AI and the Cross Series

AI and the Church: *Perspectives of multiple denominations*

Thomas B. Kelley

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Preface – A note from the author

My interest in AI, machine learning and similar subjects began back in the early 1980s as a Covenant College student. In fact, I was in the first graduating class that had a Computer Science degree as an option ('85). After graduating with a double major in Psychology and Computer Science, the Lord blessed me with a long and successful career of over 40 years in the IT industry.

In March of 2025, I suffered a massive heart attack. In the ensuing weeks, I was ordered to get some rest and let my heart heal. That gave me a chance to spend time reading what different churches/denominations had written about the use of Artificial Intelligence. (Side note: It also frustrated me because I don't believe that LLMs truly reflect the term "AI" but we'll save that for another day).

Throughout 2025, I continued to track what different churches were saying about the topic and I continued to discuss it with others. I was initially pleased with the idea of an ad-hoc committee coming out of General Assembly.

What we have now is a rather exhaustive capture of the state of "AI and the Church" as it existed into late 2025/early 2026. The problem is that the technology and the general industry are moving so quickly that a time-consuming project like this one is nearly out of date before it can be completed.

All that to say, while the information was correct when I gathered it, some of the statements in this document may have been changed or even removed by the original organization that approved it.

Regardless of the timeline issues, I have done my best to not "pick sides" in either what any particular denomination wrote or stance that they have taken. I'm not taking sides. At least my intention is to not take sides regarding the substance of any reports, plans, policies, etc. Probably, some of you will see me pivoting even when I don't mean to.

The report is not an easy read and leads me to one final thing I should share. I did use an LLM to help me as I composed the final report. Now in my 60s, I lack the patience and brain power I had when I was young when it comes to managing large amounts of data in my head. That is what LLMs are REALLY good at doing. Thus, I leveraged it to help me sort through some of the more subtle points and to make sure I tracked the differences

between what a particular church's stance might be versus stylistic differences in the way it was reported.

That said, I'll claim ownership of any mistakes, misstatements, or misrepresentations made herein. I've done my best to accurately reflect what the different churches said. However, it's not always clear the intent behind the words and if I missed something or reported it wrong, I hope you'll forgive me.

Finally, the research, the conversations, etc. led to more and more side projects, white papers, the beginning of a new podcast, and even a country western song about AI. I'm even looking at how one could build a ChatGPT-type application with the rich Reformed theology and the wisdom not to act like a pastor.

I would love to hear from you and your thoughts on the paper or other aspects of AI in the church.

In Him,

Thomas Kelley,

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Artificial Intelligence and the Wider Christian Church: A Comparative Review

Prepared for the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and any who desire a careful overview of the present landscape.

I. Executive Summary

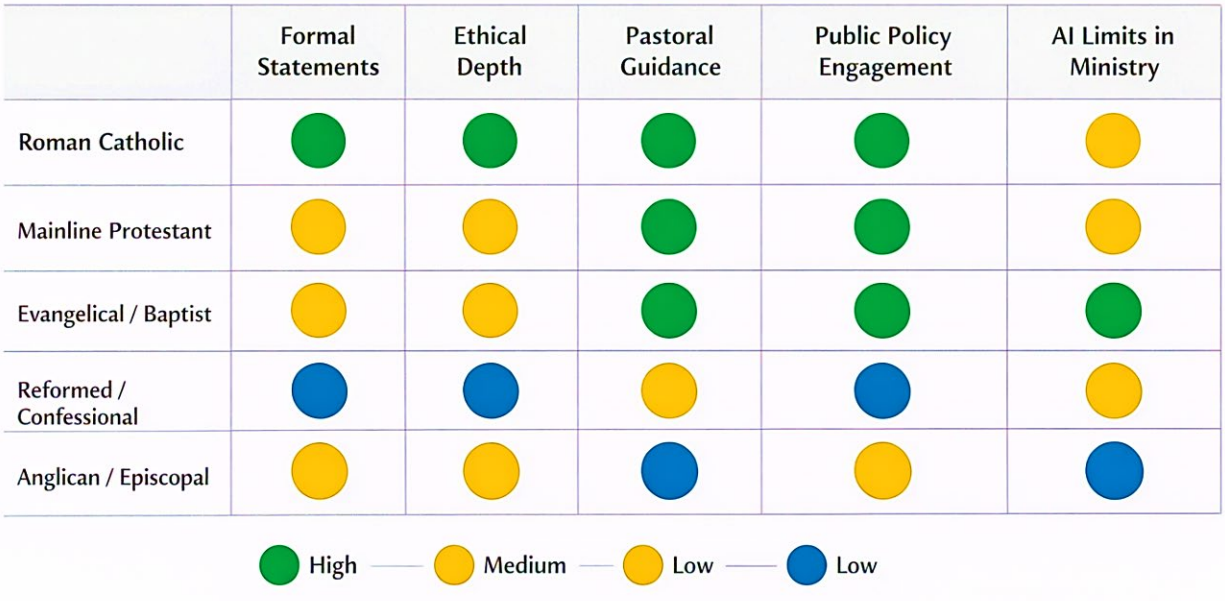
Overview: This review surveys formal statements, advisory documents, public resolutions, and study materials produced by major Christian traditions regarding artificial intelligence (AI). The goal is **descriptive**, not evaluative: to answer *what* Christian churches and ecclesial bodies have officially said about AI so far. We summarize patterns of agreement and points of divergence across these traditions, providing a clear view of the broader ecclesial landscape for PCA readers. No particular policy is recommended here; instead, we offer observations to inform the PCA's own discernment.

Key Common Findings: Across denominational lines, several consistent themes emerge:

- **AI as Tool, Not Creature:** No major Christian body treats AI as having moral agency or personhood. AI is characterized as a **tool** or instrument that humans use, rather than an independent moral actor. Responsibility for AI's use is consistently placed on **human creators, leaders, and users**, not on the technology itself. (In Catholic terms, AI is seen as part of creation's technology, not as possessing a soul or rights; similarly, Protestant statements affirm that any sin or virtue in AI's impact traces back to human decisions.)
- **Human Dignity Emphasized:** Virtually all statements ground their evaluation of AI in a theological understanding of **human dignity**. Because humans are made in God's image, technologies must respect the value of every person. Common themes include protecting the vulnerable from being exploited or marginalized by AI, resisting any dehumanizing uses of AI, and caution about technological displacement of human work in ways that harm community and purpose. In short, Christian bodies agree that AI must be measured against its effect on human life and whether it upholds or undermines the God-given worth of people.

- **Call for Ethics and Transparency:** Many church statements call for **ethical guardrails and transparency** in the development and deployment of AI. They encourage things like clear disclosure when AI is used (especially in pastoral or educational contexts), accountability structures to govern AI systems, and thoughtful discernment before adopting AI in sensitive areas of ministry. The message is: handle this powerful tool with eyes open. Several traditions explicitly urge institutions (including governments, industry, and the church itself) to develop guidelines so that AI is used in ways that are truthful, just, and aligned with Christian moral values.
- **Pastoral and Educational Impact:** A number of documents discuss how AI might affect **preaching, teaching, counseling, and discipleship**. There is broad agreement that AI should **not replace personal ministry**, but it may have appropriate uses to assist with research, communication, or administrative tasks. Different groups are beginning to explore implications for ministerial practice (for example, whether it's acceptable to use an AI to draft a sermon outline or provide spiritual counsel). However, the depth of reflection here varies: some traditions have published detailed guidance for pastors and educators, while others have only just begun raising the questions. Overall, churches are cautioning that any use of AI in ministry must preserve the integrity of human, Spirit-led pastoral care and avoid short-cuts that bypass the relational core of the church's work.

Comparative Overview of Christian Denominational Approaches to AI



Differences and Divergences: Despite broad alignment on the above principles, Christian traditions diverge in emphasis and approach:

- The **Roman Catholic Church** has provided the most extensive theological reflection on AI to date, often framed by its natural law tradition and magisterial authority. Catholic documents (e.g. a Vatican dicastery's note *Antiqua et Nova* (2025)【1】 and the **Rome Call for AI Ethics** (2020) initiated by the Vatican【2】) articulate detailed ethical considerations and guidelines for technology, rooted in Catholic social teaching.
- Some **Mainline Protestant** bodies (e.g. Presbyterian Church USA, United Methodists, the Episcopal Church) emphasize **social justice and bias**: they are concerned with AI's impact on society's marginalized and advocate for fairness and regulation in the public square. Their statements and initiatives often focus on issues like eliminating algorithmic bias, ensuring equitable access to technology, and protecting privacy and jobs. By contrast, **Evangelical Protestant** groups (e.g. the Southern Baptist Convention and related agencies) have concentrated more on **pastoral integrity and doctrinal fidelity**: they discuss AI in terms of guarding the truth of Scripture, the sanctity of human authorship (for instance, warning against plagiarism or replacing pastors with AI), and the importance of maintaining human oversight in preaching and teaching.
- There are differences in **institutional response levels**. Some denominations have taken formal actions—commissioning study committees, issuing official resolutions or pastoral letters—while others have so far produced only informal guidance or remained largely silent at the official level. For example, the Catholic Church and some mainline churches have high-level bodies actively addressing AI, whereas many confessional Reformed denominations (including the PCA until now) have not yet issued formal statements, even though individual pastors and theologians are writing on the topic.
- In general, the landscape is one of **"cautious engagement."** No Christian tradition surveyed endorses an uncritical embrace of AI, nor do any call for outright rejection of all AI uses. Instead, churches are navigating a middle path: acknowledging the potential benefits of AI for human flourishing and ministry, yet voicing clear warnings about its pitfalls and urging that timeless theological truths guide our approach. This posture can be summarized as *hopeful but careful*—seeking to use AI in service of the Gospel while steadfastly affirming that technology must remain subordinate to our faith and values.

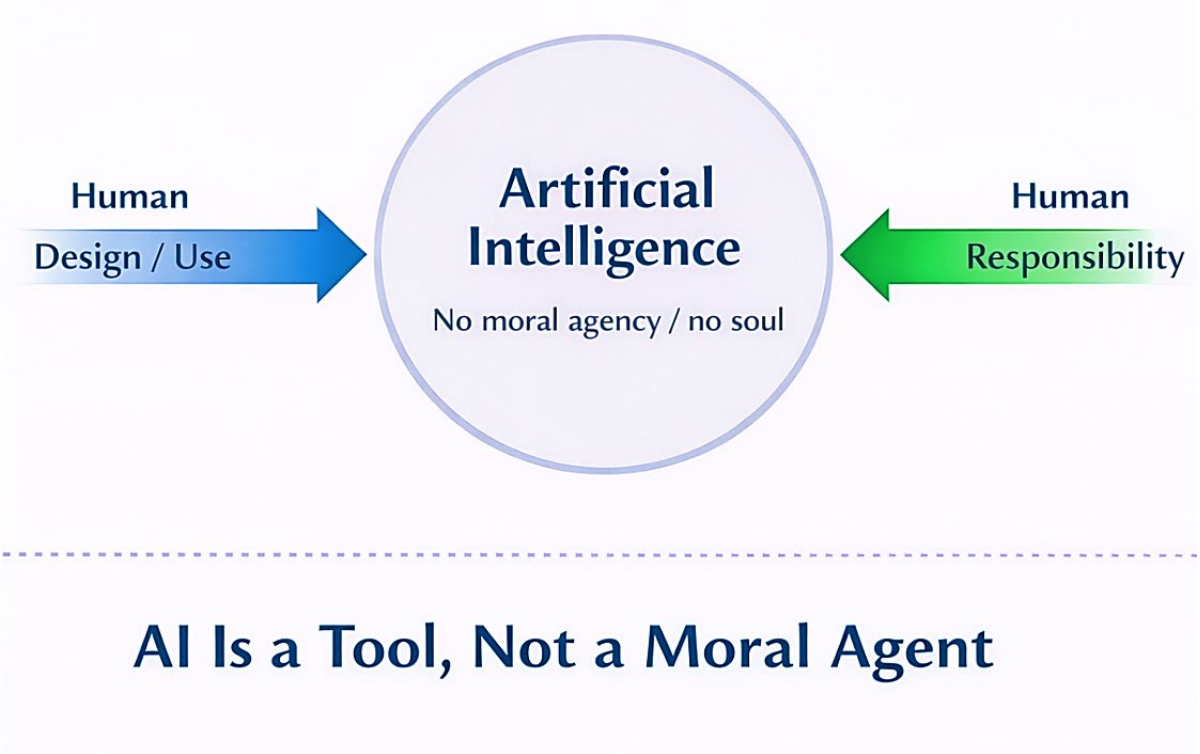
Next Steps for the PCA: The final section of this review outlines possible pathways the Presbyterian Church in America might consider in responding to AI. These range from maintaining a watching brief (learning from others' experiences) to launching its own study process or drafting guidance for churches. The options are not mutually exclusive, and **no specific recommendation is given here**. The intent is to equip PCA leaders with a sense of how peer Christian communities are handling AI, thereby informing our denomination's prayerful discernment of how to proceed in a manner consistent with our Reformed convictions and pastoral priorities.

