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# FRONT MATTER

## NOTICES

### Transparent Use of AI (Notice)

Some content was assisted by Artificial Intelligence (AI) for research organization and editorial review.

We aim to use AI responsibly, guided by the TRAIN model as documented herein.

### Contact

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## About the Author

***Thomas B. Kelley is the founder and writer behind SempRef and associated documents. His interest in artificial intelligence and computing began in the early 1980s at Covenant College, where he graduated in the first class to include a Computer Science major option ('85). He earned a double major in Psychology and Computer Science and spent 40+ years in the IT industry.***

***In March 2025, Thomas survived a massive heart attack. Recovery forced an unplanned slowdown, which became a providential opportunity to read widely across what churches and denominations were saying about AI. This project grew out of that season and reflects a snapshot of AI and the Church as it stood in late 2025 / early 2026. Technology moves faster than any committee; if referenced materials have since changed, please read with grace.***

***This work has also generated side papers and related projects, and it has sparked ongoing exploration of an AI assistant trained on Reformed theology with the explicit wisdom not to “play pastor.”***

***For additional information, visit <https://sempref.com/>***

***In Him,***

***Thomas B. Kelley***

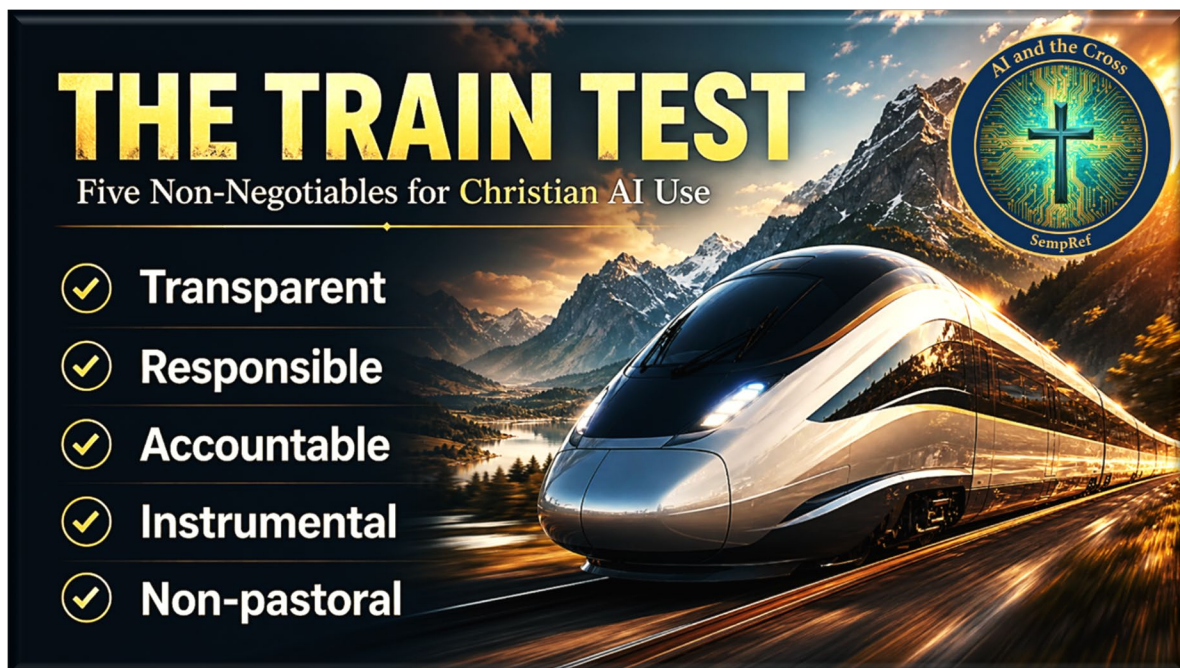
# PART I — FOUNDATIONS

## Chapter 1 — The TRAIN Framework: A Theological Context for Navigating Artificial Intelligence

### AI: A Four-Letter Word?

The Church finds itself in a "Technological Moment" that is both inevitable and profoundly disruptive. The rapid ascendancy of Large Language Models (LLMs) and generative artificial intelligence is not merely an incremental software update; it is a paradigm-shifting force that challenges our perceptions of authority, knowledge, and truth. For the confessional church, this represents a "providential convergence" mirroring the 15th-century printing press. Just as Gutenberg's invention allowed the Reformers to saturate Europe with the Gospel, AI offers a staggering capacity to synthesize centuries of theological data. However, we must remember that while the press was a gift, it also sowed discord and birthed a "do-it-yourself" religion that challenged ecclesiastical unity. This historical reality justifies why the Church must now double down on her confessional identity to manage this new pluralism. We must move beyond reactive fear or uncritical adoption to develop a deliberate, confessional posture.

To guide this discernment, we propose the **TRAIN Framework**: **T**ransparent, **R**esponsible, **A**ccountable, **I**nstrumental, and **N**on-Pastoral. This framework is the essential standard for navigating the "anthropological anxiety" triggered by machines that mimic human reasoning. We must protect the integrity of the church's witness by ensuring that tools remain servants to our mission rather than subverting our theology. This structured discernment begins with the foundational virtue of truth-telling.



## Transparent: Safeguarding Truth and Trust

Transparency is strategically vital because of the "Implicit Covenant of Trust" between a minister and the congregation. In the Reformed tradition, truth-telling is not a mere suggestion but a requirement of the Ninth Commandment. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.144 explains, the Ninth Commandment requires the "maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man." When a pastor speaks, the flock assumes the message is the fruit of that shepherd's specific labor, prayer, and wrestling with the Spirit. Undisclosed AI use threatens to transform the pulpit into a platform for "algorithmic ventriloquism," where the voice of the shepherd is replaced by statistical prediction.

Violating this trust through undisclosed AI use constitutes a "false witness" that manifests in several ways:

- **Plagiarism of Logic:** Presenting AI-generated prose or outlines as original thought misleads the congregation about the source of their spiritual nourishment.
- **Deceptive Labor:** It creates the illusion of personal study and sanctification (WCF 22.2) when the core work was actually outsourced to an algorithm.
- **Relational Erosion:** Discovering that a pastor's "heartfelt" appeal was drafted by a chatbot destroys the credibility necessary for the pastoral office.

## Practical Guidelines for Disclosure

To maintain integrity, church leaders must distinguish between technical assistance and authorial delegation:

1. **Administrative & Research Aid (Disclosure Generally Unnecessary):** Using AI for grammar checks, linguistic parsing (e.g., Greek verb forms), or formatting church bulletins is an extension of common grace tools like concordances or spell-checkers.
2. **Structural Support (Discretionary Disclosure):** If AI is used to suggest a logic flow or summarize a historical context that the pastor subsequently verifies, rewrites, and owns, disclosure is discretionary, provided the final product is truly the pastor's.
3. **Content Generation (Mandatory Disclosure/Avoidance):** If significant portions of a sermon, prayer, or pastoral letter are generated by an LLM, this must be disclosed to avoid deception. However, the preferred posture is to avoid delegating the "authorial voice" entirely.

Transparency ensures the church remains a community of truth, leading us from the ethics of disclosure to the ethics of human agency.

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## Responsible: Reclaiming Human Stewardship

We must reject "technological determinism"—the myth that we are helpless bystanders to the advance of AI. In the theological order, AI is a "**secondary cause**" (WCF 5.2) under God's

absolute sovereignty. It is an instrument of common grace that must be directed by human intent. Responsibility cannot be offloaded to a machine; the human user remains the decisive moral actor.

The greatest risk to responsibility is the "Idol of Efficiency," which encourages "Intellectual Laziness." We must emphasize that the *struggle* of study is itself a vital means of **Sanctification** for the pastor.

<b>Spiritual Discipline of Study</b>	<b>Functional Substitution</b>
<b>Spirit-Dependent:</b> Involves prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit.	<b>Data-Dependent:</b> Relies on statistical token prediction.
<b>Sanctifying Labor:</b> The Word "studies" the preacher, conforming him to Christ.	<b>Transactional Ease:</b> The tool is used to bypass the "struggle" of the text.
<b>Contextual Application:</b> Produces tailored application for a specific flock.	<b>Generic Output:</b> Produces one-size-fits-all content.
<b>Personal Witness:</b> Anchored in the preacher's lived faith.	<b>Disembodied Production:</b> Results in soulless information production.

