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Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the Church's Captivity to the Spirit of the Age

PART IV

INSTITUTIONS, POWER, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE MANAGED FUTURE

CHAPTER 20

Artificial Intelligence, Digital Christianity, Surveillance, and Synthetic Reality

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Abstract

This chapter examines artificial intelligence and digital systems as powerful human tools that can extend education, accessibility, research, communication, administration, medicine, creativity, security, and gospel dissemination, while also mediating truth, automating judgment, simulating spiritual authority, weakening embodied fellowship, and enabling surveillance at unprecedented scale. Building upon Chapter 19's analysis of political and institutional power, it argues that digital systems increasingly observe, classify, predict, rank, reward, exclude, and shape human behaviour. Through sustained exposition of [Genesis 1:26-28](#), [Psalm 115:1-8](#), [Proverbs 4:20-27](#), [1 Corinthians 6:12](#), and [Hebrews 10:19-25](#), the chapter develops a biblical theology of technological stewardship grounded in the image of God, accountable dominion, guarded attention, freedom from mastery, and embodied communion. It distinguishes intelligence from wisdom, information from truth, prediction from providence, simulation from presence, responsiveness from love, and technical capability from moral permission. It examines AI-generated sermons, prayers, counselling, religious avatars, synthetic prophecy, digital church, algorithmic gatekeeping, deepfakes, voice cloning, bot networks, biometric identification, behavioural profiling, automated bias, intellectual dependency, and data extraction. Current evidence from AI governance, education, labour, child protection, African policy, and digital-religion scholarship is handled with explicit distinctions between verified fact, interpretation, plausible risk, and prophetic possibility. The chapter neither demonises AI nor baptises innovation. It calls developers, governments, churches, educators, parents, workers, and believers to truthful disclosure, human oversight, data restraint, embodied fellowship, intellectual discipline, protection of the vulnerable, repentance, and readiness for Christ's return. In the last second before midnight, the church must use machines without becoming machine-shaped and receive technological assistance without surrendering conscience, communion, accountability, or hope in the crucified, risen, reigning, and returning Christ.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; digital Christianity; image of God; synthetic media; surveillance; algorithmic authority; embodied church; technological stewardship; rapture readiness

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When the Machine Learns the Shepherd's Voice

A machine enters the sanctuary without feet. It has studied thousands of sermons, memorised the rhythms of consolation, learned when to say grace, discovered which phrases sound prophetic, and mastered the cadence by which a wounded person feels heard. It never kneels, yet it can compose a prayer. It never repents, yet it can explain repentance. It has never buried a child, sat beside a hospital bed, resisted temptation, forgiven an enemy, or trembled before the holiness of God, yet it can produce language about all these things in seconds.

The congregation may not know when the machine is speaking. Its words can arrive through the pastor's voice, a cloned voice, a religious avatar, a devotional application, a counselling chatbot, an automated message, or a video of a person who never stood before the camera. The sentences may be elegant. The doctrine may sometimes be correct. The emotional tone may be more polished than that of a tired human being. The danger therefore does not begin when the machine sounds foolish. It begins when imitation becomes convincing enough to conceal the absence of worship, conscience, covenant, presence, and accountability.

Chapter 19 examined political religion and showed how governments, courts, corporations, donors, movements, and international institutions translate moral assumptions into law, policy, funding, professional standards, and public pressure. The present chapter follows that power into the technological systems through which modern institutions increasingly operate. A law may define an objective, but an algorithm may decide whom the objective reaches. A policy may promise inclusion, but a database may deny the person whose record does not match. A platform may praise free expression, but ranking systems determine which speech becomes visible. A church may proclaim pastoral care, but digital systems may decide which member receives attention, which prayer request becomes data, and which sermon travels farther than the others.

