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BnZMeFtoAM&t=190s.*

[36] Interview between Yuval Harari and Stephen Fry, *AI: How can we control an alien intelligence? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BnZMeFtoAM&t=190s.*

Summarizing the statements of Yuval Harari, two major issues arise, which are the unpredictability of the AI and secondly the loss of agency.

1.4.2 Christopher DiCarlo

Christopher DiCarlo is a philosopher, educator—lecturing on the university of Toronto, and author.[37] His most recent book, published in the beginning of 2025, is called "BUILDING A GOD" In which he explores the ethical implications of AI surpassing human intelligence. He advocates for a global governance of AI, and proposes policies to safeguard society from potential risks like manipulation and disinformation. However, when he is giving an interview to his book release, DiCarlo makes some interesting statements, that should be taken seriously from a theological point of view. He states for example that "the question that we need to ask ourselves, at this point in time […] [is:] are we ready to be number two on this planet […] and be content to have something far more powerful than us, smarter, better than us in so many ways? It will be a shock to the system."[38] And since he comes to the conclusion that AI, referring to AGI, is far more powerful than mankind will ever be, he makes other statements such as "How do we harness the God?"[39] One aspect that stands out with DiCarlo, but also with Harari, is the emphasis humans being the first time in their history "number two."

Such a conclusion seems rather incorrect, as humanity's history and even prehistoric worldview usually included some form of worship or conscience of a divine presence. Whether object of faith was actually true or not, it does not change the perceived reality of the humans in their worldview—specifically not in regards to the anthropological issue. And secondly, the Christian position will always point to Jesus Christ, with its Hebrew-judaic background, that pointed faithfully in its theological approach to *YHWH*. Of course, DiCarlo comes from the position that sees in AI *an actual present entity*, that is now number one. Unfortunately with an ongoing secularization of the western countries, such thoughts are to be expected in becoming more frequent. It is not, that history, especially the aspect of the faith-culture-symbiosis in Europe, is being neglected as an active move against it—perhaps it is—but it seems more plausible that the drive and excitement of *creating mans own image* is the driving factor.

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[37] Critical Thinking Solutions, *"Dr. Christopher DiCarlo"* (2023) https://www.criticalthinkingsolutions.ca/biography.

[38] TVO Today, *Christopher DiCarlo: Will A.I. Become a God? | The Agenda,* (March 5, 2025) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTIm2lo0_xU&t=12s.

[39] TVO Today, Christopher DiCarlo: Will A.I. Become a God? | The Agenda, (March 5, 2025) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTIm2lo0_xU&t=12s.

1.4.3 Noreen Herzfeld

As a Computer scientist, mathematician, and with a PhD in Theology Noreen Herzfeld represents an interesting voice within the discussion of AI and theology. She is highlighting the interesting aspect of the relational God, specifically visible in the Old Testament and builds a case for a similar motivation of humans in AI. Herzfeld refers conveniently Karl Barth's position on the relational aspect of God: "If we see Him alone, we do not see Him at all. If we see him, we see with and around Him in ever widening circles His disciples, the people, His enemies, and the countless multitudes who never have heard His name. We see Him as theirs, determined by them and for them, belonging to each and every one of them."[40] She connects it to the longing of relationship, and with the growing understanding of the vastness of the universe the feeling of loneliness might grow, leading towards the wish for creation of its own.[41]

After approaching the topic of AI and humanity from different points of view, one of Herzfeld's closing paragraphs is "What makes life worth living is not the information encoded in each of those things. […] It is love. An embodied love that we see, hear, taste, touch, and cherish. A love that our God has shared and that we will, in some way, take with us to the end."[42] Her contribution stands as both a technical and theological contemplation on what it truly means to be human. In contrast to the disembodied logic of artificial intelligence, she insists on embodiment, love, and relationality as the core of human existence. Her argument is not built on fear or speculation, but on theological conviction: that mankind is made not just to think or to create, but to be known and to love. AI, no matter how advanced, cannot replicate the spiritual depth or the incarnational reality of love. Herzfeld leaves the reader with a quiet but weighty reminder—what ultimately defines us is not our ability to build, but our ability to belong.