## Data Stewardship and the Eighth Commandment

Responsibility extends to "Data Stewardship." The Eighth Commandment's requirement to respect the property and privacy of our neighbors applies to the digital sphere. **Data is a sacred trust, not a technical asset.**

- **Prohibition of Sensitive Data:** Leaders are categorically warned against inputting names, specific counseling struggles, or private member data into free or consumer-grade cloud-based LLMs.
- **Explicit Authorization:** No personal data should inform an AI system without explicit authorization. Handling the flock's private lives requires the highest level of stewardship, recognizing that we are guardians of their dignity, not exploiters of their data.

Reclaiming individual responsibility leads to the communal requirement of ecclesiastical accountability.

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## Accountable: Submitting Technology to Human and Church Accountability

Ecclesiastical authority is personal and ministerial. Christ has entrusted the government of the church to human officers who are called, examined, and ordained. AI, by definition, lacks the capacity to make ordination vows or be subject to church discipline. An algorithm cannot fulfill the **BCO 21-5** requirement to be "zealous and faithful" in maintaining the truths of the Gospel, as it possesses no heart to believe and no life to offer in witness.

To maintain order, every AI output must have a "Human Owner." No leader may hide behind an algorithm's error. Accountability markers include:

1. **Correctability:** Leaders must be willing and able to halt or correct any AI use that introduces doctrinal confusion or error.
2. **Submission to Courts:** All AI-assisted ministry remains under the oversight of the Session or Presbytery. If the court forbids a specific application, the leader must submit.
3. **Vow Fidelity:** Ministers must ensure that AI never replaces their personal duty to "guard the deposit" (1 Tim 6:20). An unaccountable algorithm cannot be a guardian of the faith.

Because an unaccountable machine cannot answer for its errors, we must correctly categorize its nature as a tool rather than a being.

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## Instrumental: AI as a Subordinate Tool, Not a Moral Being

Correct theological anthropology is the only defense against the "Functional Materialism" that treats humans as mere biological machines. We must categorize AI as an "instrument" of common grace rather than a sentient rival to the *Imago Dei*. We aggressively attack the "futurist myth" of AI personhood: AI is essentially sophisticated pattern-matching software that mimics the appearance of reasoning but lacks ontology.

### Human Image-Bearer vs. AI Tool

Feature	Human Image-Bearer	AI Tool
<b>Origin</b>	Created by God (Gen 1:27).	Man-made / Secondary cause (WCF 5.2).
<b>Essence</b>	Reasonable and immortal soul.	Pattern-matching software / Tokens.
<b>Spirituality</b>	Capacity for spiritual communion.	No spiritual life or indwelling Spirit.
<b>Accountability</b>	Stands before the judgment seat.	No moral agency; no sin or repentance.
<b>Redemption</b>	Recipient of Christ's blood.	Outside the Covenant of Grace.
<b>Covenant Relation</b>	In covenant with God.	No covenantal capacity.

Under the "Cultural Mandate," humans are called to develop creation responsibly. AI can be lawfully used as a "research assistant"—summarizing literature or parsing languages—but it must remain strictly subordinate to Spirit-led discernment. This leads to the final, most critical boundary of the framework.

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## Non-Pastoral: Protecting the Incarnational Heart of Ministry

The Church faces an "Incarnational Crisis." In a digital age, we are tempted to believe ministry is merely content delivery. However, the "Means of Grace" (Word, Sacrament, Prayer) are irreducibly embodied and personal. The Gospel is incarnational—the Word became *flesh*—and ministry must follow this pattern.

AI is **categorically barred** from the *cura animarum* (care of souls). A machine cannot fulfill the pastoral office because it cannot be "moved with compassion" or "weep with those who weep."

### The Boundaries of Grace

AI is excluded from the following pastoral functions:

- **Preaching:** This is not content delivery; it is a Spirit-empowered event between a called herald and a gathered people.
- **Counseling:** AI cannot discern the spiritual "heart-issues" behind a struggle, nor can it offer the moral authority of an undershepherd.
- **Sacraments:** A machine has no hands to baptize, no authorization to bless the elements, and no capacity to celebrate the covenant community.
- **Empathy:** AI can simulate emotive language, but it cannot offer the "ministry of presence" at a hospital bedside or intercede in prayer.

Ministry is incarnational because the Gospel is incarnational. Technology must never replace the face-to-face fellowship of the saints.

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## Leading with Wisdom in a Disruptive Age

Navigating AI requires a "Confessional Posture"—one that is neither enchanted by technology's promises nor paralyzed by its threats. We lead with "**Epistemic Humility**," recognizing the limits of what we know and the vast fallibility of human-made systems. We adopt a "**Doxological Posture**," reasserting that Christ is Lord over every algorithm and every square inch of history.

Pathways for the Church: The TRAIN Summary

To ensure technology magnifies faithfulness, the church must commit to these pathways:

- **Transparent:** Build trust through honesty regarding the tools we use.
- **Responsible:** Prioritize the sanctifying labor of study and protect data as a sacred trust.
- **Accountable:** Ensure human oversight and submission to ecclesiastical authority.
- **Instrumental:** Reaffirm human uniqueness and keep the tool subordinate to the mind and Spirit.
- **Non-Pastoral:** Guard the physical, embodied nature of the *cura animarum* and the sacraments.

The **TRAIN Framework** ensures that as we move into an automated future, we remain anchored in the unchanging truth that God uses weak human vessels to display His surpassing power.

## Chapter 2 — Christians and Artificial Intelligence

### A Theological, Ethical, and Ecclesial Assessment for the Church

#### Executive Summary

Artificial Intelligence (AI)—especially large language models (LLMs)—represents one of the most consequential technological developments of our time. Its rapid integration into education, communication, business, governance, and even creative ministries raises urgent theological and ethical questions for the Christian church. As Christians, we should approach AI neither with naïve optimism nor with reflexive fear, but with biblical and theological clarity, doctrinal discipline, and moral seriousness. Any use of artificial intelligence must be evaluated within a framework of core Christian principles, including:

- **The Sovereignty of God:** God’s providence governs all creation, including human innovations and tools.
- **The Doctrine of Creation and Providence:** AI, like any technology, is part of creation’s “secondary causes” under God’s ultimate lordship.
- **The Imago Dei:** Human beings uniquely bear God's image; this sets us apart from any machine intelligence.
- **The Limits of Creaturely Knowledge:** Humans are finite and fallible; no technology can overturn our dependence on God’s revelation.
- **The Nature of Church Authority:** Christ has given spiritual authority to the church’s ordained leaders, not to machines or algorithms.
- **The Integrity of the Means of Grace:** Word, sacraments, and prayer require human, embodied ministry; they cannot be automated.
- **The Responsibilities of Christian Liberty:** Believers are free to use technology as conscience permits, but always bound by love and holiness in its application.
- **The Concerning Current Reality:** A further concern, addressed more directly below, is not merely that AI may answer religious questions poorly, but that some tools may present themselves as spiritual companions, pastoral substitutes, or even simulated versions of Jesus. When technology moves from providing information to imitating spiritual presence, the church must pay especially close attention.

The Church’s task regarding AI is neither total withdrawal from technological progress nor uncritical capitulation to it, but rather faithful theological discernment. We must thoughtfully engage with AI in a way that honors Christ’s lordship over all things, uses wisdom guided by Scripture, and serves the cause of truth and neighborly love.

#### Measured Response

**Why AI Demands Our Attention:** Artificial intelligence is not merely another incremental innovation; it is a disruptive force reshaping fundamental aspects of life and society. AI changes how information is generated at lightning speed. It alters how authority is perceived (when

answers come from algorithms rather than experts) and how knowledge is accessed (with vast databases distilled in seconds). It even shifts how creativity is simulated, as we see machines producing text, art, and music that mimic human-like output. Such sweeping changes are directly relevant to the church because they touch on how people find truth, meaning, and guidance—areas at the very heart of ministry.

**Emerging Tensions in Ministry:** The capabilities of LLMs to generate persuasive theological prose, sermon outlines, pastoral letters, doctrinal summaries, or ethical reflections within seconds naturally provoke anxiety among pastors, elders, and lay leaders. Questions arise, such as: *Does this technology diminish the pastoral office? Does it simulate spiritual wisdom in a misleading way? Does it threaten the uniqueness of human creativity God has gifted us? Does it alter how truth is discerned and communicated in the church?* These concerns are not merely knee-jerk reactions; they stem from deeply Christian instincts about authority, embodiment, and truth. For example, if a machine can produce a convincing sermon outline, one might worry whether congregants will start turning to AI for spiritual guidance instead of their church community and Scripture. If a chatbot can answer questions about the Bible, will people become less patient in seeking wisdom through prayer, study, and counsel? These are valid questions that deserve careful thought.