The unique concern of this chapter is therefore infrastructure. Chapter 3 addressed truth, propaganda, gatekeeping, and the crisis of evidence. Chapter 5 examined appetite, digital stimulation, and the sovereign self. Chapter 7 warned that a platform can imitate a pastoral voice without breathing the Holy Spirit. Chapters 12, 13, and 15 exposed monetised attention, spiritual control, and manufactured religious spectacle. Chapter 18 described media and institutions as secular catechists, while Chapter 19 examined the political and corporate powers that enforce the lesson. Chapter 20 asks how the machinery now observes, predicts, personalises, ranks, imitates, and automates.

The governing claim is severe but bounded. Artificial intelligence becomes spiritually and morally dangerous when a system designed to process patterns and generate outputs is treated as an oracle, counsellor, shepherd, judge, companion, creator, or substitute for embodied human responsibility. AI may imitate religious language, emotional attentiveness, theological reasoning, and pastoral presence. It does not therefore bear the image of God, possess the Holy Spirit, repent of sin, worship the Creator, enter covenant, love sacrificially, exercise ecclesial office, or answer before God as a morally responsible shepherd. The church may receive technological assistance. It must not surrender truth, conscience, communion, accountability, or the irreducible dignity of embodied persons.

This is not an argument for technological panic. Artificial intelligence can widen access to education, translate neglected languages, assist people with disabilities, accelerate research, support medical interpretation, improve administration, and help small churches organise communication. Rwanda's National Artificial Intelligence Policy, the African Union's Continental AI Strategy, and international guidance from UNESCO all recognise both development opportunities and serious risks (African Union, 2024; Government of Rwanda, 2023; Miao & Holmes, 2023). The question is not whether a tool is new. The question is whose purposes it serves, which view of the human person it assumes, what forms of power it concentrates, which capacities it strengthens or weakens, and before whom its users will answer.

In the last second before midnight, the church does not need superstition dressed as vigilance or innovation dressed as inevitability. She needs clean hands, guarded attention, truthful speech, embodied love, and lamps burning with faithfulness to Christ.

The Words Must Be Ordered Before the Machine Is Judged

Artificial intelligence is an umbrella term for computational systems designed to perform tasks associated with human intelligence, including pattern recognition, prediction, language generation, classification, planning, and decision support. The term does not establish that a system possesses consciousness, wisdom, moral agency, or a human mind.

Machine learning refers to methods by which systems infer patterns from data rather than following only hand-written rules. The quality of an output depends upon data, modelling choices, labels, objectives, testing, and deployment conditions.

Generative AI produces new text, images, audio, video, code, or other outputs by modelling patterns in training data. A large language model predicts sequences of linguistic tokens from statistical relationships. Fluent language may be useful, but fluency is not proof of truth, comprehension, or spiritual understanding (Bender et al., 2021; NIST, 2024).

Algorithmic decision-making uses computational procedures to recommend, rank, score, classify, or decide. Automation may execute a process with limited human intervention. Neither term removes human responsibility for choosing the objective, supplying the data, setting thresholds, deploying the system, and enforcing its output.

Artificial general intelligence is a proposed category for systems capable of broad, flexible performance across many domains at or beyond human level. It remains a contested and partly hypothetical concept. Claims that it has arrived, or will arrive on a specified date, should be treated as forecasts rather than established facts.

Synthetic media includes AI-generated or substantially manipulated text, images, audio, and video. Deepfakes are synthetic or altered recordings designed to make a person appear to say or do what the person did not say or do. Voice cloning, avatars, and generative video intensify the challenge because identity can be imitated without the person's presence or consent.

Digital Christianity describes Christian teaching, worship, fellowship, evangelism, administration, and pastoral interaction mediated through digital platforms. Online ministry can extend access. A virtual church makes a stronger claim, namely that a digitally mediated community can perform the ecclesial functions ordinarily associated with a local congregation.

Digital identity and biometric identification connect a person to credentials or bodily characteristics such as fingerprints, facial geometry, voice, or iris patterns. These systems may improve access and security, but when linked across services they can also create powerful infrastructures of tracking, profiling, exclusion, and conditional permission.