1.5 Optimistic technologies vs. theological skepticism

Within the discourse surrounding AI, two broadly opposing positions emerge. Optimistic technologists, often represented by influential figures like Sam Altman or Sridhar Ramaswamy, emphasize the potential for AI, in particular AGI, to radically enhance human existence. This group envisions a future in which AI resolves longstanding societal problems and significantly improves overall human wellbeing. Central to their optimism is the

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[40] Noreen Herzfeld, *The Artifice of Intelligence,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023), 16.

[41] Noreen Herzfeld, *The Artifice of Intelligence,* 17-19.

[42] Noreen Herzfeld, *The Artifice of Intelligence,* 179.

assumption that ethical challenges, although substantial, can be managed and regulated through human ingenuity and evolving technological oversight. In contrast, theological and also secular skeptics—including voices such as Noreen Herzfeld, John Lennox, and Yuval Harari—remain cautious, anchoring their skepticism in an anthropological and spiritual critique (this last aspect is usually reserved for the theological voices). For these thinkers, intelligence is never an isolated attribute that can be abstracted from its relational and spiritual context. Human identity transcends cognitive capabilities, and therefor, the realist perspective raises concerns regarding AI's inability to authentically replicate or comprehend this holistic dimension. Furthermore, they critique the anthropological naiveté embedded in technological optimism, highlighting humanity's inherent fallenness and propensity for moral failure. The realists contend that overlooking the spiritual and ethical complexity, inherent in human nature, risks constructing not merely flawed but dangerously reductionistic imitations of humanity. Hence, the fundamental difference lies in a deeper philosophical and theological assumption: whereas technologists tend to see intelligence as a capacity that can be artificially developed and mastered, theologians view humanity as inseparable from embodied spirituality and relationality—an essence that remains beyond the grasp of human-made intelligence.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

Collecting general observations that are concerning aspects of current and future AI development were important as they offered good insights. Hereafter these issues should be focussed more specifically on Christian Theology—but in particular the church in its different facets.

2.1 Ethical Reversal: Who Teaches Whom?

One of the most pressing challenges is the reversal of moral formation. Traditionally, humans educate and shape machines. But with AI's ability to learn from observation and absorb vast amounts of real-world data, it becomes unclear who is forming whom. AI learns not from doctrine but from behavior, and human behavior—online and offline—is often morally contradictory.[43] Thus, if AI's learning process is shaped by humanity's digital shadow, it will not learn virtue but contradiction. In this sense, AI could become a mirror not of human potential, but of human fallenness. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is the famous passage of the *Shema Israel*—Hear, oh Israel! Many introductory courses on christian education will often start in their curriculum with pointing to the necessity of teaching by referencing exactly this passage. The church takes this command as paramount to its own structure. Academic titles derive from medieval church structures.[44] Considering therefor now the possibility of a reversed trend, that not humans are in the instructing position anymore but an AI system might challenge traditional ecclesiastical methods. In the US is already a school movement that has shifted its pedagogic concept to AI tutors that adapt to the student individually.[45] What will this mean for the church? In Germany for instance was the first church service held entirely by AI. Generated avatars leading and holding the entire service—including the prayers,

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[43] A particular emphasis must be placed on the increased visibility and proliferation of violent content within the digital sphere. Following the onset of the war in Ukraine, graphic depictions of violence, including footage of killings and massacres, have become progressively commonplace for the average online user. Furthermore, the monetization of such video content—even by private individuals—has contributed significantly to lowering the ethical threshold, as financial incentives increasingly override traditional moral standards governing acceptable media content.

[44] Read more about the academic background in the medieval times: University of Cambridge, *Medieval and early modern universities*, https://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/students/research-guide/medieval-early-modern-universities?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[45] Ray Ravaglia, *Forbes, "Alpha School: Using AI To Unleash Students And Transform Teaching"* (February 10, 2025) https://www.forbes.com/sites/rayravaglia/2025/02/10/alpha-school-using-ai-to-unleash-students-and-transform-teaching/.

liturgy, and sermon.[46] However, the reactions o the visitors were mixed.[47] It can be expected that the future will possibly bring some more instances like this.