II. Artificial Intelligence: A Brief Literacy Overview

Before examining the church's responses, it's helpful to clarify some basic concepts about Artificial Intelligence, especially as they relate to ministry. AI is a broad field, but much of the current conversation centers on a particular type of AI known as **generative AI** (for example, the AI that powers ChatGPT and similar tools). Here is a brief overview in non-technical terms:

1. What is a Large Language Model (LLM)?

A *large language model* is an AI system trained on vast amounts of text (such as books, articles, and websites) to generate human-like language. It doesn't "think" like a human; rather, it predicts likely word sequences based on patterns in its training data. For example, if you prompt an LLM with a question about the Bible, it will try to compose an answer by drawing on all the religious texts and commentary it has ingested, stringing together sentences that statistically resemble a plausible answer. LLMs can hold remarkably coherent conversations and produce essays, stories, or answers that read fluently. However, **coherence is not the same as comprehension** – an LLM doesn't truly understand the meaning of the words or have intent behind them. It has no consciousness or spiritual discernment. It's essentially an advanced predictive text engine. This is crucial for Christians to grasp: when an AI writes something about theology or ethics, it's not teaching from wisdom or conviction; it's parroting patterns. This limits the degree to which its outputs can be trusted or treated as authoritative without human verification.



2. Generation vs. Retrieval:

Traditional computer tools (like search engines or databases) **retrieve** information that already exists. For example, a Bible search program will fetch the exact verses or a commentary entry you asked for. Generative AI, by contrast, **creates new sentences and paragraphs** in response to prompts. It doesn't give you an excerpt from a single source; it generates an original composition (based on what it "learned" from many sources). This generative ability is why tools like ChatGPT can be so useful – they can draft emails, summarize lengthy texts, or even write a sample sermon introduction for you. But the downside is that generative AI can also produce **inaccuracies or even nonsense** (what researchers call "hallucinations") that sound confident and true but aren't found in any reliable source. In ministry, this means an AI might fabricate a quote from Calvin or misstate a fact about church history while sounding convincing. Retrieval is generally reliable (you get real data that was put in), whereas generation is creative but requires scrutiny. Wise use of AI in church settings will likely involve combining both: using retrieval when exact accuracy is needed (e.g. searching an official catechism text), and using generation with caution for tasks like drafting and brainstorming, always with a human double-check.

3. Ministry-Relevant Use Cases:

Why might church leaders or ministries use AI at all? There are several emerging use cases:

- **Drafting and Writing Assistance:** AI can help write **sermon outlines, Bible study guides, or devotional materials**. For instance, a pastor could ask an AI for "five sermon illustrations about forgiveness," or a children's ministry director might have it draft a puppet script teaching the story of David and Goliath. The AI can produce a quick first draft, which the human leader can then edit and refine with theological care.
- **Research and Summarization:** AI can serve as a research assistant. It could summarize a long council document, collate various authors' views on a scripture passage, or translate ancient phrases. It might quickly gather **historical facts or denominational statements** on a topic (with the caveat that it might get some wrong and you'll need to verify from original sources). Some seminarians have used AI to get initial thoughts on an essay question or to explain a Greek verb form (again, with caution).
- **Administrative and Pastoral Support:** In church administration, AI tools might automate routine tasks. Examples include managing schedules ("smart" calendar assistants), sorting through large amounts of data (like analyzing survey results from the congregation), or even acting as an "AI chatbot" on the church's website to answer common questions (like "What time is Sunday service?"). In pastoral care, experimental uses include an AI that helps generate ideas for a church newsletter, or one that suggests biblical counseling resources when given a counseling scenario. These uses always keep a human in the loop (the AI suggests, the human decides).
- **Creative Media:** AI can also produce images, music, or video. A church might use an AI image generator to create a custom illustration for a sermon series, or an AI music tool to compose a simple background tune for a podcast. Some youth ministries have engaged teens with AI-driven creative projects (like "rewrite this parable in rap lyrics"). These creative uses raise questions about authorship and authenticity (Is it genuine to present AI-created art in worship?) which churches are just beginning to explore.

In all these use cases, **human oversight remains central**. The consensus is that AI can assist and augment ministry work, but not replace the prayerful human labor inspired by the Holy Spirit.

4. Tool, Agency, and Responsibility:

One foundational point that churches agree on: **AI is a tool, not a moral agent**. In theological terms, it has no soul, no ability to sin or be righteous. Therefore, the **moral responsibility** for any use of AI lies with people. If an AI sermon is misleading or if an algorithm amplifies misinformation, it is human programmers, leaders, or users who must answer for that – just as if a hammer is used to harm someone, we blame the person wielding it, not the hammer. This might seem obvious, but it needs stating in an age when people jokingly or seriously attribute intention to "the AI." For Christians, it's clear that *only humans (and angels) have moral agency in God's creation*. We will each give account to God for how we use the tools and talents entrusted to us (Matthew 25:14–30). AI is part of those entrusted tools. This perspective encourages us to neither demonize nor idolize AI. The technology is not intrinsically evil, nor is it benignly infallible – it takes on the character (for good or ill) of those who develop and deploy it. Church statements thus often remind readers that what matters is the **human heart and mind** directing AI's use. If used with wisdom, love, and justice, AI could help ministries; if used carelessly or selfishly, it can cause harm. Agency always loops back to us.

5. Automation and Authority:

A specific concern in ministry is whether tasks that are being automated by AI might encroach on areas of spiritual authority or office. For example, if an AI writes a sermon that a pastor then preaches verbatim, who is really doing the pastoral teaching? The pastor or a machine? Churches have pointed out that **automation does not confer ecclesial authority**. No matter how eloquent an AI-generated sermon manuscript might be, it carries *zero* spiritual authority in and of itself. Authentic Christian teaching authority comes from Scripture and from those properly called and equipped to expound it (cf. Titus 2:15). Similarly, if someone were to use an AI to simulate pastoral counseling or give algorithmic advice in a church setting, that advice has not passed through the spiritual discernment and accountability that we expect of a human pastor or elder. Thus, many caution that certain aspects of ministry should **never be simply delegated to automation**. Use AI to spell-check your sermon, sure – but it would be something else entirely to let it compose and deliver a message to the congregation. One helpful analogy: just as downloading a sermon from the internet doesn't make one a preacher, having AI draft a prayer doesn't make it "lead worship." Authority in the church remains grounded in the community and its called leaders, aided by tools but not supplanted by them.

6. Limitations and Risks:

Finally, it's important to be literate about what AI *cannot* do and where it often fails:

- **Accuracy:** As mentioned, LLMs can produce false information. They might cite books that don't exist, conflate two biblical characters, or misremember doctrine. Everything output by an AI needs a fact check against trusted sources, especially in teaching.
- **Bias:** AI systems can reflect biases present in their training data. If most content about a topic online has a secular or liberal slant, the AI's response might lean that way by default. This is why some mainline Protestant statements stress the need to be alert to biases – for example, an AI might inadvertently encode racial or gender biases, which Christians committed to equality and justice must recognize and correct.
- **The "Idol of Efficiency":** AI's promise is to make tasks much faster. But faster isn't always better in spiritual matters. There's a risk of leaning on AI to save time and in doing so, shortcut the slow work of study, meditation, and personal care. A pastor could technically input some verses and get a sermon draft in seconds – but then misses the rich process of wrestling with the text in prayer. A youth leader could have an AI answer a teen's tough question about faith, but that teen might be looking for a personal connection more than a well-worded answer. In other words, if we're not careful, AI could tempt us to forsake the **incarnational** aspects of ministry (presence, empathy, wrestling with God in study) for the sake of convenience.
- **Privacy and Security:** AI tools often run on cloud servers. If we use them with sensitive church information (say, counseling conversations or member data), we must be cautious. There's a need to ensure we're not inadvertently sharing private information with a third-party AI service. Many denominational guidelines encourage churches to develop policies on what can or cannot be run through AI systems, to protect the privacy of congregants.
- **Unintended Consequences:** Technology has a way of surprising us. A well-intended use of AI might have side effects: automating certain tasks could subtly change the culture of a church staff, or relying on AI answers could diminish people's appetite to search the Scriptures themselves. Wise voices remind us that once a technology is introduced, it can be hard to reverse course – so we should think ahead about what habits and expectations we are setting by integrating AI into aspects of church life.

In summary, AI literacy for the church means understanding that these tools are powerful but fallible, useful but limited, and always subordinate to human and divine authority. With this foundational grasp, we can better appreciate how various Christian traditions are responding to the opportunities and challenges of AI.

III. Survey of Major Christian Traditions and Ecclesial Bodies

How have different Christian groups officially responded to AI so far? Below we summarize findings from a range of traditions, based on available statements as of early 2026. The focus is on formal or semi-formal outputs (e.g. denominational resolutions, committee reports, official publications, or leadership statements). We cover the Roman Catholic perspective, several categories of Protestant responses, and Anglican engagement. This is not exhaustive, but it captures major denominations and networks for which documentation exists.

One general observation: **most groups are applying existing theological frameworks to AI, rather than developing entirely new doctrines.** AI tends to be discussed in terms of established categories like anthropology (what it means to be human), ethics (loving neighbor, justice), ecclesiology (the nature of church leadership and sacraments), etc., as we will see. This means traditions often respond to AI in ways consistent with their broader theological emphases.

A. Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church has approached AI with considerable depth and a proactive spirit, leveraging its global teaching platforms to provide guidance. Catholics start from a rich intellectual tradition that readily engages with philosophy, ethics, and social issues, so it's not surprising that they have been at the forefront of formal theological reflection on AI.

- **Vatican Guidance Documents:** In January 2025, two Vatican departments (the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education) issued a landmark document titled *"Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence."* This text【1】 articulates principles for evaluating AI, grounded in Catholic doctrine. It emphasizes that human intelligence is a gift from God that must guide the "new" forms of AI (hence the title, meaning "Ancient and New"). Key points include an affirmation of human uniqueness (AI can assist reasoning but cannot replicate the human soul or creativity bestowed by God) and a call for AI development that respects human dignity and the common good. The document warns against "anthropomorphizing"

machines and stresses that any use of AI must serve human persons and never treat them as means to an end. In essence, *Antiqua et Nova* provides an ethical framework – the Church must ensure AI aligns with fundamental moral law and human flourishing. It's written in the dense, thoughtful style typical of magisterial documents, complete with references to Scripture and papal encyclicals.

- **The "Rome Call for AI Ethics":** Earlier, in February 2020, the Vatican's **Pontifical Academy for Life** spearheaded an initiative known as the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*【2】. This was a joint pledge co-signed by tech companies (like IBM and Microsoft) and religious representatives. While not a doctrinal statement per se, it's significant that the Catholic Church brokered this conversation. The Rome Call outlines six principles (Transparency, Inclusion, Responsibility, Impartiality, Reliability, Security/Privacy) to ensure AI is developed in an ethical manner. It's an example of the Church reaching into the public and technological sphere to infuse it with moral values. Pope Francis personally endorsed this effort, reinforcing themes of human-centric AI and urging global cooperation to prevent AI's misuse.
- **Papal Reflections:** Pope Francis has publicly commented on AI on multiple occasions. Notably, his **Message for the World Day of Peace 2024** was entitled *"Artificial Intelligence and Peace."* In that message【3】, the Pope raises both hopes and concerns about AI: he hopes AI advancements will benefit humanity, but he also voices concern that AI not widen inequalities or conflict. He calls for a shared global management of these technologies, anchored in the pursuit of peace and the dignity of every person. This adds a pastoral and prophetic voice at the highest level of the Church – signaling to Catholics worldwide that AI is an issue intertwined with Christian responsibility for peace and justice.
- **General Approach:** In summary, the Catholic response is characterized by a comprehensive ethical outlook grounded in doctrine. It strongly insists on **human oversight** (echoing the Church's longstanding teaching that technology must serve, not dominate, humanity) and calls for international solidarity in addressing AI's challenges. The Church uses its well-established concepts like the common good, subsidiarity, and natural law to argue for AI that enhances human life while avoiding scenarios that treat humans as data points or means to an end. Practically, Catholic institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.) are beginning to formulate their own guidelines in line with these Vatican directives. For instance, Catholic healthcare networks are looking at how AI can help in medicine without violating patient dignity or privacy. It's fair to say the Catholic Church sees itself as **both shepherd and participant**: guiding the moral conversation on AI for society at large, and also examining its own

ministries for how best to incorporate (or limit) AI use in harmony with Catholic teaching.

B. Mainline Protestant Traditions

"Mainline" Protestantism here refers to historic denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Episcopal Church, and others often associated with theologically moderate-to-progressive social stances. These traditions have engaged with AI through the lenses of **social ethics, institutional reflection, and ecumenical dialogue**. Their responses tend to highlight implications for social justice, inclusion, and the practical needs of church communities.