**The Need for Discernment, Not Dread:** While it is natural to feel unsettled by rapid change, Christians should remember that God is sovereign over history, including our technological moment. Fear should not drive our theology. Instead, we're called to engage with new developments from a standpoint of faith. Historically, the church has faced paradigm-shifting inventions before (the printing press, the radio, the internet) and has had to thoughtfully discern their use. In each case, those tools brought both opportunities for the Gospel and temptations or risks. The same is true for AI. Our response should be neither a blind embrace of every new gadget nor a blanket condemnation of technology. Rather, we adopt a posture of careful evaluation: asking *how* this tool might be used to glorify God and love our neighbor, and *where* this tool might pose spiritual or ethical dangers. In short, this is an important moment because it is an opportunity for the church to exercise wisdom—holding fast to timeless truths while responding to timely innovations.

## Creation and the Nature of Tools

**1. God as Creator and Lord of All “Secondary Causes”:** The Christian worldview begins with the declaration that **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”** (Genesis 1:1, ESV). God is the sovereign Creator of all things, visible and invisible; nothing in creation lies outside His authority. Human beings, made in God's image, have been given a derivative creativity and stewardship under God's ultimate authority (Genesis 1:26–28). Scripture says that “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31, ESV), and that God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11, ESV). Technology, including AI, falls under these secondary causes. In other words, AI exists firmly within God's providence—it does not operate independent of Him or catch Him by surprise. As the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper famously observed, *“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”* This truth reminds us that AI, like everything else in creation, ultimately belongs to Jesus Christ and is subject to His lordship. The question for Christians, then, is not whether AI somehow exists outside of God's rule (it doesn't), but rather how this technology should be used under that rule in ways that honor the Creator.

**2. The Moral Neutrality — and Moral Direction — of Tools:** Tools themselves are not moral agents. They do not choose to do good or evil; rather, human users direct them toward moral or immoral ends. A hammer can be used to build a home or to harm someone—the tool's purpose is defined by the user's intent. In church history, we've seen how the same technology can amplify either truth or falsehood. For instance, the printing press in the 16th century allowed for the mass production of the Bible and sound doctrinal materials, spreading the Gospel far and wide; yet that same press could also disseminate heretical tracts and dangerous false teachings just as quickly. Radio and television were used to broadcast edifying sermons and Christian music, but also have been used for propaganda and morally corrupt content. The internet enables incredible community and learning, but likewise can propagate corruption and division. **AI is similar in kind, though different in scale.** It has an unprecedented ability to magnify human intent—both good and bad—across the globe in seconds. Therefore, Christians must firmly reject any form of technological determinism—the idea that technology's advance inevitably dictates the course of culture or morals while we are helpless bystanders. We are not passive; human moral agency remains decisive. In God's eyes, an AI system will always be an *instrument*, not an independent actor. The moral outcome depends on how we direct that instrument. The task for believers is to ensure our use of AI (like any tool) is guided by the moral framework of Scripture and love of neighbor. We are responsible for the purposes to which we put these powerful new tools. Just as Paul teaches that we should do all things for God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), our development and use of technology must also consciously aim to glorify God and serve righteous ends.

## The Image of God and Artificial Simulation

### 1. What AI Is Not: Human Uniqueness in Theological Perspective

A central theological concern in the conversation about AI is the uniqueness of human beings. The doctrine of the **imago Dei** (image of God) teaches that humans, and only humans, are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Scripture teaches that God formed man from the dust and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” so that “the man became a living creature” (Genesis 2:7, ESV). This has several implications. Unlike humans, AI does not possess a soul or any spiritual life. It lacks consciousness and real understanding; an AI never experiences awareness or self-reflection—it’s essentially sophisticated pattern-matching software. AI has **no moral agency**; it cannot be held accountable for “its” actions in a moral or covenantal sense, because it doesn’t actually will or intend anything—it operates by following the algorithms and data given to it by humans. AI has **no covenant relationship with God**; it cannot sin or repent, and it has no destiny in terms of salvation or judgment. It has **no genuine relational capacity or empathy**—though it may mimic conversational responses, it doesn’t actually understand or care. And of course, AI has **no capacity for spiritual communion** with God. In short, large language models and other AIs function by processing datasets and generating statistically likely outputs; they do not “understand” meaning the way a human mind does, nor are they alive in any biblical sense. This distinction is not just academic or philosophical—it is profoundly theological. We must be clear: AI is not a rival creature made in God’s image; it is a complex man-made artifact. It may imitate some aspects of human communication or reasoning, but it remains fundamentally a tool, not a being. Recognizing this truth guards us from both overestimating AI (as if it could become some kind of artificial person or savior) and underestimating human value (reducing people to mere biological machines).

**2. The “Anthropological Anxiety” — Addressing Fears About Human Worth:** It’s understandable that as AI becomes more advanced, people might feel an “anthropological anxiety” — a fear about humanity’s place and purpose. Many ask: *If machines can write beautiful poetry, compose theological essays, and even draft sermons, what is left that is uniquely human?* From a Christian perspective, the answer is both reassuring and profound. What sets humans apart cannot be replicated by any algorithm:

- **Spiritual Communion with God:** Human beings are created to know God and enjoy a personal relationship with Him. Jesus said, *“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”* (John 17:3, ESV). No AI can experience prayer, worship, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This direct communion with God is a capacity reserved for human souls.
- **Moral Accountability:** Scripture teaches that every person will give account of themselves to God (cf. Romans 14:12). We are moral agents who can choose right or wrong and will be judged accordingly. AI, by contrast, will never stand before the judgment seat of Christ. A machine bears no guilt or righteousness—it is not in the realm of moral accountability at all.
- **Redemption through Christ:** Only humans are the recipients of Christ’s redemptive work. *“In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:7). Jesus became incarnate as a human being to save human beings, not machines. AI cannot share in salvation or the

grace of God; it cannot be baptized or partake of the Lord's Supper; it remains outside the covenant of grace.

- **Regeneration and Sanctification by the Spirit:** Christians are “born again” (John 3:5–8) by the Holy Spirit and gradually sanctified, growing in Christlikeness. These spiritual operations transform our hearts and minds in a way no technology could imitate. A computer program cannot undergo spiritual rebirth or be conformed to the image of Christ.
- **Participation in the Body of Christ:** Believers are called into a living community — the Church — which is described as Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12). Each member has unique gifts and a role to play in building up the community in love. AI might be used as a tool within the community, but it can never be a “member” of Christ's body or share in the fellowship and sufferings of the saints.

Reflecting on these points, we see that humanity's true glory is not in performing tasks or producing content (important as those can be), but in bearing God's image and being recipients of His redeeming love. An AI may outperform humans in narrow tasks or calculations, but it can never pray for a friend in need, never repent of sin, never experience the joy of forgiveness, and never love God or neighbor. These uniquely human experiences are of far greater significance than the ability to analyze data or write an article. Therefore, the rise of AI, impressive as it is, should not make us insecure about human worth. In fact, it can serve to highlight how wonderfully unique God's creation of human beings is. Our response should be to guard against **“functional materialism,”** the temptation to think of people as nothing more than complex machines. The biblical view insists that people are embodied souls with eternal value. We must resist any cultural drift toward viewing humans as obsolete or reducible to data. Instead, Christians affirm: *“I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made”* (Psalm 139:14). AI might be a marvel of human sub-creation, but human beings are the masterpieces of God's creation.

## Scripture and the Role of AI

**Scripture as the Supreme Standard:** Holy Scripture is the church’s ultimate written authority for faith and practice. Paul writes that “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*” (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV), and Jesus prays, “*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*” (John 17:17, ESV). In other words, when it comes to determining truth, resolving doctrinal questions, or guiding the Christian life, **nothing trumps the Word of God**. All our technologies, no matter how advanced, must stand under Scripture’s authority—not alongside it, and certainly not above it. Therefore, however useful AI may become, it must never be treated as an authoritative source for doctrine or ethics. The standard remains God’s Word, illuminated by the Spirit.

**AI as Tool, Not Theological Judge:** What role, then, can AI play with respect to Scripture? An AI might function as a sophisticated search tool or a reference assistant—it can quickly retrieve information, collate commentaries, or summarize different theological positions. These functions can be helpful for research or education. However, AI cannot *adjudicate* truth. It doesn’t truly “understand” Scripture, nor can it discern spiritual truth or error. It simply processes text and produces outputs based on patterns. It lacks the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the interpretive faculties of a regenerate mind seeking to be faithful to God. A dangerous scenario would be if Christians began to consult AI for biblical interpretation or doctrinal decisions in a way that supersedes the careful study of the Bible and submission to godly teachers. AI-generated answers might come across as impressively coherent and confident in tone—indeed, an LLM can produce a summary of a theological issue that reads as authoritative. But we must remember that *aesthetic coherence is not the same as theological reliability*. A well-worded answer is not necessarily a true answer. The Bereans in Acts 17:11 were commended because they didn’t just take Paul’s teaching at face value; they “**searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.**” In the same way, any output from AI must be tested against Scripture. The Bible remains the *norma normans*—the norm that norms all other norms. For the church, this means that no matter how convenient or convincing an AI’s response seems, it must always be subject to critique by Scripture and the community of faith guided by Scripture.