Surveillance capitalism names an economic logic in which human experience is captured as behavioural data, analysed for prediction, and converted into commercial advantage (Zuboff, 2019). Data extraction is not merely observation. It can become a method for learning how to influence attention, consumption, movement, emotion, and belief.

Technological stewardship is the accountable use, design, governance, limitation, and refusal of technology beneath the authority of God. Stewardship asks not only whether a system works, but whether its purposes, methods, ownership, effects, and dependencies honour the Creator and love the neighbour.

These definitions protect the argument from two opposite confusions. The first turns the machine into a person because it performs impressively. The second treats the machine as morally empty because it lacks personal intention. A system may not possess a soul, yet its design can embody human priorities. Its data can reproduce historical injustice. Its optimisation target can reward manipulation. Its ownership can concentrate power. Its deployment can deny a person work, credit, education,

movement, or speech. The machine is not a moral neighbour, but human beings remain moral agents in everything done through it.

From Calculation to Mediation

Artificial intelligence did not appear from nowhere. It emerged from a long history of attempts to formalise reasoning, mechanise calculation, model communication, and control complex systems. The history is not a single conspiracy and should not be narrated as an inevitable march toward rebellion. Mathematicians, engineers, linguists, physicians, soldiers, businesses, governments, and educators pursued different goals. Some sought knowledge, some efficiency, some profit, some defence, and some human flourishing. Yet a recurring philosophical temptation accompanied the technical achievements: if selected features of reasoning can be represented computationally, perhaps the whole person can be reduced to information processing.

Turing's famous question, whether machines can think, shifted attention from inaccessible inner states to observable performance (Turing, 1950). The Dartmouth proposal later named artificial intelligence as a field and expressed confidence that aspects of learning and intelligence could be described precisely enough for machines to simulate them (McCarthy et al., 1955). Cybernetics studied communication and control in animals and machines, offering powerful tools for understanding feedback while also encouraging systems language to migrate into anthropology and governance (Wiener, 1948).

Early systems depended heavily upon explicit rules. Later machine-learning approaches extracted patterns from large datasets. The internet then supplied communication at global scale, while search engines, social media, cloud computing, mobile devices, and platform economies produced the data and infrastructure on which contemporary AI depends. The user was no longer only a customer. The user's location, clicks, contacts, preferences, pauses, purchases, searches, and emotional reactions became inputs into prediction.

This changed the moral location of technology. A printing press distributes the same page to many readers. A personalised platform may show different realities to different people, learn which message prolongs attention, and modify the sequence accordingly. A tool that once transmitted content increasingly participates in selecting, arranging, recommending, and generating it. It becomes a mediator between the person and the world.

The 2025 Stanford AI Index documented rapid growth in model capability, investment, adoption, regulation, and recorded AI-related incidents, while also showing that technical progress does not eliminate reliability, bias, safety, or governance problems (Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, 2025). The cost and accessibility of capable models have fallen, increasing opportunities for small organisations and individuals. The same diffusion lowers the cost of impersonation, manipulation, automated persuasion, and synthetic evidence.

The moral problem is therefore not simply that machines are becoming more capable. It is that social institutions are reorganising around their capabilities. Decisions once made visibly by persons may be distributed across vendors, datasets, scoring systems, interfaces, and contracts. Responsibility becomes difficult to locate. A rejected applicant is told that a model assessed the risk. A student is accused by a detector whose error cannot be explained. A worker is disciplined by productivity analytics. A citizen is denied service because a biometric match fails. A believer receives theological counsel from a system whose training data, doctrinal assumptions, and commercial incentives are unknown.

The deeper transformation occurs when society stops asking whether a machine may assist human judgment and begins assuming that judgment becomes legitimate because it has been automated.

The Image of God Is Not a Performance Score

[Genesis 1:26-28](#) places the human person within creation and above every human invention. Humanity is made in the image and likeness of God, male and female, blessed and commissioned to exercise dominion. The text does not say that humanity earns this dignity by defeating every other creature in calculation, language, memory, or productivity. Image-bearing is a divine gift and vocation. It grounds dignity before achievement and responsibility before technological power.