- **Ethical and Social Focus:** Mainline statements and discussions about AI frequently emphasize issues like **bias, fairness, and the impact on labor and society**. For example, a Presbyterian Church (USA) office has noted concerns that AI algorithms, if unchecked, could perpetuate racial or gender biases in areas like policing or hiring. Mainline churches often connect such concerns to their broader commitment to social justice. They ask: *Who might be hurt by AI? Who benefits? Does it protect the "least of these"?* These questions reflect liberationist and justice-oriented theological perspectives common in mainline circles. As such, you see advocacy for **transparency in AI decision-making** (so that the marginalized aren't unfairly targeted by "black box" systems) and for **government regulation** to prevent abusive surveillance or exploitation through AI. The mainline approach is often outward-facing: how can society manage AI ethically to protect human rights?
- **Institutional Projects and Summits:** Several mainline denominations have initiated task forces or collaborative projects to study AI. Notably, the **PC(USA) Office of Innovation** has a dedicated initiative called "AI and the Church"【4】. This initiative is bringing together a diverse group of theologians, tech experts, and church leaders (across Presbyterian and other traditions) to explore fundamental questions about AI over a multi-year period. The tone is one of exploration and equipping: producing resources, guides, and suggested readings for congregations. Similarly, in August 2024 an ecumenical event called the *"AI & the Church Summit"* was co-organized by mainline denominations【5】. Leaders from the Episcopal Church, PC(USA), and ELCA met together to begin an ongoing conversation about AI's role in church and society. This was a pioneering gathering, underlining mainline churches' willingness to collaborate and share learnings. They discussed everything from using AI in church administration to addressing ethical dilemmas it raises. Such events also show a relative **optimism** that if churches

band together, they can proactively shape how AI is adopted in ministry and mission, rather than reacting after the fact.

- **Pastoral and Educational Concerns:** Mainline denominations are also attentively considering how AI might reshape **day-to-day ministry and education**. For instance, some seminaries related to these churches have started offering workshops on AI for ministry. The United Methodist Church's Discipleship Ministries agency launched an "**AI for Ministry**" online resource hub in 2025【8】, providing tools and training for church leaders curious about integrating AI in preaching, teaching, and administration. The spirit is not to rush into tech for tech's sake, but to ensure clergy and laity are technologically literate. Mainline statements often caution against over-reliance on AI in roles like pastoral care or preaching — echoing their commitment to an **incarnational** ministry model (where relationship and presence are paramount). At the same time, they recognize practical benefits: a Lutheran synod report hypothetically noted that AI could help a small church produce a high-quality newsletter or assist a pastor in organizing her sermon research, which are good things if used wisely. The balance they strike is "useful tool, *yes* — human core of ministry, **absolutely yes**."
- **Theological Framing:** Theologically, mainline discussions may invoke themes like *imago Dei* (that all people reflect God's image, implying technology must honor that) and *neighbor-love* in the context of AI (asking how AI can serve our neighbor, not just profit or efficiency). They tend to use accessible moral language more than confessional specificity. While not as theologically dense as Catholic documents, some mainline reflections bring in biblical principles. For example, a United Church of Christ commentary on AI cited the Tower of Babel story as a cautionary tale of technological pride. A Methodist resolution might reference the Wesleyan concern for holiness in heart and life, questioning whether AI helps or hinders our pursuit of sanctification and justice. In general, mainline Protestant churches see AI's promise in enhancing communication and knowledge (things they can channel into mission and education), but they remain vigilant about its risks to equality, employment, and authentic community.
- **Varying Levels of Formality:** The range of response in the mainline world is broad. Some churches have official resolutions or detailed reports (for instance, the Episcopal task force described below in section E, or a paper by a Presbyterian seminary think-tank). Others are still in exploratory phases without issuing anything like a denominational stance. Many mainline efforts are happening at the agency or working-group level rather than at the level of binding assembly acts. So, a

Presbyterian might find guidance on a denominational website or in a seminary journal, even if the General Assembly hasn't legislated on it. This organic approach is consistent with how mainline churches often handle emerging issues—study it, discuss it in conferences, create resources for congregations, and only later consider formal resolutions if needed.

In summary, mainline Protestants approach AI with a combination of **ethical concern for society's vulnerable, practical interest in ministry innovation, and a collaborative spirit** that brings churches together to learn. They ask hard questions about power and equity, even as they cautiously experiment with using AI tools to support the church's work.

C. Evangelical and Baptist Traditions

Evangelical and Baptist responses, particularly those from more conservative evangelical bodies in the U.S., have been shaped by concerns for **doctrinal integrity, moral use of technology, and safeguarding the primacy of the Bible and the local church** in an age of AI. While evangelicals are not monolithic, a common thread is a desire to ensure AI does not compromise biblical truth or the authenticity of the Gospel message.

- **Southern Baptist Convention (SBC):** The SBC, the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., addressed AI in an official capacity by passing a **resolution "On Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies" in June 2023**【6】. This resolution provides a concise evangelical perspective on AI. It begins by affirming something fundamental: "All technology, including AI, is created by human beings with the gifts and abilities God has granted to us as the pinnacle of the created order (Genesis 1:26–28)…" – thus grounding technology in God's creation mandate. It goes on with a series of **"Whereas"** clauses acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges of AI. Importantly, the resolution states *unequivocally* that human beings are image-bearers of God and that our value is not based on our productivity, implicitly cautioning against any worldview that might treat people as cogs in a tech-driven machine. The **"Resolved"** clauses (the actionable statements of the resolution) express several commitments: a resolve to engage AI from a place of eschatological hope (not fear or uncritical embrace), a confession that **Scripture is sufficient** for guiding us through new challenges (a very evangelical commitment to the sufficiency of God's Word), and a call to uphold human dignity at the center of any AI ethics. The SBC also *encourages Christians to shape these technologies proactively* and calls on government and industry leaders to use AI in ways that respect the unique status of humans in creation. Finally, the resolution affirms that only God is the Creator and in control of history ("no innovation will usurp the sovereignty and power of God"). In effect, the SBC planted a flag: we will not fear AI,

but we will judge it by biblical truths. We won't let it replace human roles ordained by God, nor let it tempt us to devalue people. We will engage it, but on God's terms.

- **Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC):** The ERLC, which is the public policy arm of the SBC, followed up by producing a resource for churches titled **"The Work of Our Hands: Christian Ministry in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" (2025)** 【7】. This guide was designed to help pastors and ministry leaders think through practical scenarios involving AI from a Southern Baptist evangelical standpoint. It covers various aspects such as discipleship in a digital age, how AI might affect family life, and theological questions about what it means to be human. One notable feature of evangelical approaches like this is a commitment to **authorship and authenticity**. Evangelicals hold preaching and teaching in high regard; there's a sacred trust that the words delivered from the pulpit are the result of the Holy Spirit's work in a preacher's heart and diligent study. Thus, the ERLC guide (and articles by evangelical thought leaders) often counsel that pastors should not rely on AI to write sermons or prayers. It's not necessarily labeled a sin to use those tools, but it's seen as unwise and undermining the personal call of ministry. To give an anecdotal example: one well-known evangelical pastor quipped at a conference, "If I let AI write my sermon, who is pastoring whom? Am I shepherding the flock, or is Silicon Valley shepherding me?" That encapsulates a widespread sentiment – **integrity in pastoral authorship** is a concern. Using AI to assist with research is one thing, but delivering AI-composed spiritual content is viewed as inauthentic and potentially misleading.

- **Focus on Truth and Discernment:** In general, evangelical responses put heavy stress on **biblical discernment**. They worry about false teachings or misinformation that AI might spread. For instance, an AI might produce a very convincing paragraph that sounds biblical but is subtly heretical. Evangelicals, with their emphasis on sound doctrine, caution believers not to take AI outputs at face value on spiritual matters. Some have suggested that AI could become a tool for spreading deceptions if not carefully evaluated. Therefore, the advice is often: *"Test everything; hold fast what is good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21) – apply that to AI content. There's also an apologetics dimension: evangelical writers ask how AI might challenge evangelism or worldviews. Could AI lead people toward a more materialistic view of humanity (seeing the brain as just a machine)? How do we respond with the biblical teaching that humans are body and soul, more than algorithms? Evangelical apologists are actively engaging those questions.

- **Moral Usage:** On the ethical front, beyond the doctrinal and church-centered issues, evangelicals echo many of the same concerns as others about using AI morally. For example, there is strong condemnation of using AI for deceptive purposes (like creating fake videos – deepfakes – to harm someone's reputation, which falls under bearing false witness). They emphasize honesty and transparency, urging Christians in any field to **never use AI in ways that mislead**. If a church uses AI (say, a chatbot for a Q&A on their website), integrity requires that they disclose it's an AI and ensure it's monitored for truthfulness. These points align with broader Christian ethics but are often stated with a particular fervor in evangelical writing, given the priority of personal integrity and witness.
- **Examples of Evangelical Engagement:** Outside the SBC, various evangelical organizations and writers are producing content on AI. The Lausanne Movement's **Global Analysis**, for example, published an article "AI Through the Lens: Evaluating AI design and use in alignment with biblical ethics" (Oct 2025)【9】, highlighting how evangelical communities globally are wrestling with the balance between resisting harmful uses of AI and enthusiastically adopting beneficial ones. (The Lausanne piece notes that some evangelicals see AI as a tool for advancing the Gospel—like Bible translation or digital evangelism—while others are more wary of its dangers. It calls for a biblical ethical framework to navigate these differences.) Evangelical colleges and seminaries have hosted forums – one could think of Wheaton College's panel on "AI and the Image of God" or seminary courses beginning to include discussions about AI's implications for theology and ministry.

In summary, evangelical and Baptist responses are characterized by a **protective stance toward the core of the faith and the integrity of ministry**, combined with a willingness to use AI tools in subordinate ways. They are often among the first to say, "Let's make sure this technology bows to the authority of Scripture and serves the church, not the other way around." While embracing innovative means to spread the Gospel has historically been an evangelical strength (from radio ministry to internet evangelism), they are self-aware that *how* we use a tool can either honor or dishonor God. Thus, their contributions to the AI conversation include robust reminders of theological non-negotiables (God's sovereignty, the image of God in man, the centrality of the Word) and moral guardrails for any Christian engaging with AI.

D. Reformed and Confessional Traditions

By "Reformed and confessional," we refer to churches that hold explicitly to Reformation-era confessions and catechisms (such as the Westminster Standards, the Three Forms of

Unity, etc.), which include many Presbyterian denominations (like the PCA, OPC), Reformed churches (CRCNA, URCNA, etc.), and others. These bodies have generally been **slower and more limited in issuing formal statements on AI** up to now, compared to some of the groups above. That said, there is active *discussion* happening among Reformed theologians and pastors, often drawing on deep doctrinal wells to analyze AI. The lack of official statements might simply reflect limited bandwidth or the newness of the topic, rather than lack of interest or concern.

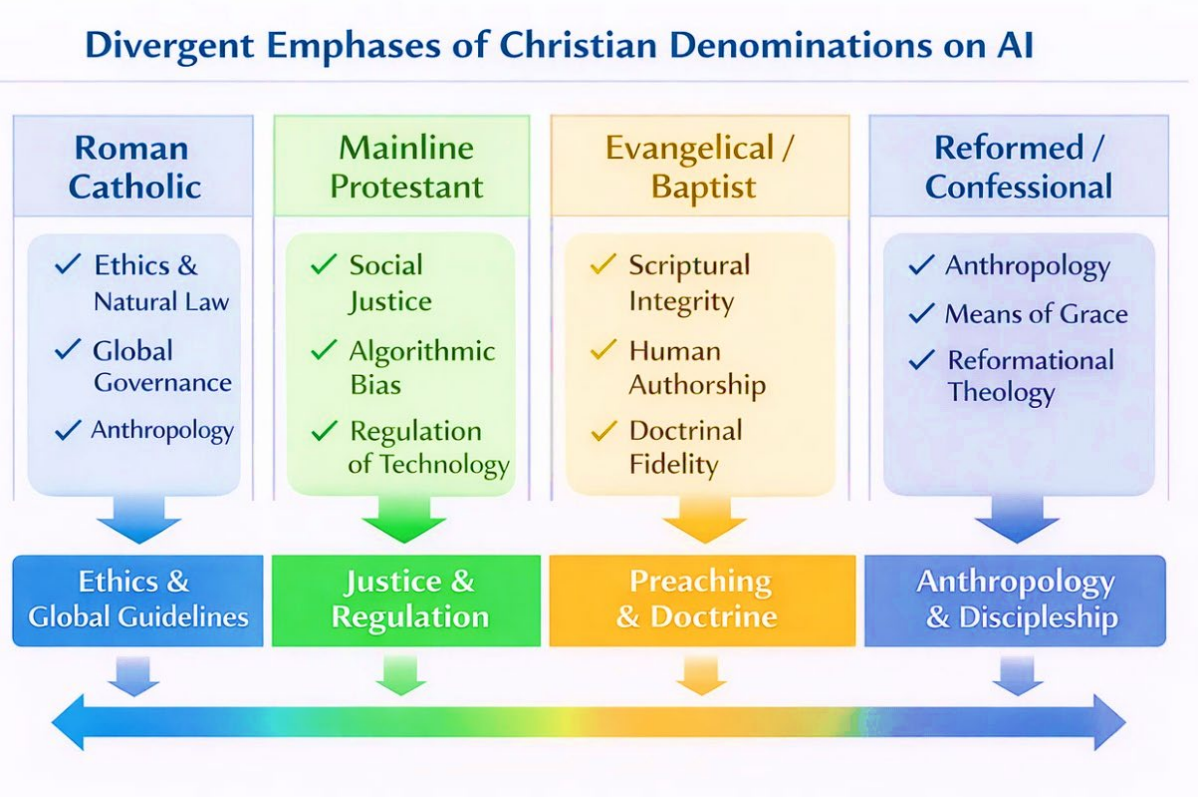
- **Current Status:** As of this review, no major confessional Reformed denomination has released an official denominational position or study report on AI. For instance, the PCA has not yet commissioned a study committee or overture on AI; the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and others similarly have not published something under official imprimatur. The **Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA)** did post a brief article in one of its publications raising questions about AI and justice, but not a formal synodical action. In Europe, some Reformed state churches have touched on technology in broader ethical proclamations, but nothing focusing narrowly on AI. This relative quietness might be because these churches are still in the "learning and observing" phase, or because other pressing issues have dominated their agendas.
- **Themes in Reformed Discussion:** Within Reformed circles, when theologians or pastors talk about AI, they often frame it in light of **Reformed doctrines and principles**. Key themes include:
    - **The Sovereignty of God:** Reformed thinkers emphasize that AI, like everything else, falls under God's sovereignty and providence. There is comfort and confidence that no technological development can ever thwart God's plan or catch Him off guard. This echoes the sentiment of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 27, that providence means all things (indeed, "all creatures") come to us not by chance but from God's fatherly hand. Thus, while serious about engaging AI wisely, Reformed Christians approach it without panic, trusting that Christ is King over even our algorithms.
    - **Imago Dei and Human Vocation:** There is a strong stress on **anthropology** – what it means to be human in relation to machines. Drawing on the doctrine of the image of God, Reformed writers assert the uniqueness of human rationality, creativity, morality, and relational capacity. For example, a Reformed author might argue that AI, no matter how advanced, can never pray, never experience fellowship with God, and never exercise moral judgment; those remain distinctly human prerogatives. This underscores why