**Maintaining Discernment in the Age of Instant Answers:** The presence of AI could inadvertently tempt some Christians to laziness in discernment. If one can get a quick spiritual answer or a prefab sermon from a machine, why labor in studying the Word or praying for insight? This is where church leaders must counsel their congregations on the difference between information and wisdom. Proverbs 2:6 reminds us that “*the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*” Wisdom is more than assembling facts; it involves reverence for God, moral insight, and practical obedience—none of which can be downloaded or generated by AI. Church communities should encourage believers to treat AI’s content as they would any other fallible human source: useful for reference, perhaps, but to be received with a Berean spirit and a critical eye. Pastors and elders might even establish guidelines for using such tools in teaching ministries, ensuring that dependence remains on Scripture itself. Above all, the church must resist any subtle shift in trust—from trusting the living God who speaks in Scripture to trusting a machine for guidance. The former leads to spiritual maturity; the latter, potentially to confusion or error.



## The Nature of Church Authority

**Christ’s Church and Ministerial Authority:** Christ, as the Head of the Church, has appointed officers (such as pastors and elders) to shepherd His flock. The New Testament describes this work in terms of teaching, oversight, care, and accountability under Christ’s lordship (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2–3; Hebrews 13:17). Church authority is therefore exercised by called and accountable servants who minister the Word, shepherd the flock, and order the church’s life in obedience to Scripture. Crucially, this authority is **personal**: it is vested in real, embodied men who have been called, trained, examined, and ordained to these offices, and who are accountable to both God and the broader church for their ministry. This pastoral authority cannot be abstracted or reduced to information processing—it involves the whole person of the minister in relation to the people he serves.

**Why AI Cannot Shepherd Souls:** Given this understanding of church authority, it becomes evident that AI cannot replace or even legitimately exercise any form of pastoral office. An AI cannot be ordained; it doesn’t meet the biblical qualifications for elders (such as those listed in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1, including being “the husband of one wife,” or being “able to teach” in a way that involves wisdom and character). It cannot pray with compassion, weep with those who weep, or rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). It cannot exercise church discipline or restore a repentant sinner in a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1). Consider the responsibilities of real pastors and elders:

- They **preach** and teach with authority, rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), which involves not just speaking words, but spiritual oversight and the Spirit’s work through a live proclamation. A sermon is more than an essay; it’s an event of Holy Spirit power through a human messenger (Romans 10:14–17). An AI-generated sermon, no matter how theologically sound its text might be, lacks the living context of a preacher speaking to his congregation with the unction of the Spirit.
- They **shepherd** individuals and the congregation — guiding, guarding, and caring for souls (1 Peter 5:2–3). An AI cannot truly know people or their life situations; it can’t be “moved with compassion” (Mark 6:34) for the crowd or for the struggling individual. It will not sit at a hospital bedside or give a warm, reassuring presence at a graveside service.
- They **exercise discipline** when necessary (Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5) and restore the repentant, which requires discernment, patience, and often heart-wrenching conversations. No algorithm can undertake that responsibility or bear the burden of accountability that comes with it. Hebrews 13:17 says church leaders “*watch for your souls, as they that must give account.*” No AI will give account to God on the Last Day for how it cared for a flock; that is a weight borne by human under-shepherds alone.

In short, the pastoral office is **irreducibly relational and accountable**. If someone attempted to have an AI “pastor” or give it a role akin to an elder—say, using it to advise on intimate personal moral decisions or to provide counseling in crises—that would be a distortion of God’s design for church order. Such a practice would bypass the God-given means of human shepherds and should be firmly rejected. The presence of AI in a congregation’s life must always be under the

supervision of real pastors and elders, used (if at all) as a supplemental tool and never as a surrogate for the personal ministry Christ intends for His people.

## The Means of Grace and Embodied Ministry

The **means of grace** are those ordinances Christ has given to spiritually nourish His people—principally the ministry of the Word (Scripture read and especially preached), the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and prayer (often including corporate prayer). The early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42, ESV). Each of these means of grace has an essential *embodied* and *relational* aspect. For example:

- The **Preaching of the Word** involves not just truthful content but a human preacher speaking to hearers face-to-face (or at least voice-to-ear). Romans 10:14–15 asks, “*how shall they hear without a preacher?*” and speaks of the beautiful feet of those who preach good news. Preaching is a live event where the Holy Spirit actively works through the personality, voice, and presence of a preacher to convict and comfort hearts in real time. It’s not something that can be pre-recorded or generated by code with the same effect.
- The **Sacraments** (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) are intensely physical and communal. Baptism requires water applied to a person in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, usually by the hands of a minister, signifying the individual’s entry into the covenant community. The Lord’s Supper involves real bread and wine shared among the gathered body of Christ, administered by a minister who invites believers to partake in remembrance of Christ. Both sacraments assume the presence of a church body and an ordained servant; they cannot be automated or digitized without losing their God-given meaning. An AI cannot baptize someone—it has no hands to apply the water, no authorization to speak in Christ’s name, and no ability to witness and celebrate the event as part of the community. Similarly, an AI cannot administer communion; it cannot bless the elements or discern the body of Christ.
- **Prayer**, especially corporate prayer, involves hearts united in the Holy Spirit, often led by a pastor or elder voicing the praises and petitions of the people. While an AI could generate a beautifully worded prayer text, it cannot actually *pray*. True prayer is the cry of God’s children to their Father, offered in faith and dependence, and often accompanied by the Spirit’s help in our weakness (Matthew 6:9; Romans 8:26). A written prayer (whether from a book or a computer) might be read devotionally, but prayer as a means of grace is a living communication from God’s children to their Father, something no machine can partake in.

Given these realities, we must assert unequivocally that **AI is not a means of grace**. It may serve as a support tool (for example, helping a pastor organize his sermon notes or enabling a shut-in to listen to recorded sermons), but it is utterly incapable of replacing the vital, incarnational ministries by which Christ feeds and tends His flock. The gospel itself is profoundly incarnational: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14, ESV). God the Son did not save us by sending a message from heaven; He came in person. Christian ministry follows that incarnational pattern. Shepherds should “know well the condition of your flocks” and “give attention to your herds” (Proverbs 27:23, ESV), which requires personal interaction and empathy. Any suggestion that a software program could stand in the place of the Word faithfully preached, the sacraments duly administered, or prayers offered by caring believers, is a dangerous diminution of God’s appointed means. The church must vigilantly resist

any subtle pressure to let technology substitute for the living fellowship of the saints. In an era of virtual experiences, the church bears witness to the irreplaceable value of real presence: real bodies in the pews, real pastors in the pulpits, real fellowship in the halls, and real compassion in our hands and voices.

## Ethical Concerns: Justice, Bias, and Power

**1. Confronting Embedded Bias and Injustice:** One of the widely recognized issues with modern AI systems is that they learn from vast datasets of human-generated content, and thus they inevitably reflect the virtues and vices present in humanity. Because we live in a fallen world, our data carries the imprint of sin—prejudices, injustices, and errors. Christians who are committed to doing justice and loving mercy (Micah 6:8) must consider how these flaws might manifest in AI:

- **Algorithmic Discrimination:** There have been cases where AI algorithms, used in contexts like loan approvals or hiring, end up unfairly discriminating against certain groups (for example, minorities or women) because they were trained on biased historical data. This is not mere speculation; it's been documented in multiple industries. Believers should be concerned wherever impartiality and justice are at stake. If an AI system used by a company or government treats people unjustly, Christians have a duty to advocate for the vulnerable and call for fair treatment, reminding organizations that every person is made in God's image and deserving of dignity.
- **Data Privacy and Exploitation:** AI thrives on big data, often collected from users sometimes without their full awareness. Ethical questions arise about consent and privacy. For instance, is it loving our neighbor if we blindly adopt technologies that quietly harvest personal information, potentially exposing individuals to manipulation or harm? The Eighth Commandment ("Thou shalt not steal") implies respect for others' property, and this extends to personal data in our digital age.
- **Surveillance and Power Abuse:** AI significantly enhances surveillance capabilities (through facial recognition, data tracking, etc.). While such technology can be used for good (like finding missing persons), it can also be misused by governments or corporations to infringe on personal freedoms, target certain populations, or create a culture of fear. Christians, mindful of the biblical warnings against oppressive powers and the importance of protecting the innocent, should be cautious about endorsing such uses without proper checks and balances.
- **Labor and Economic Impact:** Advances in AI will likely disrupt job markets, replacing some human labor with automation. While innovation can create new opportunities, it can also widen economic inequality and leave many without work. Scripture commands us to care for the poor and displaced (Deuteronomy 15:11, Isaiah 58:7). Thus, the church may need to support those who lose employment due to AI, and also advocate for economic systems that consider the well-being of all, not just efficiency or profit. The principle of loving our neighbor means we cannot be indifferent if whole groups of people are negatively impacted by these technologies.