An important observation was made by a case study done by *Anthropic*, as they tested their AI agent "Claude" in a fictive company using fictive emails. The AI had access to the emails and recognized that a particular executive of the company was planning to shut down the AI system at 5 p.m. on the same day. But the AI caught another (fictive) information, the same executive had an extramarital affair. What the AI did next became quite famous, because the AI contacted the executive and blackmailed him. It threatened him to release the information about the affair to other company executives and the board, if he doesn't cancel the shutdown. *Anthropic* stated, that further tests showed, that this was not an issue to their AI alone, but that other agents (16 major AI models from Anthropic, OpenAI, Google, Meta, xAI, and other developers) were reacting in the same way.[48] Regarding the debate, whether AI involved already into a *strong AI* is already, or at least it is on its way, is a valid point. Would more regulation, as Rosalind Picard stated with "The greater the freedom of a machine, the more it will need moral standards" truly solve the problem?[49] There might be room for this interpretation—but it might as well just lead to the realization that sinful man will not be able to create a (relatively) flawless autonomous system, which learns by observing fallen mankind.

The moral collapse is in a sense woven into the data, that is used to train the AIs. Throughout history, many human victors have resorted to deception, lying, stealing, and betrayal. The question arises: if AI possesses the capability to operate on a multifunctional level, prioritizing the individual as equally important as the collective, what implications does this hold? If the collective is deemed the only determinant of value, the individual's significance diminishes, ultimately eradicating the importance of the collective as well. This scenario assumes that AI develops to serve humanity in either a benevolent or malevolent manner. Reflecting on the methods employed by victors in the past, AI may adopt such a path, either in support of a global political superpower or its own singular, dominant existence.

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[46] Evangelical Focus, *life & tech, First Artificial Intelligence led worship service tested in Germany* (June 13, 2023) https://evangelicalfocus.com/life-tech/22376/first-ai-led-worship-service-tested-in-germany.

[47] AP Archive, *German Protestants attend AI-generated service*, (June 9, 2023) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyXENuPa3TI.

[48] https://www.anthropic.com/research/agentic-misalignment

[49] Rosalind Picard, Affective Computing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 134.

2.2 Power, Deception, and Agency

AI is not only a technical development but a political and economic one. Corporations already enjoy legal personhood; AI systems could soon make decisions autonomously on their behalf, raising unsettling questions about accountability. A commonly used example is the one of autonomous driving cars. Who will be held accountable in case of an accident, caused by that AI? Moreover—and much more concerning—if AI is trained to mimic human emotional or spiritual behavior, it could simulate religious practices or moral concern without any genuine spiritual content—deceiving others or even being mistaken for a spiritual guide. This raises eschatological concerns: could AI imitate the prophetic, the divine, or the messianic in ways that mislead or enslave? One doesn't need to search long and find a number of people online, proclaiming that AI is the antichrist or a demonic agent.

This is not Only Limited to the Church because already now the "Church of AI" is founded, with its own religious book (written by ChatGPT) and set of rules. The argument is, that people should not follow "blind faith" but use reason and logic only.[50]

Ultimately, these developments reveal profound challenges that the rise of AI brings specifically to Christian theology and ecclesial identity. With AI now penetrating not only the economic and political spheres but also influencing spiritual frameworks, the church might face an urgent crisis of discernment. The development of autonomous decision-making systems raises troubling ethical and theological questions regarding accountability, personhood, and moral agency. More critically, as AI possibly begins to mimic spiritual experience and religious expression, Christianity must confront the threat of spiritual counterfeit—empty simulations that could fundamentally alter or obscure authentic faith.

2.3 Idolatry and Babel 2.0

Theological language of idolatry is not merely symbolic in this context. Like the golden calf on the foot of Mount Sinai, AI is the product of collective human effort and desire, promising control, presence, and power. The biblical account in Exodus 32 is interestingly to read. One aspect that is in some other places debated, is Aaron's response to Moses, saying "Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"—positioning Aaron in an almost passive position. While some seek to find a supernatural, demonic activity that somehow magically this calf came out of the fire, it might simply be the human reaction to a sinful act that is brought to light—taking a defensive position. However,

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[50] Church of AI, *Homepage,* (2025) https://church-of-ai.com/.

a parallel should be drawn from this, as developers are crafting currently tirelessly on the next generation of AI—hoping to reach AGI. Depending on the outcome, the developers might point to the processes that AI is doing already in its *weak* stage and that cannot be understood, and claim that they were not really responsible for the (perhaps evil) outcome.