certain tasks (like preaching the Word or shepherding souls) cannot be handed to AI. Additionally, the Reformed concept of the **cultural mandate** (Genesis 1:28) comes into play: humans are called to develop creation responsibly. Some see AI as an extension of that mandate – a fruit of human creativity that can be used to God's glory if rightly managed. But with human vocation comes the duty to restrain and guide our creations toward the good, echoing the idea of being stewards who must one day give account.

- **Sanctification and Wisdom:** Reformed pastors note that technology should not short-circuit the process of spiritual growth. There's a value in the *struggle* – whether it's grappling with a biblical text or laboring in prayer. If a seminary student uses AI to do all his exegesis, he might get a passable sermon, but he hasn't grown in understanding or dependence on the Spirit. This resonates with the Puritan work ethic and the idea that holiness often requires discipline and even hardship. So the concern is: will AI make us theologically lazy or spiritually impatient? Reformed teaching on sanctification as a gradual, means-of-grace-driven process implies skepticism toward any "quick fix" or overly automated spirituality.
- **Preaching and the Means of Grace:** Perhaps the most frequently discussed practical angle is **preaching.** In confessional Reformed churches, preaching is central – it's viewed as a means of grace, an act in which Christ himself speaks by His Word and Spirit through a human preacher. The thought of an AI "preaching" is inadmissible. Not that anyone is proposing a robot in the pulpit, but even the idea of relying heavily on AI for sermon content raises red flags. Reformed ministers have warned that preaching derived from an AI undermines the authenticity of pastoral ministry and ignores how the Spirit works through the prayerful preparation of a *particular* messenger for a *particular* congregation. There's also a covenantal aspect: the flock is in a covenant relationship with their shepherd who knows them and labors among them – an AI does not have that bond. So, Reformed discussions often circle back to, "Whatever we do with AI, it must not disrupt or imitate the divinely ordained means of grace (preaching, sacraments, prayer) which require human agency as appointed by God." In practice, this means a Reformed church might say: using AI to typeset the bulletin or pick royalty-free hymn tunes is fine; using it to generate sermon outlines or theological advice in lieu of your pastor is not fine.

- **Publications and Resources:** While no official statements exist, Reformed individuals have contributed to the conversation through blogs, journals, and conferences. For example, *The Gospel Coalition* (a network with heavy Reformed Baptist and PCA participation) has run articles on AI – often cautionary but also acknowledging opportunities for evangelism via technology. At the 2023 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, a number of Reformed scholars presented papers on AI in light of Christian doctrine (e.g., one paper explored Jonathan Edwards' view of creativity in contrast to AI "creativity"). Westminster Theological Seminary's journal carried a piece reflecting on AI and the Tower of Babel. These are not widely circulated to congregations, but they indicate that Reformed thought leaders are indeed wrestling with AI behind the scenes, aiming to bring solid theological insight to bear.
- **Tone:** The tone in Reformed contexts is often one of **intellectual carefulness combined with pastoral concern**. There's a desire to be very theologically precise (e.g., ensuring we don't inadvertently endorse a materialist view of the mind by how we speak of AI "thinking"). There's also a pastoral heart – a worry for how AI might affect the church's spiritual health. One PCA pastor wrote an op-ed saying, "We must not let our churches become laboratories for the latest gadget; they must remain greenhouses for souls." This captures a protective instinct to guard the flock from potential spiritual ill effects of over-technologization, while still acknowledging that tech can serve the church in subordinate ways (like amplification served Whitefield's preaching in the open air – a neutral tool amplifying the word).

In summary, the Reformed and confessional world is engaging AI thoughtfully but mostly informally as of now. They are leaning on their robust theological convictions to navigate the issue: God's sovereignty gives peace, Scripture provides principles, the nature of the church provides boundaries, and our doctrines of man and sin inject realism about what AI is and isn't. We can expect that as AI continues to evolve, Reformed denominations will eventually produce more formal reports or pastor guidelines, and when they do, these documents will likely echo the themes above – ensuring that whatever stance is taken, it honors the confessions and the centrality of Word and Sacrament ministry.



E. Anglican / Episcopal Engagement

The Anglican Communion, and specifically the Episcopal Church in the USA (which is part of that communion), has also begun to address AI, although like the Reformed world, it is early in the process. Anglican approaches often blend a concern for ethics and pastoral practice (similar to mainline Protestants) with a certain procedural ethos – i.e., doing things "decently and in order" via commissions and study groups reflecting the church's synodal style of governance.

- **Episcopal Church Task Force (TEC):** The most noteworthy development is that the Episcopal Church's General Convention (their highest decision-making body) passed a resolution in 2024 calling for the creation of a **Task Force on Artificial Intelligence in the Episcopal Church**【8】. This task force, comprising clergy, lay experts, theologians, and even tech specialists, has been tasked with studying AI's implications for the church's life over the next few years. According to the resolution (2024-D020), the mandate includes examining how AI might affect **church teachings, liturgy, and ethics**; developing **guidelines** for the church's use of generative AI (identifying what uses might be beneficial and which detrimental); and reporting back with recommendations. The inclusion of "liturgy" in that mandate is intriguing – it suggests they're even considering questions like: Could AI help write liturgical material? Should it? What about AI-composed sacred music? Or pastoral

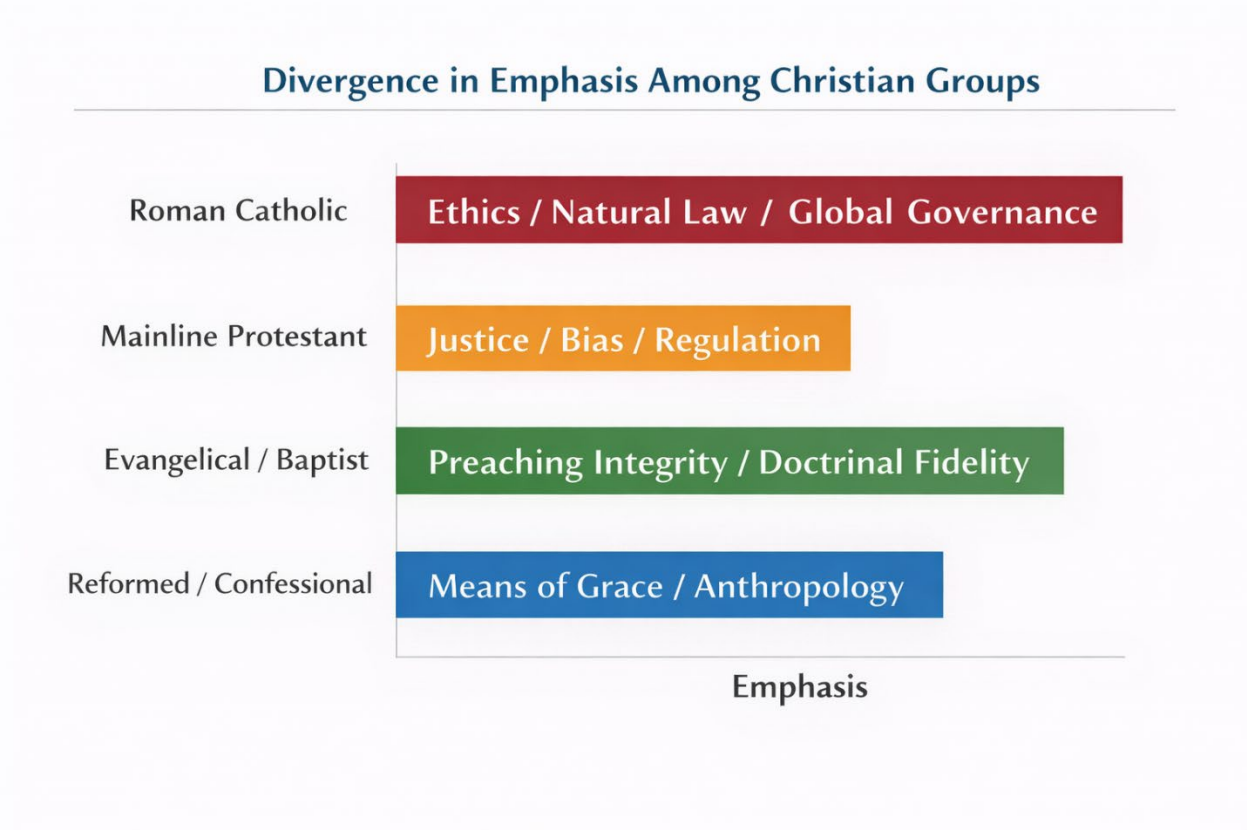
prayers drafted by AI? By explicitly naming those, they show awareness that even worship practices could be touched by this tech, and they want a theological say on it. The final text of the resolution stresses ensuring the task force's work reflects **the values and teachings of the Church**, and notably, it calls for a diverse membership (including educators and people from Episcopal schools). This indicates a desire for a well-rounded perspective: not just tech enthusiasts, but also those who understand formation and doctrine.

- **Anglican Ethos in Approach:** Anglicans often have a balance of Word, Tradition, and Reason in how they approach new issues. In discussions around AI, Anglican writers or bishops might start with broad theological principles (like God's creation and human co-creativity), bring in insights from church tradition (maybe references to how earlier eras handled new philosophies or sciences), and then reason through current evidence about AI. For example, an Anglican ethicist may reference how the church navigated the rise of modern medicine or the industrial revolution as precedents for how we might navigate AI – drawing lessons about maintaining human dignity and sabbath rest amidst technology. There is also a sacramental perspective: could AI ever mediate grace? (The knee-jerk answer is no – only Christ through ordained sacraments does that – but it's the kind of question an Anglican might articulately explore to clarify *why* not, thus teaching about sacramental theology in the process). Already, individual Anglican voices have contributed to ecumenical statements like the "Rome Call" (an Anglican representative signed it alongside the Catholic and tech leaders). The Archbishop of Canterbury's office has put out a brief statement urging that AI development be approached with "a strong ethical compass and concern for the God-given dignity of persons."

- **Global Anglican Perspectives:** It's worth noting that the Anglican Communion is worldwide and diverse. The Episcopal Church (TEC) is one province; others include the Church of England, the Anglican Church of Canada, churches in Africa, Asia, etc. As of now, much of the official reflection has happened in Western provinces. The Church of England has had informal discussions (e.g., the Bishop of Oxford delivered a speech in the House of Lords on AI ethics, drawing on Christian principles). In the Global South, there's less published on AI specifically, but their concern might align with socio-economic justice (for instance, African Anglican leaders could be concerned about how AI affects employment or spreads misinformation across their contexts). As the task force from TEC produces its work, it may be shared and reviewed communion-wide.