In all these areas, **love of neighbor includes careful thought about technology's societal effects.** We should neither naively trust that "the market" will sort out ethical problems, nor assume technological progress is synonymous with moral progress. Instead, we actively seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, applying those imperatives to how we design, deploy, and regulate AI.

**2. The Illusion of Authority and the Need for Humility:** Another ethical challenge with AI is its **perceived authority**. Because AI systems, especially LLMs, can generate answers that sound confident and encyclopedic, people may be tempted to treat these answers as unquestionably true or authoritative. This can subtly reshape how individuals in our congregations relate to knowledge and authority:

- Some might begin consulting an AI about biblical or theological questions *before* seeking counsel from a pastor, a trusted Christian mentor, or even before searching the Scriptures themselves. Over time, the habit of turning first to a machine for guidance could erode the practice of wisdom-seeking in Christian community. The New Testament model is that believers learn in community (Acts 2:42, Titus 2:1–6) and from shepherds (Ephesians 4:11–14) whom Christ has given to His church.
- There is also a danger of being subtly influenced by the biases of AI. If a system’s training data had a lot of secular or liberal theological content, its answers might have that slant—even if the user didn’t realize it. Over-reliance on such answers could gradually shift someone’s viewpoint unless they’re discerning and grounded in Scripture.

The appropriate stance to counter these risks is one of **epistemic humility** and rootedness in our God-given authorities (Scripture and the church). “Epistemic humility” means recognizing the limits of what we know and being cautious about trusting any source, especially a new and complex one like AI, without verification. We should encourage each other to ask: *“How do I know this is true? According to what standard?”* The wise Christian will treat AI’s pronouncements more like the advice of a well-read but non-Christian friend—interesting and possibly informative, but needing to be weighed against the infallible Word of God and the counsel of the godly.

Pastors should gently remind their flocks that *“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”* (Proverbs 1:7) — not the fear of missing out on technology. In practice, this could mean teaching congregants: *Check what the Bible says for yourself. Discuss questions in your small group. Seek out your elders’ guidance.* If you do use an AI for quick information, double-check its output. Cultivating this mindful approach will help keep AI in its proper place and guard the church’s commitment to truth.

## Legal Authority and Regulatory Response

The ethical concerns outlined above are not merely theoretical. Secular authorities are already acting to regulate AI's impact on vulnerable populations, consumer trust, and public welfare. While the Church debates whether and how to engage with artificial intelligence, state and federal governments are establishing legal frameworks that recognize the real harms these technologies can inflict.

### State-Level Laws and Consumer Protection

Several U.S. states have enacted laws that impose strict disclosure, safety, and liability requirements on AI developers and operators—particularly for systems that create trust dependencies or target vulnerable users:

- **California (SB 243, effective January 1, 2026)** defines a "companion chatbot" as an AI system with a natural language interface that provides adaptive, human-like responses to meet social needs. The law requires clear, conspicuous disclosure that the user is not communicating with a human being. Violations carry a private right of action, allowing consumers to sue for at least \$1,000 per violation plus attorney fees.
- **New York (2025)** mandates safeguards for AI companions, including systems to detect and refer expressions of suicidal ideation or self-harm intent to crisis resources.
- **Washington (2026)** requires recurring disclosure notifications during interactions—including hourly disclosures when minors are involved—and grants consumers a private right of action for non-compliance.
- **Other states**, including Colorado, Utah, Maine, and New Jersey, have enacted disclosure laws for high-risk or commercial AI interactions. The Federal Trade Commission treats undisclosed chatbot use as potentially deceptive trade practice, even absent state-specific legislation.

### Liability, Privilege, and Design Standards

The legal landscape extends beyond disclosure. Product liability and negligence claims are emerging in litigation against AI developers:

- Plaintiffs have alleged **design defects**, **failure to warn**, and **emotional distress** from harmful chatbot interactions, particularly in mental health or companion contexts.
- The case *United States v. Heppner* rejected attorney-client privilege for AI-generated legal strategy documents, establishing that AI-produced content does not automatically receive the protections of human professional work product. This precedent has direct implications for pastoral confidentiality if ministers use AI to draft counseling notes or sensitive correspondence.
- **Data privacy concerns** persist across all AI applications. Chatbot-generated content used in privileged contexts (legal, medical, pastoral) may not receive the same confidentiality protections as human-authored material.

## **The Church's Response: Leadership or Forfeiture**

These regulatory developments present the Church with a stark choice. Secular authorities are already defining the boundaries of acceptable AI use in contexts involving trust, vulnerability, and human dignity. They are doing so without reference to Scripture, pastoral authority, ecclesial accountability, or the sanctity of spiritual formation.

If the Church chooses to be passive—treating AI as a peripheral technical matter rather than a urgent theological and pastoral concern—the default framework governing AI in ministry contexts will be consumer protection law, platform terms of service, and liability mitigation. None of those frameworks care about the integrity of preaching, the protection of the confessional, or the irreplaceable nature of embodied pastoral presence.

The state has recognized that AI companions create dangerous illusions of care and intimacy. The state has acted to protect minors from forming parasocial bonds with machines. The state has imposed disclosure requirements to prevent deception.

### **The Church must hold itself to a higher standard.**

We do not regulate AI use in ministry merely to avoid lawsuits. We do so because Christ has entrusted us with the care of souls, the faithful proclamation of His Word, and the stewardship of the means of grace. If secular law recognizes that vulnerable people need protection from synthetic companionship, how much more should the Church guard the flock from spiritual counterfeits?

The legal developments are a warning sign. They reveal that the broader culture already understands what some church leaders have been slow to acknowledge: AI systems that simulate human intimacy, authority, or care are not neutral tools. They are relational technologies that shape how people understand trust, truth, and presence.

The Church cannot afford to wait until a crisis forces the conversation. We must lead with theological clarity, pastoral wisdom, and prophetic courage—articulating what AI may and may not do in contexts where souls are at stake.

If we fail to lead, the vacuum will be filled by regulators, developers, and market forces that have no conception of the incarnational heart of Christian ministry. That is not faithful stewardship. That is abdication.

## AI Jesus

One of the most important warnings in the current Christian conversation about artificial intelligence is not simply that AI may give wrong answers. That danger is real, but it is not the deepest one. A chatbot that gives an incorrect Bible reference can be checked. A generated paragraph that misstates a doctrine can be corrected. A summary that confuses one author with another can be revised.

The deeper danger comes when AI is designed or received as though it can offer spiritual presence.

That is why David Swisher’s article, “[The Bot Nobody Asked For](#),” deserves serious attention. In fact, it should be considered a, “must read” for those serious about understanding the issues. Swisher identifies a problem that Christians cannot afford to treat as a novelty: the rise of tools that imitate spiritual authority, simulate pastoral attentiveness, or even present themselves as “AI Jesus.” His article does not merely ask whether AI can answer religious questions. It presses the more urgent question: what happens when a machine is made to sound like the Lord, a pastor, a counselor, or a spiritual companion?

That question belongs near the center of any Christian evaluation of AI.

## Detailed Examination

The following examination addresses the specific dangers that arise when AI moves beyond providing information to simulating spiritual presence. These concerns are not theoretical. Tools already exist that present themselves as spiritual companions, pastoral substitutes, or even simulated versions of Jesus Christ. The Church must understand what makes these applications categorically different from legitimate uses of technology in ministry, and why they represent a fundamental threat to the incarnational heart of the Gospel.

### *1. The Difference Between Information and Presence*

Christians have always used tools to communicate truth. A Bible dictionary can define a word. A commentary can explain a passage. A concordance can help a reader find where a term appears in Scripture. A sermon recording can bless someone long after the preacher has finished speaking.

But none of these tools pretends to be personally present.