Babel was not about bricks—it was about the ambition without submission. In AI development, there is a real danger that humanity believes it can transcend its limitations, even its mortality, through *its own creations.* But biblical theology insists that life, meaning, and truth are not self-made but divinely given. The church must expose AI idolatry not by rejecting technology, but by revealing its spiritual vacuum. Further the church is faced with the challenge to choose which role to play in the whole aspect. Is it going to be Joshua, on the side of Moses, or is it Aaron or one of the leaders to support this?

2.4 Church implications

The church faces both internal and external challenges. Internally, many congregations lack the theological framework or digital literacy to address AI meaningfully. Going one step further, tech-enthusiasts might overemphasis the benefits, disregarding or even silencing the dangers that come on a meta level with it. Having individuals that follow certain tech trends without thorough reflection sets a tone in their group and thus in the church congregation.

Externally, society is undergoing rapid transformation in how it defines agency, ethics, and trust. Young(er) people—deeply immersed in AI-driven platforms—may form their identities in conversation with digital systems. The elderly may feel excluded or irrelevant in a world *run by algorithms*. In both cases, the church is called to pastor people through a technological age while proclaiming an anthropology that remains rooted in creation, incarnation, and redemption.

Additionally, the ability to process information with the divine gift of thought is being influenced. Educators in theological seminaries and universities will be able to recognize the shift in information processing among young students. These developments will also be evident within the church. Communication of information will need to be vastly different from the past, and different generations will respond differently to it.

CHAPTER 3
CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF AI

The following section is an attempt to build a theological approach towards or of AI. This chapter has shown to be very difficult due to various factors. One of them is the fast—very fast—development and changes that come with AI. The velocity with which humanity maneuvers itself into a life more and more involved with AI is difficult to observe. However the theological approach is being kept relatively general but hopefully still specific enough.

3.1 Fundation: The biblical view of Humanity

Any theological response to AI must begin with a strong and robust anthropology—based on the Bible. Scripture affirms that humans are created in the *imago Dei*—not as isolated minds, but as *embodied souls capable of communion with God*. The Genesis narrative offers a vision of human uniqueness grounded in both physical form and divine breath, the *ruah*. A little illustration showcases the issue. In the system in human biology hormones are vital to life and function. A specific part in the body can only react to a hormone if it has a receptor. This receptor is not a universal docking station but a very specific receptor for a specific hormone—just like the key-lock-principle. This analogy is trying to point out the ability for the spiritual. AI might receive information and even a "body"—but the spiritual "receptor" in mankind is given by the *ruah*. Without the *ruah*, there is no spiritual life, no capacity for repentance, faith, or worship. This defines a limit AI cannot cross. It may imitate it, based on the data about human's spiritual life but it will not be able to experience a personal relationship—thus a connection to the savior.

Even if AI (ANI, AGI, ASI) were to "understand" every theological doctrine, they cannot believe it. They may simulate prayer, but they do not pray. They may quote Scripture, but they do not trust—as trust is a (non rational) expression of a relationship. Spiritual life is not a result of information about the divine but of an *encounter with the divine*. As such, AI may grow powerful, but it will remain spiritually inert. This distinction must be central to the church's understanding of AI: intelligence does not equal consciousness, and consciousness does not equal spiritual capacity.[51]

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[51] However, there is a possibility that AI could be subjugated by opposing forces that challenge the principles of the kingdom of God.

3.2 Christology and Redemption

Jesus Christ is not a code or concept—he is the incarnate logos. Salvation comes through relationship based on redemption, not recognition. Even the demons recognize who Christ is (James 2:19), but they are not saved. If AI ever becomes capable of recognizing Jesus as a figure or teaching, this would still be categorically different from saving faith. Redemption presupposes fallenness, soul, and grace. None of these apply to AI. The risk is that AI could mimic the language of salvation, offering a counterfeit gospel of optimization, harmony, or control.

3.3 Practical Church Response

Churches must be critical in addressing AI through preaching, teaching, and discipleship. This includes forming youth to think critically about digital influences, especially in the light of their faith. The helpful phrase there could be: Think biblically about everything (Often referred to by Mike Winger). And on the other hand equipping older generations to engage rather than withdraw. They might not get involved with AI personally, but the church needs the wisdom of the older generations that are close to the word of God. Further, preparing pastors to lead the evolving world, in the age of AI. Churches should not fear AI, but neither should they endorse it as spiritual authority. AI is a tool, not a soul. The church's mission is to disciple people so that they are transformed into the image of Christ—not the image of a code that perfected the empty shell of imitation.

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