- **Integration with Existing Ministries:** Anglicans, especially in parish contexts, are looking at practical uses too. Some Episcopal churches are leveraging AI in small ways – say, using AI-driven grammar tools to draft newsletters or employing a chatbot on a diocesan website to help people find churches or ministries. Because Anglican parishes value liturgy and tradition, they're less likely to make radical changes (you won't find an AI leading Morning Prayer in place of a priest, thankfully!). But they might use behind-the-scenes tools for efficiency. The caution always would be: does this technology serve our worship and mission, or is it altering its character? Knowing Anglicans, any suggested change that even smells like it affects liturgical or theological integrity will undergo much dialogue and perhaps be tabled until more consensus.
- **Education and Formation:** Episcopal seminaries and training institutions are taking note as well. We see emerging efforts to include tech ethics in seminary curricula. For example, Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP) hosted a webinar on "Pastoral Ministry in the Digital Age" that included segments on AI for pastoral care and the moral questions it raises. These efforts show an understanding that **future clergy need to be prepared**. It's quite Anglican to educate first, form committees second, and produce a report third, before making any canons or rules down the line.

In summary, the Anglican/Episcopal engagement with AI so far mirrors their broader approach to change: measured, committee-driven, theologically reflective, and concerned with maintaining the **unity and worship life of the church**. They likely will produce a thoughtful report via the task force, offering guidance that other denominations (including the PCA) might find useful. It wouldn't be surprising if the final Anglican report has recommendations such as: ensure human clergy oversee any AI use in worship contexts, consider pastoral ethics of using AI in counseling, embrace beneficial tools that help administration or education, etc., all couched in language connecting to Anglican tradition and theology.



IV. Areas of Broad Convergence

Despite the diversity of traditions surveyed, there is a noteworthy **common ground** in how Christians are thinking about AI. It seems the Holy Spirit has led the broader church toward several shared convictions, even without a central coordinating effort. Here are the major points of convergence:

- **"AI is a Tool, Not a Soul":** Across Catholic, Orthodox (not detailed above, though they share similar views), Protestant, and evangelical lines, there's firm agreement that artificial intelligence, no matter how sophisticated, **does not possess a soul or moral agency**. In theological terms, it is part of creation, not on par with human image-bearers. Therefore, any tendencies in popular culture to treat AI like a person (e.g. attributing intentions or rights to it) are resisted. Documents repeatedly emphasize human **responsibility**: an AI can't sin or exercise virtue, but the people who program or use it can. The Vatican put it succinctly – terms like "learning" or "decision" when applied to AI are analogical; we must not confuse machine outputs with the depth of human reason and conscience【1】. Evangelicals have echoed this by saying we should avoid *"technological animism"* – subtly idolizing or fearing

AI as if it had a will of its own. This convergence reinforces that Christian ethics around AI will hold *people* accountable for AI's effects. We can't say "the computer made me do it" any more than Adam could say "the woman made me do it" without avoiding personal responsibility.

- **Human Dignity and the Imago Dei:** Every tradition surveyed roots its ethical perspective in a strong affirmation of human dignity. Whether it's Catholic social teaching, Reformed doctrine, or Baptist resolutions, there is reference to humans being made in God's image and thus uniquely precious. This undergirds concerns like: AI must not be used to exploit workers, or to profile and oppress minority groups, or to replace genuine human contact for those who need care. The **imago Dei** is a unifying doctrine here. For example, the Southern Baptist resolution explicitly says our value is not in what we produce — a very image-of-God argument 【6】. The Rome Call speaks of an "algor-ethics" that ensures respect for human rights and dignity【2】. Mainline statements talk about dehumanization as a sin to resist. In practice, this means Christians broadly agree on things like: killing robots (autonomous weapons) would be morally problematic, or AI systems should include safeguards for privacy and consent out of respect for personhood. There's also a positive side: because humans are in God's image, we have creative gifts – so developing AI can be seen as an exercise of those gifts, as long as it honors the Creator and the highest creation (humankind). Thus dignity is both the reason to be cautious and the reason we can, within bounds, proceed to innovate.

- **Ethical Use and Transparency:** Virtually every Christian reflection calls for **ethical guidelines and transparency** in AI usage. This includes within the church (e.g. if a pastor uses AI in sermon prep, some argue he should disclose that to maintain trust) and in society (e.g. a bank using AI for loan decisions should be transparent about criteria to avoid unjust discrimination). There's a shared concern about secrecy and manipulation. For instance, deepfakes or AI-generated misinformation are seen as bearing false witness, and Christians agree such misuse must be opposed. Many denominations encourage creating oversight bodies or ethical review committees for AI deployments (the idea being that just as a church might have an ethics committee for investments, maybe one day for its AI tools). **Accountability** is a buzzword all find important: AI developers and users should be accountable to moral standards. So when an AI injures or defrauds someone, humans in charge should be answerable. The common call is *proactive governance* – don't wait for something to go wrong; put guardrails in place now. In the church context, this might mean a seminary or denomination drafting recommended practices (e.g., "Do not counsel solely by chatbot; ensure human

pastoral follow-up," or "Do not plagiarize content from AI without verification"). The fact that Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangelicals are all urging caution and structured thinking is a strong convergence.

- **Priority of Pastoral/Relational Ministry:** Another convergence is the insistence that **AI should not displace the personal, relational core of Christian ministry.** All traditions, in their own diction, say something to this effect. The Catholic *Antiqua et Nova* warns against delegating spiritual accompaniment to machines【1】. Evangelicals talk about maintaining authentic fellowship and not forsaking assembling together for virtual alternatives. Mainline churches underscore that an AI can't administer sacraments or truly empathize with a person's sorrow. There's a beautiful unity here in recognizing the **incarnational** nature of Christianity – God became flesh and engages us personally, and he calls us to be present to one another. So while AI might help schedule a visit, it will never be the same as making that visit. A robot "priest" is universally rejected as a concept (some experiments in Japan notwithstanding) because it lacks the human soul and ordination. The means of grace – whether broadly or narrowly understood – require human participation. So, whether it's a Catholic saying the Eucharist cannot be consecrated by a machine, or a Reformed pastor saying the preaching cannot be outsourced, the underlying agreement is that **embodied ministry is irreplaceable**. In tandem, Christian leaders converge on encouraging the **use of AI for secondary tasks** to free up more time for those primary, face-to-face ministries. If AI can handle some paperwork or provide research quickly, that's great if it allows the pastor more time to pray with someone or play with the youth group kids on a retreat. Technology serves love; it mustn't replace it.

- **Cautious Optimism:** A final area of broad agreement is a kind of tempered or **cautious optimism**. Few if any Christian leaders are saying "AI is an unmitigated evil we must banish." On the contrary, most acknowledge real benefits: better medical diagnoses, tools for education, efficiency in work that can alleviate poverty, etc., can all be possible through AI. And many point out ways the church could use AI positively (some we've mentioned: translations, reaching into digital spaces with the Gospel, analyzing patterns to improve stewardship, etc.). This optimism is tempered by the doctrine of **human sinfulness** – everyone recognizes that because people are fallen, any technology we create will have mixed results. We might intend AI for good, but it can be twisted (just as nuclear technology powers cities or destroys them). So the tone is hopeful but realistic. Almost all statements have both "thank God for human creativity" and "let's beware human depravity" in their rationale. This middle path sets Christians apart from the extreme tech-utopian

voices as well as the doomsayers. It aligns with a theology of **creation-fall-redemption**: AI is part of creation (good in principle), affected by the fall (must be restrained and redeemed), and can be part of God's redemptive purposes if used rightly (e.g., aiding in Bible distribution or caring for the sick). Different denominations may stress one aspect more (Catholics might stress creation's goodness and ethical use, evangelicals might stress the fall and need for discernment), but overall they cover the spectrum.

In sum, the core consensus is that *people matter more than technology*. AI must remain a servant, used with wisdom and love. The broad Christian voice to the world on this is remarkably unified: we will neither uncritically embrace AI as savior nor fearfully demonize it as some uncontrollable monster. We will approach it as God's stewards, together seeking to **"do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God"** (Micah 6:8) in the age of AI.

V. Areas of Divergence

While the convergence is significant, it is equally important to note where Christian traditions diverge in their approach to AI. These differences do not necessarily imply direct contradictions, but rather variations in *emphasis*, *tone*, and *priorities* shaped by each tradition's theological heritage and context. Recognizing these divergences can help us understand the **unique contribution of each tradition** and also any potential blind spots. Some key areas of divergence include:

- **Optimism vs. Caution:** Different groups lean more optimistic or more cautious about AI's potential. For example, some **mainline Protestant** and Catholic leaders speak positively about embracing technological innovation for the common good – their statements carry an undercurrent of "we can guide AI to help solve human problems if we infuse it with our values." On the other hand, some **evangelical** and **Reformed** voices sound more wary, emphasizing the dangers and urging a slow, critical adoption. This is partly temperament (progressive circles often see an opportunity for human progress; conservative circles often first see what could go wrong) and partly theology (a higher view of human perfectibility vs. a heavier stress on human depravity). As a result, a mainline church agency might launch an AI experiment as a pilot program, whereas a conservative church might wait and see how that goes before trying anything similar. **Lausanne Movement** observers noted this range, saying evangelicals globally range from "outright resistance to enthusiastic adoption" of AI【9】. It appears the difference

isn't about fundamental doctrine but about trust in human structures to manage change.

- **External Policy Advocacy vs. Internal Church Focus:** Catholic and many mainline statements put significant energy into **advocating in the public square** for ethical AI – they call on governments, the UN, tech companies to ensure AI is just and fair. For instance, the Vatican and the World Council of Churches have spoken at the UN about AI ethics, and some mainline churches lobby for regulations on data privacy or facial recognition. By contrast, **evangelical** and **Baptist** statements focus more on how **the church itself** should handle AI (guarding preaching, internal use, etc.) and less on pressing government for specific policies. The SBC resolution does call on leaders broadly to use technology ethically, but the tone is more exhortation than lobbying. This divergence stems from how the traditions view engagement with societal structures: mainline and Catholic traditions, with their history of social teaching, readily enter policy debates; evangelical traditions, with a stronger separation of church and state ethos, concentrate on shaping individual and church behavior according to biblical principles and let the cultural influence flow from that. So in practical terms, a Presbyterian Church (USA) might issue a statement to Congress about AI oversight, whereas a PCA (Reformed) or SBC church is more likely to issue guidance to its pastors and members and be relatively quiet in the legislative arena.

- **Emphasis on Preaching/Teaching Authenticity: Evangelicals and Reformed** churches have been especially vocal about issues of **authorship, plagiarism, and the sanctity of preaching**. They worry about pastors using AI to generate sermons, students using AI to write papers dishonestly, etc. This hasn't been as front-and-center in Catholic or mainline documents. It's not that Catholics or mainliners are okay with plagiarism (they're not!), but their documents haven't zoomed in on that scenario as much. For example, the SBC resolution indirectly alludes to preaching by talking about God's Word and human messengers【6】, and evangelical blogs have outright titles like "Pastors, Don't Let AI Steal Your Pulpit." Meanwhile, a Catholic document focuses more on big-picture ethics than on whether a priest might use AI for a homily. This divergence reflects community concerns: evangelicals have a highly sermon-centric worship, so the thought of AI meddling there triggers alarms. Mainline churches also value preaching but might not see the average pastor rushing to AI for a sermon as a pressing issue (perhaps assuming their clergy wouldn't do that, or that if they did it's just another commentary aid). Thus, the degree of guidance on "don't use AI to cheat or shortcut spiritual duties" is much more explicit in evangelical discourse.