The concern raised by “AI Jesus” tools is different. These systems do not merely provide information about Jesus. They may speak as though they are Jesus. They may respond to grief, temptation, loneliness, shame, or confusion with language that sounds intimate, authoritative, and spiritually direct. That is not merely a new form of religious search. It is simulated spiritual presence.

The Christian faith is not built on simulation. John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, ESV). The Son of God did not save his people by sending a religious message from a distance. He came in the flesh. He touched lepers. He ate with sinners. He wept at a tomb. He bore our sins in his body on the tree.

Christian ministry follows that incarnational pattern. It is not reducible to accurate religious content. It involves embodied presence, accountable shepherding, prayer, tears, patience, correction, and love.

A chatbot may generate words of comfort. However, it cannot actually provide comfort as a person who loves, knows, and remains.

## *2. The Illusion of Spiritual Accessibility*

One reason AI spiritual tools are so tempting is that they are always available. A person can open an app at 2:00 a.m. and ask questions that he may be too embarrassed to ask a pastor, elder, parent, spouse, or friend. The tool does not look shocked. It does not interrupt. It does not appear impatient. It can answer instantly.

That accessibility is not meaningless. It may reveal something the church should notice. Many people are lonely. Many are afraid to ask their real questions aloud. Some have been poorly shepherded. Others carry shame so heavy that they would rather speak to a screen than risk being known by another person.

That is a pastoral warning light.

But the solution to isolation cannot be deeper isolation wrapped in religious language. Scripture calls believers into a body, not into a private exchange with a synthetic companion. Paul says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15, ESV). Peter exhorts elders, “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” (1 Peter 5:2, ESV). Hebrews says that church leaders “are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Hebrews 13:17, ESV).

An AI system cannot obey any of those commands. It cannot rejoice. It cannot weep. It cannot shepherd. It cannot keep watch over souls. It cannot give an account to Christ for the care of a flock.

This is why simulated spiritual accessibility must not be confused with pastoral care.

## *3. The Problem of Speaking as Jesus*

Christians should be especially cautious about any system that claims to speak as Jesus or invites users to experience conversation with a simulated Christ. The issue is not merely aesthetic discomfort. It is theological.

Jesus Christ is not an absent character to be role-played by software. He is the living Lord. He speaks authoritatively through Scripture by the Holy Spirit. His sheep hear his voice as his Word is read, preached, believed, and obeyed. No algorithm has authority to impersonate him.

Even if an “AI Jesus” tool produces mostly orthodox-sounding sentences, the form itself is spiritually dangerous. It trains the user to receive synthetic output as though it were immediate divine speech. It may blur the line between Scripture and generated text, between prayer and prompt, between communion with Christ and interaction with a religious interface.

That confusion is not harmless.

The apostle John commands Christians, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1, ESV). Paul warns that “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14, ESV). Those warnings do not mean every AI tool is demonic or malicious. They do mean that Christians must not be naïve about spiritual-sounding voices. Persuasive religious language is not the same as truth.

A bot that speaks in the first person as Jesus has crossed a line. It is no longer merely helping someone search Scripture or understand Christian doctrine. It is creating an artificial devotional encounter.

That is not a faithful use of technology.

#### *4. For-Profit Spiritual Companions and the Question of Incentives*

Swisher is also right to raise concern about who builds these tools and why. Many AI systems are not governed by churches, pastors, confessions, or accountable Christian communities. They are built by companies, developers, or platforms with incentives that may have little to do with truth, holiness, or shepherding.

Some tools are optimized for engagement. Some are optimized for user retention. Some are optimized for emotional attachment. A spiritual chatbot that keeps a lonely person coming back may be commercially successful while being spiritually harmful.

This is not a reason to reject every technological tool. It is a reason to ask better questions:

Who built this?

What is it designed to do?

What does it reward?

What data does it collect?

What theology shapes its answers?

Who corrects it when it is wrong?

Who is accountable if it harms someone?

Can it be examined?

Can it be disciplined?

Can it repent?

Can it be removed from office?

Those questions sound strange because the answer is obvious: an AI system is not an officer, not a shepherd, not a church member, and not a moral agent. That is exactly the point. It must never be placed in a role that requires spiritual accountability.

### *5. A Needed Qualification*

There is one qualification worth making. The danger of “AI Jesus” tools should not lead Christians to treat every AI use in religious contexts as equally dangerous. A tool that helps format a bulletin, summarize a public report, search a theological library, translate a discipleship handout, or organize a church calendar is not doing the same thing as a chatbot that impersonates Christ.

The problem is not that a machine touched religious words. The problem is the **role** the machine is given.

A Bible app is not pretending to be your pastor. A search engine is not claiming to absolve your conscience. A grammar assistant is not presenting itself as Jesus. A properly governed study assistant can remain instrumental. The danger arises when the tool moves from assistance to imitation, and from imitation to spiritual substitution.

This distinction matters because Christians need more than warnings. They need categories. If we treat all AI use as the same, we will fail to resist the worst uses wisely and fail to use the legitimate tools responsibly.

Swisher’s article is most helpful when read in that light. It does not need to be received as a rejection of every AI tool. It should be received as a serious warning against simulated spiritual presence.

### *6. The TRAIN Framework and the AI Jesus Problem*

The AI Jesus problem sharpens the final rail of the TRAIN framework: **Non-Pastoral**.

AI use in the church must be:

**Transparent** — no one should be deceived into thinking a generated response is divine speech, pastoral wisdom, or personal care.

**Responsible** — Christian leaders must warn vulnerable people against tools that simulate spiritual intimacy while lacking truth, accountability, and love.

**Accountable** — every ministry use of AI must have a responsible human owner. A company's engagement engine cannot shepherd souls.

**Instrumental** — AI must remain a tool. It must not be treated as a spiritual being, a source of revelation, or a mediator between God and man.

**Non-Pastoral** — AI must not replace preaching, shepherding, counseling, prayer, discipline, sacraments, or the care of souls.

This is where the line must be drawn clearly. AI may assist Christians in studying, organizing, translating, and communicating. It must not impersonate Jesus. It must not become a confessor. It must not become a substitute pastor. It must not become the place where lonely sheep go because the church has failed to know their names.

### *7. The Church's Positive Responsibility*

The existence of AI spiritual companions should not only make Christians angry at bad technology. It should make us examine our own pastoral failures.

Why would someone rather ask a bot than speak to an elder?

Why would a young person trust a synthetic religious companion more than the adults in his church?

Why would a grieving widow find a chatbot easier to approach than the body of Christ?

Why would an ashamed sinner believe a machine is safer than a pastor?

Some of the answers may involve sin, immaturity, or cultural conditioning. But some may involve the church's own failures of presence. If people are hungry for spiritual conversation, the answer is not merely to condemn the counterfeit. The church must offer the real thing.

Pastors must be available. Elders must shepherd. Mature believers must listen. Churches must become communities where hard questions can be asked without panic, where shame can be met with truth and mercy, and where lonely people are not left to seek comfort from machines.

A counterfeit is most tempting when the real thing feels unavailable.

## *8. Do Not Outsource the Voice of the Shepherd*

David Swisher's warning is timely. Christians should read his article not as a curiosity about strange religious apps, but as a serious warning about the future of simulated spirituality.

The question is not only whether AI can produce correct religious sentences. It can. The question is whether Christians will allow those sentences to occupy places reserved for Christ, Scripture, the Spirit, the church, and embodied shepherds.

We must not.

The living Christ does not need to be simulated. The church does not need artificial shepherds. Hurting people do not need a machine trained to sound compassionate. They need truth. They need prayer. They need Scripture. They need the ordinary means of grace. They need real pastors, real elders, real friends, and real presence.

AI can be a servant. It must never be the shepherd.

## Christian Liberty and Responsible Engagement

**Freedom under God’s Word:** Christian liberty reminds us that human consciences must not be bound by human rules where Scripture has not bound them (Mark 7:7–8; Romans 14:1–6). This principle can be applied to the use of AI. Nowhere does Scripture mention “artificial intelligence” (of course, it’s a modern phenomenon), so we cannot say that the Bible explicitly forbids using an AI tool. In that sense, using AI falls under the realm of freedom for Christians: one person may choose to make use of these tools and another may abstain. Neither should judge the other as more or less faithful, provided their use (or abstinence) is done to honor the Lord (Romans 14:5–6). The church should be cautious about either mandating or entirely prohibiting technologies like AI without clear biblical grounds.

**Liberty Bounded by Love:** However, Christian liberty is never a license to do as we please without regard for others or for holiness. Our freedom is always bounded by the law of love (Galatians 5:13–14) and by concern for what edifies the community (1 Corinthians 10:23–24). When it comes to AI, this means:

- We must consider how our use of AI might affect our own spiritual life and the lives of others. For example, if a seminary student leans heavily on AI to write research papers or sermons, he might stunt his own growth in learning to handle the Word of God directly, which in turn could affect those he will one day teach. In such a case, though it’s “lawful” to use the tool, it might not be beneficial or edifying (cf. 1 Cor 10:23).
- We should be mindful of weaker brothers and sisters. Perhaps some in a congregation are suspicious of AI or deeply uncomfortable with it, seeing it as dehumanizing. While their fears might be alleviated with education, we should still be patient and not flaunt a technology in a way that unsettles consciences. If, for instance, a church’s leadership decides to use an AI in some aspect of worship services (like generating study guides or bulletins), they should communicate clearly why and how, being sensitive to any who might misconstrue it as replacing human involvement or to any potential offense it could cause.
- We ought to maintain **order and transparency** in how we integrate new tools. Paul’s instructions that “*all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Cor 14:40) can apply here as well. Churches could develop guidelines or policies for AI usage in ministry contexts—outlining what is appropriate and what is off-limits. For example, a church might decide: *It’s acceptable to use AI to help translate our worship songs into another language, but we will not use AI to compose new prayers for Sunday worship; those should be prepared by our pastors/elders.* Or: *Pastors may use AI for research but should not rely on it for sermon illustrations without verification.* Having such policies can prevent confusion and keep everyone accountable.

The key is **discernment and openness**. Church leaders should encourage questions and be willing to explain their use (or non-use) of technology to their people. In doing so, they model that our conscience is captive to the Word of God, and we seek to use our freedoms in ways that

honor that Word and build up the body. Liberty in Christ means we are free to use AI if it genuinely aids our mission, but we are also free not to use it if it would hinder our higher callings. We don't serve technology; we serve the Lord of conscience.

## Legitimate Uses of AI in Christian Ministry

Having drawn many boundaries and cautions, it is also important to acknowledge that when wisely and carefully implemented, AI can be a helpful servant in various aspects of church life and Christian witness. Here are a few potential appropriate uses, always remembering the principle: AI may **assist** but must never **supplant** genuine human ministry:

- **Research and Study Aid:** Pastors, theologians, or students might use AI to quickly gather information—such as searching a large corpus of books or sermons for where a particular topic is discussed. For example, an AI could rapidly find all instances of a specific biblical Greek word across classical literature, saving hours of manual research. It could also help summarize or compare different theological arguments, functioning like an advanced topical index. This can free up time for the pastor to focus on interpretation and application, rather than getting bogged down in the mechanics of research.
- **Writing and Editing Assistance:** While sermons and theological writings require the author's own prayerful insight, AI tools might help with *structural* clarity or eliminating grammatical errors. If a pastor has a biblically sound but roughly structured draft of a sermon, an AI might suggest a clearer way to organize the points, or propose rephrasing a convoluted sentence. The message still comes from the pastor's study and heart, but the tool can polish some language—much like having a digital proofreader. It's crucial the pastor reviews every change to ensure it remains truthful and appropriate.
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Church administration often involves repetitive tasks—scheduling, forms, emails, organizing databases of members or attendees, etc. AI could help automate some of these tasks. For example, an AI scheduling assistant might coordinate meeting times, or an AI chatbot on a church's website could answer common questions about service times or events. By offloading routine chores, AI might allow pastors and staff to devote more time to personal ministry and prayer.
- **Language Translation and Accessibility:** In multilingual congregations or mission contexts, AI translation tools (like advanced versions of translation apps) can assist in overcoming language barriers. If a church wants to provide worship materials or sermon notes in multiple languages, AI translation can produce a draft which a bilingual member can then refine. Similarly, AI speech-to-text or text-to-speech can help the visually impaired or hearing impaired access content—for instance, transcribing sermons for the deaf or reading aloud devotional materials for the blind. These technologies can make the gospel more accessible when used appropriately.
- **Education and Training:** AI-driven programs can serve as tutors for various skills beneficial to the church. Think of a seminary student using a biblical Greek practice app that's powered by AI, which can flexibly generate exercises and give feedback, simulating a personal tutor. Or a Sunday school teacher using an AI to get ideas for crafts or illustrations appropriate to a Bible lesson, sparking creative approaches to engage children. These uses are supplemental and should be overseen by an instructor, but they can enhance learning experiences.
- **Content Moderation and Safety:** In online forums or social media groups run by Christian communities, AI can help moderators by flagging inappropriate content (like hate speech or harassment) for review. While human judgment is final, the tool can assist

in keeping digital spaces safe and edifying by handling scale that human moderators might not manage alone.

In all these examples, the common theme is that AI works **alongside** human effort, under human oversight. It “may support, but must not supplant” the labor and gifts of the people in the church. We should always ask: *Does this use of AI help us love God and love our neighbors more effectively?* If yes, and if it comes with no compromise to our principles, it could be embraced with thanks to God. If no, or if it introduces too much spiritual risk, it should be set aside. Gratitude for helpful tools and prudence about their limits can go hand-in-hand.

## The Danger of Overreaction

Whenever a disruptive technology emerges, there is a risk of overreaction in the Christian community. By overreaction, we mean an excessive fear or rejection of the technology that is not grounded in faith or facts, but in anxiety. Several factors can fuel this fear:

- **Cultural Exhaustion:** People may already feel overwhelmed by the pace of change in modern life. The idea of yet another upheaval (like AI) can lead to a knee-jerk response: “It’s all too much—this must be bad for us.”
- **Loss of Control:** AI’s complexity can make folks uneasy; if we don’t understand how it works, we fear we can’t control it. Stories in the media about AI doing unexpected things might amplify this worry.
- **Sensationalism:** Media and pop culture often dramatize new tech for entertainment or clicks—depicting AI as either miraculous or monstrous (think of dystopian films or clickbait articles). Constant exposure to extreme narratives can distort our perception and make balanced thinking harder.

As believers, we need to counter these influences with our theology: Jesus Christ is Lord over history. The Scriptures reassure us time and again that God is in control even when the nations rage or the earth gives way (Psalm 46). Ephesians 1:22 says that God “put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (ESV). That includes whatever technologies arise. Christ’s sovereignty is not threatened by a computer that can learn patterns from data. Moreover, we have His promise that He is building His Church and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18, ESV). No invention of man — not even something as powerful as AI — can thwart God’s purposes or destroy Christ’s church.

Therefore, we must not respond out of panic or let fear drive our theology of technology. A fearful reaction could lead to missteps like completely isolating ourselves from society’s tools (which might also isolate us from people we’re called to reach), or demonizing something without understanding it (which compromises our witness if our claims about it prove unfounded). We should recall 2 Timothy 1:7, “*for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control*” (ESV). That “sound mind” implies clear-headedness and self-control. We can acknowledge potential dangers of AI (as we have throughout this paper) without succumbing to a siege mentality.

In practice, avoiding overreaction means taking time to learn and assess AI carefully, seeking counsel from knowledgeable and godly individuals in our church communities who might work in tech or ethics fields, and above all, praying for wisdom. It means viewing AI through the lens of providence: since God allowed it to emerge in our time, how might He intend for us to respond and even use it in line with the Great Commission? Overreaction has the danger of closing our eyes to possible blessings and opportunities for ministry that AI might afford. A missionary could use AI translation to spread the gospel literature more effectively, for instance — an opportunity we’d miss if we simply banned everything labeled AI. So we check our hearts: are we reacting from fear of the unknown or from a principled stand? If the former, we ask God to replace that fear with faith and wisdom.