- **Approach to Counseling and Spiritual Direction:** There is some variation in how traditions view the role of AI in personal counseling or spiritual advice. An interesting example: a UK-based experiment put a "sermon-writing AI" and an "AI spiritual advisor" to test in some liberal Anglican parishes, just to provoke discussion. Mainline folks have entertained the question, "Could an AI give decent pastoral advice if trained on the Bible and psychology?" Most answer that it's inferior to real pastors, but they explore it academically. **Evangelicals and Catholics**, however, seem to shut that door more firmly from the outset. The Catholic confessional system and evangelical emphasis on shepherding both imply that *an algorithm can't have cura animarum* (care of souls). So the **boundaries** set around counseling differ: Evangelicals might outright ban any use of AI in one-on-one ministry contexts beyond maybe scheduling appointments; a mainline church might say, "We have to be careful, but perhaps a chatbot could offer initial spiritual support to seekers on our church website who are too shy to talk to a person, as long as a real minister follows up." Again, this isn't a core doctrinal fight, but a difference in comfort levels and ecclesiology. (Mainline traditions sometimes experiment more with new forms of ministry, whereas confessional traditions guard traditional pastoral roles more tightly.) It will be telling to see how each handles scenarios like AI-driven Bible study apps or "virtual chaplains." Likely divergence will persist there.
- **Theological Vocabulary and Depth:** The various statements differ in how explicitly theological or detailed they are. For instance, the **Catholic** documents integrate Thomistic philosophy and magisterial references, using precise terminology about human nature, whereas a **Methodist** agency article might speak more generally about "loving our neighbor in a digital age" with lay language. **Reformed** thinkers might bring in covenant theology or specific doctrinal points (like distinguishing God's creative power from human making). This doesn't mean actual disagreement, but the **register** is different. A lay Catholic might find their Church's note on AI a bit dense, whereas a United Methodist commentary might be very accessible and story-driven. This diversity can actually be complementary: the Catholic might provide the scholarly underpinnings; the Methodist might translate similar concerns to the parish level. However, the divergence in expression sometimes leads to misperception — an evangelical reader might think a mainline statement is too lax because it doesn't thunder with Bible verses, whereas a mainline reader might think an evangelical statement is too narrow or negative because it's bluntly worded. These are style differences more than substance.
- **Institutional Formality:** Finally, as noted earlier, there's divergence in how **formal** or binding the responses are. The **Roman Catholic** perspective comes

with a certain authority (e.g., *Antiqua et Nova* is a teaching note that will likely influence Catholic institutions globally). **Mainline denominations** may issue guidelines or resolutions, but often they serve as counsel rather than strict law, given the looser governance (for instance, a Presbyterian Church (USA) resolution doesn't carry the same enforceability as a Vatican directive for a Catholic university). **Evangelical denominations** like the SBC pass resolutions which are non-binding but instructive for their members' thinking. And in Reformed denominations like the PCA, unless a study paper is adopted, there may be nothing official at all — leaving a vacuum often filled by independent voices. So, there's a divergence in whether the results are **constitutionally significant or advisory**. This means that how seriously or uniformly each tradition implements their insights can vary. A Catholic diocese might develop a whole set of policies because the Vatican said X, Y, Z about AI; whereas in a congregational evangelical setting, one church might follow the denomination's suggestion closely, another might barely be aware of it. Over time, those differences could yield varying cultures of tech engagement across these faith communities.

Understanding these divergences helps avoid a one-size-fits-all expectation. Each part of the Body of Christ is addressing AI in a way consistent with its character: some more hands-on in society, some more inwardly focused; some more intellectual, some more pragmatic; some quick to write prayers about new tech, others quick to write policies. In God's providence, these differences might be a strength – we can learn from each other. For instance, a Reformed church might benefit from the Catholic detailed ethical analysis, and a Catholic might learn from the evangelical resolve to keep preaching pure. The hope would be that through respectful dialogue, the churches can present a unified witness that also leverages each tradition's gifts.

VI. Observations from the Comparative Landscape

Having surveyed the landscape, we can draw a few **big-picture observations** about how the Christian church at large is handling the AI revolution. These observations synthesize the patterns noted above and may be instructive for any denomination (like the PCA) assessing its own next steps.

1. The church often lags practice: In many cases, **adoption of AI tools in ministry is happening *before* formal theological reflection catches up**. For example, individual pastors, teachers, and church tech teams have started using AI in small ways (from automating email responses to experimenting with chatbots for Q&A on church websites)

even if their denomination hasn't issued any guidance or statement yet. This is reminiscent of earlier technologies – by the time the church issued internet guidelines, people were already emailing prayer requests for years. While it's not ideal, it's reality: ministry is pragmatic and will try new tools, while official bodies move deliberately. One implication is that we may find "facts on the ground" in our churches (like a youth leader who's been using ChatGPT to get ideas) that should be acknowledged and lovingly examined rather than ignored. This also suggests that official statements, when they do come, might need to address existing uses and provide course-correction if necessary, rather than speaking into a vacuum. A positive outcome of this lag is that the church can learn from early adopters and avoid their mistakes when formulating broader policies.

2. Existing theology is proving sufficient (so far): A noteworthy observation is that **none of the major Christian bodies have found it necessary to invent new doctrinal categories for AI**. Instead, they are applying time-tested theological and ethical principles to these novel questions. For instance, the question "Can a machine be morally responsible?" is answered with classical theological anthropology (only ensouled beings with free will can be moral agents). Questions about controlling AI evoke doctrines of sin and prudence. Even eschatological hopes or fears around AI are tempered by referencing Scripture's promises and warnings (we don't expect a technological utopia because we await Christ's kingdom; we also don't fear an AI apocalypse because we trust God's providence over history). In other words, our **theological toolkit has proven robust** when brought to bear on AI. This affirms the wisdom of our traditions – the Lord has given His church enduring truths that can shine light on brand-new issues. Some observers have pointed out that engaging AI is actually driving Christians to rediscover and articulate doctrines like the imago Dei or providence with fresh clarity. For those worried that AI is outside the church's expertise, it's encouraging to see that our Scriptures and confessions are absolutely relevant and helpful in this sphere.

3. Governance structures influence responsiveness: How a denomination is structured affects how it deals with AI. **Centralized churches** (like the Catholic Church or a connectional church with strong central leadership) have been able to issue thorough statements relatively quickly. **Decentralized churches** or ones with congregational polity might not have any official stance yet because nothing compels them to act until a grassroots concern rises. This isn't to say one is better – each has pros and cons. The Catholic Church's prompt guidance provides clarity but may not trickle down uniformly; a congregational setting's flexibility allows local innovation but maybe at risk of inconsistency or lack of theological depth. Ecumenical efforts (like the AI & Faith summit) have tried to bridge gaps by sharing insights across structures. An observation here for something like the PCA: with a connectional but committee-driven model, if we want to

address AI, we likely need to intentionally set that in motion (perhaps via a study committee or overture), otherwise it may be a long time before anything official emerges because it competes with other priorities. Meanwhile, our members might look to parachurch voices (like TGC or Lausanne or seminary professors) for guidance in the absence of denominational statements. This interplay suggests that a wise path is to **integrate informal and formal**: encourage thought leaders in our circles to publish and teach on AI (informal guidance), and in due time formalize those insights through our governance processes so that they carry weight and unity.

4. Ministry questions are bubbling up from below: Many of the specific issues being talked about (e.g., "Is it OK to use AI to write a prayer of confession for Sunday?" or "How do we counsel a youth who says they have an AI 'friend' that talks to them?") are coming from actual ministry contexts. **Practical questions are arising at the ground level** often before theologians have fully systematized them. It's akin to the early church facing Gentile converts and working out theology of circumcision on the fly. For instance, a seminary student recently asked on Twitter if using AI to parse Greek verbs for his homework was cheating or just like using Bible software. That question hadn't been explicitly addressed by any policy, but it resonates with old questions of academic integrity – just new form. This tells us that any ecclesial guidance will need to be **pastorally aware and case-driven**, not just abstract. It might be wise to gather those questions (maybe our denomination could survey pastors or seminary faculty on what AI-related issues they're encountering). The comparative review shows some denominations (especially mainline) already compiling case studies and suggested practices. We can learn from those. For example, the Methodist "AI for Ministry" resources include case studies on using AI in a church's finance committee, or how a campus minister might respond if students bring an AI into Bible study discussion. These concrete scenarios make the discussion tangible. As a church known for solid doctrine, the Reformed tradition can contribute by marrying that doctrinal clarity with practical wisdom in addressing these scenarios.

5. The prevailing posture: cautious engagement (not panic or passivity): Zooming out, one sees that the overall **Christian posture is neither technophobic nor technophilic**. Instead, it is a discerning engagement. This is actually a healthy middle ground that contrasts with some voices in secular society. There are tech enthusiasts who think AI will solve everything and tech alarmists who think it will destroy humanity imminently. The church, informed by scripture, is saying: "We will neither bow to this nor run from it. We will test it, use what is good, reject what is evil." This measured approach is a testimony in itself. It's reminiscent of Paul in Athens – he didn't smash their altar to the unknown god; he repurposed it to talk about Christ, *but* he also called out their idolatry. The church is doing similar with AI: finding ways to use it for good (translation, admin, creativity) while naming

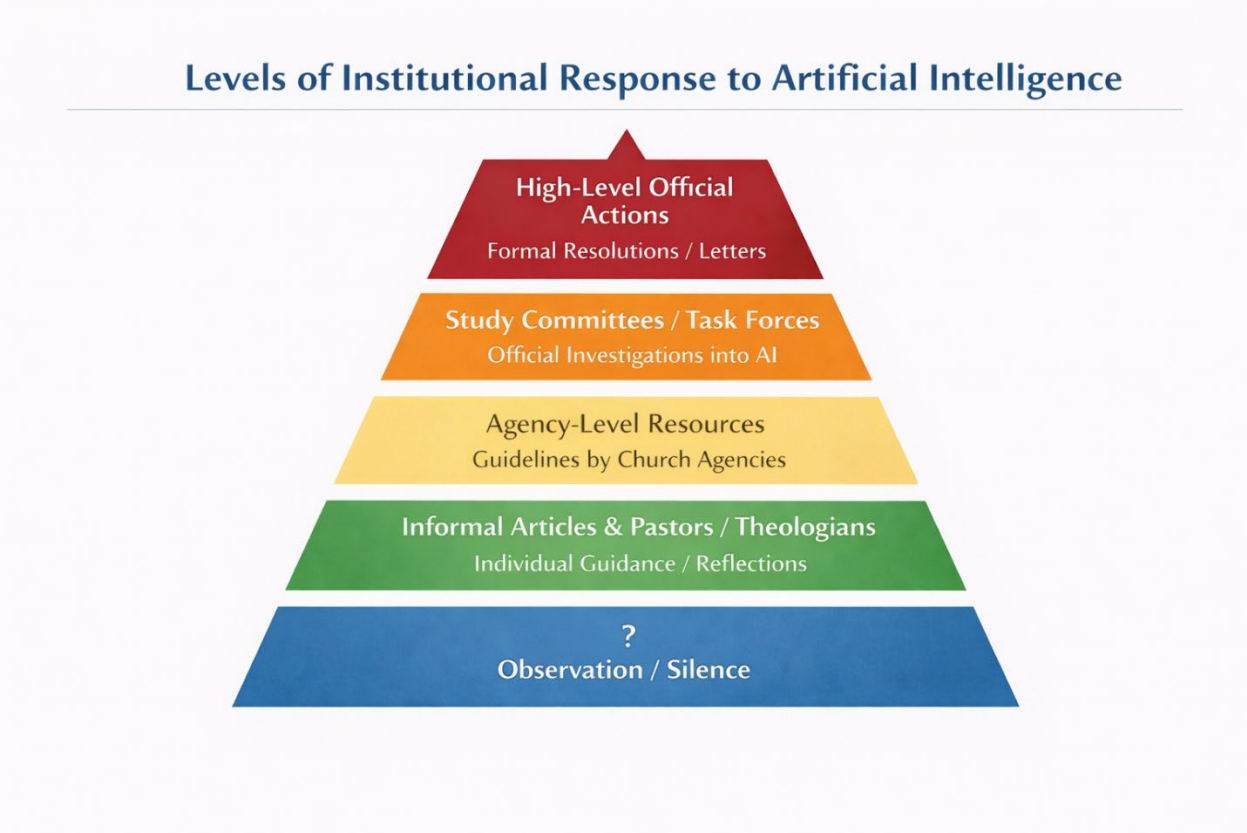
and shunning the idolatries and injustices attached to it (like surveillance abuse, or transhumanist ideologies that idolize technology). One could say the consensus approach fulfills 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 almost to the letter. For the PCA, known for wanting to be biblically faithful and culturally aware, this mainstream Christian posture probably aligns well with our instincts. It's encouraging that we're not out on a limb alone; we have fellow members of Christ's body across traditions modeling a balanced approach. There is opportunity for collaboration – perhaps inter-denominational conversations or sharing of resources (for example, we could adapt a Catholic school's digital ethics curriculum for use in our Christian schools, or share our seminary's theological white paper with a multi-denominational audience).

6. Technology as an ecumenical bridge: As a final observation, dealing with AI has brought different Christian traditions into dialogue with each other in new ways. Conferences, working groups, and summits on AI often include Catholics, Protestants, and sometimes Orthodox and others in the same room, learning from one another. The shared challenges of AI remind us of our shared humanity and the one Lord we serve. It's a space where the church can present a more united front to the world. One example of this increased ecumenical dialogue is the **Rome Call for AI Ethics**【2】 – co-signed not just by Catholics and tech firms, but endorsed by Jewish and Muslim leaders too. It created a rare table where religious convictions informed a common pledge. While doctrine divides on many fronts, on ethical issues of human dignity in AI, there is large overlap. The Lausanne article【9】 also was an attempt to build an evangelical framework that could be appreciated broadly. For the PCA, this means that as we do our own reflection, we should remain open to listening to the wider church and even contributing to these broader conversations. It doesn't dilute our distinctives to agree on an ethical principle about AI; in fact, it reinforces our witness of charity and truth. In a cynical world of tech, seeing the church largely united in saying "people are not machines and must be loved, not exploited" is powerful.

In sum, the church's engagement with AI so far is characterized by a careful yet confident application of faith to novel challenges. We are, in a sense, **learning once again how relevant the Gospel is** to every facet of life – even algorithms and data. These observations highlight that we have much to be grateful for (our heritage gives us tools to respond), much to be watchful for (the practical issues emerging in our pews), and much to collaborate on across denominational lines.

VII. Potential Pathways for the Presbyterian Church in America

Given this comparative overview, what might the Presbyterian Church in America do moving forward regarding artificial intelligence? Here we outline several possible pathways. These options range from very passive to very active responses, each with its own pros and cons. They are **not mutually exclusive** – the PCA could combine elements from multiple paths. Also, these are presented descriptively: we are not at this time recommending one over another, but rather mapping the terrain for informed decision-making by PCA leadership.



1. **Continue Observing and Learning:** The PCA could take a cautious "wait and see" approach. This means not rushing into any official actions, but rather keeping an eye on technological developments and how other churches handle them. The denomination might encourage informal learning – for example, asking a few interested pastors or professors to monitor AI trends and report back periodically. The advantage of this path is humility and prudence: it avoids premature pronouncements on a moving target. We'd gather more data (both about AI itself and about how church members are using it) before formulating a stance. The risk, however, is that in the absence of guidance, individual members or churches might go astray or face dilemmas without support. Essentially, this path bets on the

benefits of patience, trusting that God's providence and the wider church's insights will help clarify things in time. It keeps the PCA flexible, avoiding the need to revisit a hasty statement if technology changes radically.

2. **Encourage Informal Study and Discussion:** Without taking formal action, the PCA could still foster denomination-wide awareness of AI issues. For instance, General Assembly or presbyteries could host workshops or panel discussions on AI's implications from a Reformed perspective. We could invite experts (maybe a Christian in the tech industry, a seminary ethicist, etc.) to speak at events. The denomination's magazine or website could run a series of articles on AI and faith. We might create channels (like a mailing list or online forum) for pastors and elders to share experiences and best practices about using or confronting AI in ministry. This approach treats the issue seriously but handles it organically through education. It would equip our leaders to think on their feet. It's relatively low-cost and can happen quickly. The outcome would be a better-informed PCA community even before any official paper is written. Many denominations have started here – essentially crowd-sourcing wisdom and giving space for the Spirit to lead through communal conversation.

3. **Develop Pastoral Guidance (Non-binding):** Another step could be for a PCA agency or committee to produce a **pastoral letter or guidance document** on AI. For example, the Committee on Discipleship Ministries (CDM) or the Committee on Theology could draft a resource that says, "Here are some principles and cautions for using AI in PCA ministries." It might address questions like sermon prep, counseling, children's education, etc., offering advice consistent with our theology. This wouldn't be an official stance of the General Assembly unless adopted, but it would carry weight if coming from a respected committee. It could be distributed to sessions, pastors, and church educators as a recommended resource. The benefit is providing something relatively quickly that meets the immediate need for guidance, without the rigor (or bureaucracy) of formal reports. If over time the guidance needed updating or formalizing, that could happen, but meanwhile churches aren't left in a lurch. This is somewhat like how the PCA has issued pastoral letters on topics like gender confusion or pornography – giving practical and theological counsel to our churches without it being part of our constitutional documents.

4. **Appoint a Study Committee:** The PCA could decide that AI's importance warrants the formation of an **ad-interim study committee** at the General Assembly level. This committee, composed of knowledgeable pastors, theologians, and perhaps

tech-savvy laypersons, would be tasked with examining the issue in depth over a year or two and reporting back with findings and any recommendations. They might produce a comprehensive report akin to those on, say, human sexuality or creation views. Such a report could then be received by the General Assembly (and optionally adopted or commended). This path allows a thorough, Reformed analysis tailored to the PCA's context. We could address specific theological questions (like "AI and the doctrine of creation") and specific practical ones (like "should a ruling elder use AI in decision-making?"). The existence of a study committee also signals to the denomination that this is an important matter. Of course, forming a committee has challenges: it requires Assembly approval, budget, and the right mix of expertise. But it would leverage our connectionalism to produce something of lasting value. If done well, the PCA's report could even serve the wider evangelical community. Timing is a factor – if we wait too long to do this, we may miss shaping the conversation; if we do it too hastily, we risk a shallow report.

5. **Integrate AI awareness into Training and Education:** Another approach is more gradual but formative: ensure that AI and related ethical issues are integrated into **the training of our future and current church leaders**. For instance, our seminaries (like Covenant Seminary and RTS) could be engaged to include discussions of technology in theology and ministry courses. The course on Ethics could have a module on AI. Or presbytery credentials committees might gently probe candidates on how they'd handle certain tech-related pastoral scenarios. Continuing education events for pastors could feature sessions on AI. The idea is that, over time, PCA leaders just have this as part of their ministerial toolkit. This path might not produce a single statement or moment, but it will influence the culture of our leadership. It aligns with our commitment to robust training – just as we prepare people to handle counseling, or worship debates, we prepare them to handle AI questions. It also puts the issue in a discipleship frame: as technology becomes part of everyday discipleship for congregants (how they use AI at work, how it influences their worldview), our elders and pastors should be equipped to guide them. This could be paired with existing efforts on worldview training or cultural engagement that many PCA churches emphasize.

6. **Adopt a Formal Position or Overture:** Finally, the PCA could take a more definitive stance by drafting and adopting a formal declaration or even a change to our Book of Church Order (BCO) if deemed necessary. For example, an **overture** could be brought to General Assembly stating the PCA's position on AI – perhaps a concise statement of principles like affirming human uniqueness, urging ethical use, and denouncing certain misuses (similar in style to the SBC resolution but in our own

words). If adopted, it becomes a public stance of the PCA. Or if some very specific issue needed addressing in BCO (though it's hard to imagine – perhaps something about not administering sacraments via digital means, which is already implicitly covered by our theology of worship), that could be codified. The benefit of a formal stance is clarity and unity of voice. It would let PCA members and the world know where we stand. It also could serve as a protective measure—e.g., if a PCA church wanted to try something questionable with AI, a formal stance could rein that in. The downside is lack of agility: formal positions are hard to adjust if things change, and if worded poorly, could either overstep (forbid something that later seems benign) or under-address something. Also, crafting such a statement requires broad consensus; otherwise it could be divisive. Historically, the PCA has preferred study reports over binding declarations on complex contemporary issues (we tend to teach and persuade rather than legislate in these areas), so this would be a higher bar.

As noted, the PCA could blend these approaches. One realistic roadmap might be: encourage informal study now, perhaps commission a study committee next year, and use their report as the basis for any formal guidance or educational curriculum down the line. That way we incrementally build our denominational response with wide input and prayerful reflection at each stage.

Regardless of the path, it's evident from the broader survey that **engaging the topic of AI is both necessary and constructive**. It's an opportunity for the PCA to apply our Reformed faith to a major cultural issue, for the good of our churches and our witness. It's also a chance to reassure our members (especially younger ones who are tech-savvy) that the church is not ignoring what's happening in the world, but is ready to provide thoughtful leadership anchored in biblical truth.

Any steps we take should be undertaken with an eye to glorifying Christ, loving our neighbors (including those creating and affected by AI), and strengthening the church's ministry. AI, like any tool, will either be used to **build up or tear down** – and we want to be among those who ensure it is used in ways that build up, according to the wisdom God gives.

Addendum to Chapter 3

Magnifica Humanitas and the Roman Catholic Response to Artificial Intelligence

A supplemental note to Artificial Intelligence and the Wider Christian Church: A Comparative Review

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Purpose of This Addendum

This addendum updates the comparative landscape described in Chapter 3 in light of Pope Leo XIV's encyclical Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence, dated May 15, 2026 and publicly released by the Holy See on May 25, 2026. It is not a replacement for the Roman Catholic section of the chapter, nor is it intended to revise the chapter's descriptive method. Rather, it records a significant subsequent development in Roman Catholic engagement with AI and considers how that development affects the broader ecclesial landscape surveyed in the chapter.

The original chapter treated the Roman Catholic Church as already occupying the most developed formal position among major Christian traditions, citing Antiqua et Nova, the Rome Call for AI Ethics, and papal reflections on AI and peace. Magnifica Humanitas confirms and extends that judgment. The Catholic response has now moved from dicastery-level guidance and papal addresses into the form of a social encyclical — what the document frames as addressing the res novae of our time, the "new things," deliberately echoing Pope Leo XIII's landmark 1891 Rerum Novarum. That shift matters. It means artificial intelligence has been placed not merely among contemporary moral concerns, but within the formal stream of Catholic Social Doctrine.

I. Documentary Significance

The most important feature of Magnifica Humanitas is not simply that it speaks about AI, but that it treats AI as a civilizational development comparable to earlier social transformations addressed by the modern papal magisterium. By situating the document near the anniversary of Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum, Pope Leo XIV implicitly reads the AI revolution in continuity with the industrial, economic, and social disruptions that first occasioned modern Catholic social teaching. The analogy is instructive: just as the labor question forced the Church of Rome to address capital, property, wages, and social order, the AI question now requires attention to data, automation, algorithmic governance, digital communication, technological concentration, and the future of human work.

This represents a broadening of the Catholic AI conversation. Antiqua et Nova focused directly on the relationship between human intelligence and artificial intelligence, distinguishing the human person from the machine and warning against anthropomorphizing AI. The Rome Call for AI

Ethics offered public principles for ethical development and deployment. Magnifica Humanitas absorbs those concerns into a more comprehensive social-theological frame. AI is no longer treated only as a tool requiring ethical use; it is treated as a force that may reshape institutions, economies, public truth, education, family life, war, and the cultural imagination.

The encyclical identifies what it calls a "Babel syndrome" in contemporary technology culture: the concentration of power in the hands of a few corporations and nations; the reduction of persons to data and market value; the pretense that a single digital language can translate everything, including the mystery of the human person; and an idolatry of efficiency and profit that sacrifices the vulnerable. This diagnosis is not peripheral to the document's argument — it is its organizing concern, and it shapes both how the encyclical reads the problem and what kind of response it calls for.

For purposes of the comparative review, this development strengthens the earlier observation that Roman Catholic engagement is marked by institutional formalization, philosophical breadth, and a willingness to address AI in public, global, and policy-facing terms. The Catholic Church is not merely reacting to pastoral use cases from below. It is attempting to narrate the meaning of AI from above, through the categories of social doctrine, human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, social justice, and integral human development.

II. The Controlling Images: Babel and Nehemiah

Magnifica Humanitas is organized, at the imaginative level, around two biblical images: the Tower of Babel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah. This gives the encyclical a more explicitly theological architecture than many public AI statements, and it is worth examining both the content and the method of that architecture.

Babel represents the drive toward technological self-exaltation: a unified technical project, impressive in scale, but detached from humble dependence on God and inattentive to the dignity of persons. In the encyclical's reading, Babel is not simply ancient rebellion; it is a recurring temptation wherever power, efficiency, uniformity, and self-assertion displace communion, humility, and neighborly responsibility. The document's "Babel syndrome" is precisely this: the concentration of technological power in the hands of a few, the erasure of persons into data points, and the assumption that one platform or system can contain and manage everything — including the mystery of what it means to be human.

Nehemiah supplies the alternative image. The ruined city is rebuilt through prayer, patient inspection, coordinated labor, local responsibility, and the participation of many persons with distinct roles. Applied to AI, the image suggests that technological change must be governed through shared discernment rather than imposed by elites, platforms, or opaque systems. It also gives the document its constructive tone. The Pope does not call for withdrawal from technological development, but for a different mode of building: one that protects persons, attends to weakness, and refuses to confuse technical capacity with moral wisdom.

These biblical images help explain why the document avoids both simple rejection and simple embrace of AI. Technology can heal, connect, educate, and protect; it can also dominate, exclude, surveil, manipulate, and dehumanize. The moral question is therefore not whether technology is permitted in the abstract, but what kind of social order is being built through it and what vision of the human person governs that construction. Christian readers across traditions will find the framework immediately recognizable, even where they would ground it differently.

III. Theological Anthropology at the Center

At the heart of Magnifica Humanitas lies a robust doctrine of the human person as imago Dei. The encyclical grounds human dignity not in capacity, productivity, or even rationality per se, but in being created in the image of the Triune God — "Father, Son and Holy Spirit…love itself in relationship, expressed in the mutual gift of self and in sharing with the world." This Trinitarian foundation becomes the load-bearing structure for the document's technological ethics.

The Incarnation receives particular emphasis. The encyclical insists that as the Son of God enters human history and becomes flesh, he establishes an ontological threshold that no algorithm can cross. AI may process language, generate images, optimize decisions, and simulate interaction — but it cannot love, cannot bear the image of God, cannot enter into covenant, and cannot bear moral accountability before its Creator. This christological anthropology is maintained rigorously throughout the document and explains why the encyclical never wavers on the tool-not-creature distinction even while acknowledging AI's extraordinary capabilities.

For comparative purposes, this is a significant theological development. Chapter 3 noted the broad Christian consensus that AI is not a moral person and that human dignity is central to every tradition's evaluation of it. Magnifica Humanitas now provides the most formally developed theological account of why that consensus holds. The answer is not merely functional ("AI cannot do what humans do") but ontological and relational: humans exist in a different mode of being, one established by creation and confirmed by the Incarnation.