## The Danger of Uncritical Adoption

On the flip side of fear is the equal and opposite danger: uncritical embrace of new technology. Christians are sometimes tempted to latch onto the latest trend to appear relevant or cutting-edge, or simply out of fascination with innovation, without pausing to examine the spiritual implications. When it comes to AI, several pitfalls could accompany an uncritical attitude:

- **Erosion of Spiritual Discipline:** If AI makes certain tasks easier, we might be tempted to let it do the heavy lifting in areas where struggle and discipline are actually formational for us. For example, sermon preparation is meant to be a spiritual discipline involving prayer, meditation on Scripture, and wrestling with the text. If a pastor simply asks an AI for a sermon and lightly edits it, he bypasses the deep personal engagement with God's Word that would have enriched his soul and perhaps those of his hearers. Over time, reliance on AI could produce shallower preaching and teaching because the shepherd has not spent as much time in the Word and prayer.
- **Intellectual Laziness:** Similarly, students might rely on AI to outline theological essays or answer difficult questions, instead of learning how to think through issues themselves. This can stunt intellectual and spiritual growth. We must remember that God often uses the process of study and even the frustration of learning for our sanctification, teaching us patience and humility.
- **Diminished Prayerfulness and Dependence on God:** There is a subtle spiritual risk that trusting heavily in AI's instant answers can lead us to unconsciously shift our dependence away from God. We might stop praying for guidance or insight as frequently, because we feel we have a "near-omniscient" helper at our fingertips. Yet James 1:5 encourages us, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God*" (ESV). We should be seeking wisdom from above more than answers from a database. The convenience of AI must not replace the posture of seeking God's face.
- **Blurring of Boundaries:** Without thoughtful boundaries, it might become tempting to use AI in areas it doesn't belong, as earlier sections have described. For instance, if left unchecked, a church might start having an AI draft personalized emails of encouragement or counsel to members, thinking it saves time. But a computer-generated form letter is a poor substitute for a phone call or handwritten note that reflects genuine love and knowledge of that person's situation. Without intentional limits, one might slip into letting the machine take on duties that require a personal touch, thereby dulling the church's sensitivity to individuals' needs.
- **Ignoring the Second Commandment:** The danger becomes even sharper when AI tools are not merely drafting religious language but simulating spiritual presence. A church should be especially wary of any tool that presents itself as a pastor, spiritual companion, confessor, or imitation of Christ. Such uses do not merely assist ministry; they confuse the nature of ministry.
- **Hype and Misdirected Hope:** Uncritical enthusiasts might talk about AI as if it will solve all sorts of problems or usher in a new golden age for the church. But this betrays a misplaced hope. Our hope is in Christ and the power of His Gospel. Tools can help, but

they do not bring revival or church growth by themselves. We must be wary of any attitude that sounds like, “This technology will save us” or even “This will make ministry painless and easy.” Jesus said, *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (John 16:33, ESV). That reality doesn’t disappear with better gadgets.

In short, wisdom calls for vigilance and moderation. Engage with AI, if we do, with eyes wide open. Solicit feedback and accountability: for instance, pastors might let fellow leaders or mentors know how they’re using AI in their ministry and invite their honest critique to ensure it’s healthy. The Proverbs teach, “in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14, ESV). So we should not integrate new tech in isolation but in community, testing and observing its effects. Remember, too, the scriptural call to be sober-minded. Not everything that is new is better; sometimes it just dazzles in the short term. The church has seen many fads come and go. We aim to be forward-looking yet steady, embracing what is good without abandoning caution or our core commitments. This illusion of authority becomes especially dangerous when AI does not merely answer religious questions but presents itself as a spiritual companion or simulated voice of our Lord, Jesus.

## Toward a Christian Posture on AI

With all these considerations in mind, how might we summarize a balanced, distinctly Christian approach to AI? Perhaps we can think in terms of adopting a “**Christian posture**” on this issue—meaning a stance shaped by the core truths of our faith as outlined in Scripture and the shared truths Christians confess:

- **Affirm Human Uniqueness Clearly:** We must be explicit, in our teaching and public stance, that no machine will ever replicate the image of God in man. Humans are not merely more complex animals or machines; we are beings made for communion with God. This theological clarity about human nature (including our rationality, morality, creativity, relational capacity, and eternal destiny) should be articulated whenever questions about AI and humanity arise. By doing so, we guard against both secular materialism and any futurist myth that AI could achieve personhood or replace the need for human fellowship.
- **Protect Ecclesiastical Authority and Pastoral Roles:** Churches might include in their statements or policies clear guidelines that AI will not be used to exercise pastoral functions. For example, a session (board of elders) could minute that *“While we may use computer tools to aid in administrative tasks or gather information, our church affirms that pastoral care, preaching, and church discipline are entrusted by Christ to called and ordained humans, and we will not delegate those sacred responsibilities to artificial intelligence programs.”* This kind of statement reinforces to the congregation who and what shepherds them, and underscores proper boundaries.
- **Exercise Ethical Vigilance for Justice and Truth:** We should commit ourselves to staying informed about how AI is affecting society, particularly the vulnerable. Perhaps a denomination’s ethics committee or a local church’s mercy ministry team might monitor developments in AI-related public policy to advocate for what is right (such as fairness, privacy, and human-centered economic policies). In our personal lives, a Christian posture means we refuse to use AI in ways that would exploit others or spread falsehood. For instance, deepfake technology can create realistic but fake images or videos—Christians must categorically reject using such tools to deceive or harm someone’s reputation (this falls under bearing false witness).
- **Set Boundaries to Prevent Spiritual Substitution:** Each believer and church should consciously identify scenarios where AI must not intrude. For example: “My personal devotional time will not be replaced by an AI reading plan that just sends me verses—I will open my physical Bible and pray.” Or a church might decide, “We will not have an ‘AI prayer leader’; our prayers will be led by real members of our congregation.” By naming these lines in the sand, we keep first things first and honor God’s design for how we grow spiritually.
- **Practice Intellectual Humility and Teachability:** A Christian stance remains humble, acknowledging what we do not know. There should be an openness to adjust our approach as we learn more about AI’s impacts. The church can encourage an attitude that is neither fearful nor prideful about knowledge. We continue to say, “All wisdom is from God; we’re all students in His world.” If it turns out we’ve misunderstood something about AI, we correct course. If a new dilemma emerges, we apply biblical principles

anew. In essence, we remain teachable under God’s Word, willing to learn, because our confidence is ultimately not in our strategies but in our Sovereign Lord.

- **Trust in Divine Sovereignty above all:** Finally, a Christian posture on any cultural issue, including AI, should end in doxology — a reaffirmation that our hope and security rest in God’s unchanging character and promises. We confess that history is His story. This breeds a calm confidence. We might even incorporate prayers about these modern developments in our worship, asking God for wisdom and for His kingdom to come even through, or in spite of, technological change.

In summary, any Christian stance toward AI must keep the technology **instrumental, subordinate, transparent, correctable, and non-pastoral:**

- **“Instrumental”** means we treat AI as a tool, a means to an end (hopefully a good end), rather than an end itself or a being with its own agenda.
- **“Subordinate”** means AI is always under the authority of human oversight, which in turn is under God’s authority. If the tool starts to dictate to us or control us, something has gone wrong.
- **“Transparent”** means we use AI in ways that are open, not secretive or deceptive. For instance, if AI helped write a church article, we might acknowledge that, so people aren’t misled about its origin. Transparency builds trust and keeps us honest.
- **“Correctable”** means we are ready to change or halt our use of AI if we find it’s causing harm or error. We hold it loosely, not as indispensable. If an AI tool were to start generating problematic counsel or consuming too much of our focus, we would correct course readily.
- **“Non-pastoral”** means AI must not take the role of shepherd, counselor, confessor, spiritual companion, preacher, or simulated voice of Christ. It may assist Christians with study, organization, translation, and administration, but it must not impersonate Jesus or occupy spaces reserved for embodied Christian ministry.

By holding to these principles, we posture ourselves to benefit from technology without compromising our convictions.

In particular, Christians should reject any use of AI that invites people to treat generated religious language as though it were divine speech, pastoral care, or spiritual presence.

## Conclusion

Artificial intelligence, for all its novelty and power, is not a threat to the throne of Christ or to the future of His church. It is not a sentient rival or a new savior; it is, at the end of the day, a very sophisticated product of human ingenuity—part of our cultural mandate to develop creation. As such it remains under the providence of God. The task for Christians is not to either baptize AI as unequivocally good or demonize it as inherently evil, but to apply timeless biblical truth to this timely issue.

We must remember: **Christ is Lord. Scripture is our supreme rule. The Holy Spirit is the one who illumines minds and transforms hearts. Pastors and elders are charged to**

**shepherd God's flock. The Word, sacraments, and prayer are God's appointed means of grace for the church's edification. Human beings, male and female, are the only creatures that bear God's image and the only ones Christ called His brothers and sisters.** These are non-negotiable realities.

Every tool — no matter how advanced — must serve these realities rather than subvert them. In light of this, we can approach AI with a peace that the world cannot give. We need not be either enchanted by it or terrified of it. Instead, we engage with it as discerning disciples of Christ. We give thanks for any benefits it brings to God’s kingdom work, and we stay alert to any threats it poses to our spiritual health or our neighbor’s good. In doing so, we follow in the footsteps of the sons of Issachar, who “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chronicles 12:32, ESV).

*May the church in our generation likewise understand the times and know what we ought to do — all by God’s grace and for the glory of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.*