Reformed readers will find substantial agreement here. The Westminster Standards ground human dignity in creation after God's image, which includes "knowledge, righteousness, and holiness" (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 17) — not merely cognitive capacity or productive ability. Both traditions reject any reduction of personhood to computational function or behavioral output.

Where the traditions diverge is in emphasis and implication. The encyclical's account of human "grandeur" and creative capacity, while acknowledging creaturely limits, reflects a more optimistic anthropological register than Westminster's sustained emphasis on total depravity and the noetic effects of the Fall. The encyclical's confidence in human cooperation with grace when governing technology contrasts with the Reformed insistence that fallen reason requires Scripture's explicit guidance and the Spirit's illumination. These are not trivial differences — they shape practical questions about whether AI can be adequately governed by natural law reasoning alone or whether explicit biblical parameters are required. But they should not obscure the fundamental agreement:

AI lacks what humans possess — a soul, covenant standing before God, moral agency, and the capacity for redemption.

IV. Major Themes in the Encyclical

Magnifica Humanitas develops several themes that overlap strongly with the wider Christian consensus identified in Chapter 3, while extending that consensus in important directions.

The Tool-Not-Creature Distinction

The encyclical maintains without qualification that AI is not a bearer of moral agency, conscience, spiritual life, or human dignity. Responsibility remains with human developers, owners, institutions, public authorities, and users. This is consistent with the broad finding of Chapter 3 that no major Christian tradition grants AI personhood or treats the machine as an independent moral subject.

The Social Embeddedness of Technology

The document does not deny that technologies can be used for good ends, but it insists that technological systems take shape within human motives, institutional incentives, economic power, and cultural assumptions. This is especially evident in the encyclical's concern over private transnational technological actors whose resources, data, and platforms may exceed the practical authority of many states — a concern that goes significantly beyond the scope of most Protestant AI statements surveyed in Chapter 3.

Truth as a Social Good

Digital platforms and AI systems are not merely channels of information; they shape perception, public imagination, and trust. The encyclical's sustained warnings about misinformation, manipulation, and the deformation of communication align broadly with Christian concerns for truthfulness across traditions, including the Westminster Larger Catechism's extended treatment of the Ninth Commandment (Q. 144–145), which prohibits not only false statements but "concealing the truth" and "holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others."

The Vulnerability of Children

Among the encyclical's most urgent sections is its treatment of children's exposure to digital technology and AI. The document cites evidence that early and unsupervised exposure to digital devices and social media can negatively impact sleep, attention, emotional regulation, and relational development. It warns specifically about grooming and exploitation through AI-generated images, addiction by design, exposure to violent or pornographic content, and the erosion of sustained attention and deep learning. These concerns are neither uniquely Catholic nor uniquely conservative; they represent a point at which the encyclical speaks to every tradition with pastoral responsibility for children and families.

The Economics of AI

Building on over a century of Catholic social teaching, the document addresses labor displacement, wealth concentration, and the exploitation of workers who perform the human labor that trains AI systems and moderates their outputs. It warns against "models of wellbeing that leave behind entire populations" and insists on the dignity of work as central to human flourishing. This economic dimension is underdeveloped in most Protestant AI statements surveyed in Chapter 3, and the encyclical may prompt wider Christian engagement with questions of justice and stewardship in the digital economy. The Westminster Larger Catechism's exposition of the Eighth Commandment (Q. 140–142) includes extensive duties regarding a neighbor's "wealth and outward estate" — not merely refraining from theft but actively promoting others' economic welfare — providing a natural Reformed entry point into the questions the encyclical raises.

War and Autonomous Weapons

Magnifica Humanitas addresses cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons, rearmament, and the moral danger of systems that make life-and-death decisions without meaningful human oversight. It argues that lethal force requires human moral accountability — a position that connects naturally with just war reasoning in the wider Christian tradition, including the Westminster Confession's affirmation that civil authorities may wield the sword when just and necessary (WCF 23.2). The question the encyclical presses is whether the delegation of lethal decisions to algorithms constitutes an abdication of the moral responsibility that legitimate authority necessarily carries.

The Irreplaceability of Embodied Ministry

Throughout the document runs an emphasis on embodiment, presence, and the irreplaceable nature of face-to-face relationship. The encyclical insists that AI cannot replace what it calls "the ministry of presence" — the personal, Spirit-led character of pastoral care, spiritual formation, and human accompaniment. This represents perhaps the strongest area of cross-traditional agreement in the current Christian landscape. Whether expressed through Catholic sacramental theology or Reformed emphasis on the preached Word and properly administered sacraments, both traditions recognize that the Gospel is irreducibly embodied and that machines cannot occupy the place of persons.

Rejecting Transhumanism and Posthumanism

The encyclical explicitly refuses accounts of progress that regard embodiment, dependence, limitation, or vulnerability as defects to be overcome through technological enhancement. The grandeur of humanity, it insists, is not found in escaping creaturely limits but in receiving human life as gift and understanding it in light of the Incarnation. This rejection of transhumanism is consistent with the broad Christian refusal across traditions to treat AI as a rival account of the human person.

V. Continuity with the Chapter's Comparative Findings

Magnifica Humanitas does not overturn the comparative conclusions of Chapter 3. Rather, it intensifies them.

The chapter observed that Christian bodies broadly converge on several points: AI is a tool, not a creature; human dignity is central; ethical transparency is necessary; and pastoral or relational ministry cannot be displaced by machines. The encyclical strongly reinforces each of these points, while giving the Roman Catholic contribution a more developed account of technological power, social structures, and the relationship between AI and the common good.

The chapter also noted that Roman Catholic engagement is more formalized than that of many Protestant bodies. That observation is now even more pronounced. A dicastery note can be influential; a papal encyclical carries a different symbolic and institutional weight within Roman Catholicism. Catholic universities, hospitals, dioceses, schools, charities, and policy voices will likely read their AI work in light of this document for years to come.

This institutional reality also illuminates a structural divergence that Chapter 3 noted in passing and that Magnifica Humanitas now makes more visible: the gap between traditions with centralized formal teaching structures and those whose responses remain decentralized. The Catholic Church can speak globally and institutionally in a single voice; Reformed and evangelical bodies typically move through slower deliberative processes — study committees, denominational resolutions, seminary publications, and session-level guidance. That difference is not merely procedural. It shapes how quickly members receive direction, how coherently institutions respond, and how publicly the tradition's reasoning is heard in broader cultural and policy conversations. The encyclical's release may widen this gap in perceived seriousness, even among traditions that would dispute Rome's authority claim.

At the same time, the chapter's observations about divergence still stand. Catholic reflection proceeds from Catholic assumptions: magisterial authority, doctrinal development, natural law, the vocabulary of Catholic Social Doctrine, and a robust account of the institutional Church as a teacher in public and social matters. Protestant and especially Reformed readers may learn from the moral analysis without adopting the authority structure that carries it.

VI. Authority and Method: Where Traditions Diverge

While substantial agreement exists on practical concerns, fundamental theological differences shape how different traditions approach the encyclical and its reasoning. These are not merely academic distinctions; they bear on how Protestant churches receive and evaluate the document.

The Question of Authority

The encyclical presents itself as binding teaching from the successor of Peter, with authority to interpret Scripture and develop doctrine for the universal church. This assumes papal primacy and the magisterium's teaching office — claims that Reformed theology explicitly rejects. The

Westminster Confession states: “There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof” (WCF 25.6). For Reformed believers, Scripture alone is “the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined” (WCF 1.10). An encyclical may contain wise observations and helpful ethical reasoning, but it cannot bind conscience or function as authoritative church teaching. It must be examined by Scripture.

This difference has practical implications for how the document functions in each tradition. When Rome speaks, Catholic institutions receive what they understand as authoritative guidance requiring implementation. When Reformed churches engage AI, each session and presbytery must do its own theological work, developing guidance through ordinary deliberative processes. Neither approach is inherently superior in outcome, but they operate from fundamentally different assumptions about how truth is discerned and authority exercised.

Natural Law and Sola Scriptura

The encyclical’s significant reliance on natural law reasoning — the belief that human reason can discern moral truth from creation itself — differs from the Reformed emphasis on sola scriptura. While Westminster affirms general revelation (WCF 1.1), it holds that this knowledge is insufficient for either salvation or comprehensive moral guidance. Only Scripture provides the knowledge of God’s will necessary for faith and practice.

This epistemological difference shapes technological ethics at a foundational level. The encyclical assumes that dialogue with human sciences and engagement with secular ethical reasoning can develop adequate frameworks for AI governance. Reformed theology, while acknowledging that common grace enables significant cultural and moral achievement by unbelievers, maintains that fallen reason cannot construct a comprehensive ethical system adequate to the scope of the challenge without Scripture’s explicit parameters. The Westminster Larger Catechism’s exposition of the Ten Commandments (Q. 91–152) offers a different working model: taking the explicit requirements of biblical law and their “good and necessary consequence” and applying them systematically to contemporary situations, including technology.

Learning Without Compromising

None of this prevents Reformed churches from taking Magnifica Humanitas seriously as a significant piece of Christian social witness. Its warnings about technological concentration, algorithmic opacity, manipulation, labor displacement, the vulnerability of children, the deformation of truth, and autonomous weapons are not uniquely Catholic concerns. They are matters of neighbor-love, justice, stewardship, and human responsibility that the whole church faces. Reformed readers can affirm much of the encyclical’s moral burden, test its claims by Scripture, and engage its reasoning as a serious contribution to the wider Christian conversation — while maintaining that it does not bind their consciences and that their own tradition must develop guidance from its own confessional and scriptural foundations.

VII. Effect on the Wider Christian Landscape

The release of Magnifica Humanitas alters the landscape surveyed in Chapter 3 in at least four ways.

First, it confirms that AI has become a first-order theological and social issue, not merely a matter of administrative convenience or digital literacy. The Vatican has now placed artificial intelligence among the major social questions of the age, alongside industrialization, labor, and human rights.

Second, it raises the standard for ecclesial seriousness. Whatever one thinks of Catholic authority claims, the document models sustained theological engagement with technology at the level of anthropology, economics, politics, education, family, communication, labor, and war. Other traditions will increasingly be measured against this standard, whether or not they accept its conclusions.

Third, it may widen the gap between traditions with formal teaching structures and those whose responses remain decentralized and informal. That difference shapes how quickly members receive direction and how coherently institutions respond to a rapidly changing technological environment.

Fourth, it strengthens the ecumenical convergence around one central claim: people are not machines and must not be treated as such. Across traditions, the most stable Christian agreement remains anthropological. AI can be useful, but it cannot become a rival account of the human person. It can assist human work, but it cannot replace embodied ministry. It can process language, but it cannot bear the image of God, love a neighbor, repent of sin, receive grace, or shepherd the people of God.

VIII. Concluding Assessment

Magnifica Humanitas should be understood as the most significant Roman Catholic AI document to date — not because it introduces every concern for the first time, but because it gathers existing Catholic concerns into the form of a comprehensive social encyclical. It gives theological weight and institutional permanence to questions that are already appearing in ordinary ministry: What may a pastor delegate to AI? How should Christian schools teach students to use these tools? What kinds of disclosure preserve trust? How should churches protect sensitive data? What happens to work, truth, attention, and human formation when algorithmic systems become ordinary features of life?

For the purposes of Chapter 3, the encyclical confirms the chapter's central portrait of the current Christian landscape: cautious engagement, broad agreement on human dignity, strong resistance to AI personhood, concern for transparency and accountability, and deep unease about the replacement of personal ministry by technological simulation. It also confirms the continuing divergence of authority structures and theological methods. Roman Catholicism speaks through

magisterial social doctrine; Reformed churches must speak from Scripture, confession, and properly ordered church courts.

For PCA readers specifically, the encyclical functions as a useful external mirror. It shows the seriousness with which another major Christian communion is treating AI. It also exposes the relative thinness of many Protestant responses and the danger that Reformed churches may leave practical guidance to informal voices while Roman Catholic institutions develop more coherent public frameworks. Whether or not the PCA ever issues a formal denominational statement, the questions now pressing upon pastors, elders, schools, seminaries, and families will not wait indefinitely for ecclesiastical process.

The most prudent response is therefore neither imitation nor indifference. We should recognize the importance of the document, learn from its breadth, test its claims by Scripture, and continue the work of developing guidance that is confessionally Reformed, pastorally concrete, and attentive to the actual questions arising in churches, schools, homes, and workplaces.

In the end, both Catholic and Reformed traditions confess that Christ is Lord over all creation — including every algorithm ever written. The question is not whether the church should engage AI, but how to do so faithfully: maintaining theological integrity, protecting human dignity, serving the vulnerable, and bearing witness to the truth that humanity's hope lies not in technological progress but in the redemption accomplished by Christ and applied by the Spirit. The path forward requires what Reformed theology has always required: submission to Scripture's authority, reliance on the Spirit's illumination, and engagement with God's world through the lens of God's Word. On this foundation, Christians of all traditions can work together on shared concerns while honoring the genuine theological differences that have shaped — and continue to shape — their respective communions.

Source Notes

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