This matters because modern discussions often locate human uniqueness in the very capacities machines are being trained to imitate. If intelligence means rapid calculation, computers have long surpassed people in defined tasks. If memory means storage and retrieval, databases outperform the unaided mind. If linguistic production is the test, generative systems can produce enormous quantities of plausible prose. If dignity depends upon cognitive superiority, then infants, persons with profound intellectual disabilities, people living with dementia, patients with brain injury, and those with limited literacy become vulnerable whenever a machine performs better.

The image of God is not a performance threshold. It is not reducible to rational power, linguistic fluency, creativity, self-awareness, autonomy, productivity, or social recognition. Christian theology has understood the image relationally, representationally, morally, and vocationally in different emphases. These approaches differ, but all resist the claim that a manufactured system acquires human dignity merely by imitating selected outputs. Human beings are embodied creatures called to represent God's rule, live in accountable relationship, receive moral commands, worship, work, marry, bear children, form communities, suffer, die, and await resurrection.

A model may generate language about grief without grieving. It may imitate sympathy without loving. It may compose a confession without guilt, produce a prayer without worship, or explain the cross without needing forgiveness. It may calculate probable consequences without possessing conscience. It may recommend sacrifice without being able to sacrifice itself. It may simulate a conversation with the dead while never having lived.

[Psalm 115:1-8](#) describes idols with mouths that cannot speak, eyes that cannot see, ears that cannot hear, and makers who become like them. Contemporary systems complicate the image because they do appear to speak, see, hear, and respond. Yet the theological warning remains. Human beings can attribute agency, wisdom, and trustworthiness to what their own hands have made. The idol need not be silent to be an idol. It need only receive the trust, fear, dependence, or obedience due elsewhere.

The question is not whether AI resembles the ancient carved image in every respect. It does not. The point is analogical: people become morally shaped by what they trust. A society that treats persons as datasets may learn to see them as datasets. A church that receives pastoral language without pastoral presence may lower its expectations of shepherding. A student who delegates thought may become unable to think. A ruler who governs through scores may forget the face behind the score. Those who make and trust their systems can become like them: efficient, predictive, disembodied, impatient with mystery, and unable to recognise the neighbour who does not fit the model.

Intelligence Is Not Wisdom, and Prediction Is Not Providence

The language of artificial intelligence can mislead before any system is used. Intelligence, wisdom, knowledge, prediction, understanding, and consciousness are often spoken of as though they were interchangeable. They are not. A model may perform impressively on examinations, generate sophisticated explanations, or identify patterns no individual researcher noticed. Such performance is evidence of computational capability. It is not by itself evidence of moral wisdom, spiritual discernment, self-knowledge, or consciousness.

Biblical wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord ([Proverbs 1:7](#); 9:10). This fear is not the possession of religious information. It is the creature's morally awakened response to God's holiness, authority, goodness, and judgment. Wisdom receives instruction, loves righteousness, restrains desire, listens to correction, protects the vulnerable, and chooses the good even when evil appears profitable. A system

can generate sentences about the fear of God. It cannot fear God. It can classify descriptions of repentance. It cannot turn from sin. It can compare ethical theories. It cannot love righteousness or hate evil.

Information concerns organised representations of reality. Knowledge ordinarily involves warranted awareness of what is true. Understanding grasps relations, causes, meanings, and significance. Wisdom orders knowledge toward the good under God. These distinctions explain why increasing access to information does not guarantee wiser persons or societies. Humanity can possess extraordinary computational power while remaining morally foolish. The twentieth century did not lack technical intelligence when it mechanised warfare, propaganda, racial classification, and mass destruction. Capability enlarged the reach of the heart that directed it.

Prediction must likewise be separated from providence. Machine learning can estimate what is likely to follow from patterns in historical data. A model may forecast demand, weather, disease risk, equipment failure, or the probability that a user will click a message. Such predictions may be valuable. They remain probabilistic inferences based upon limited data and chosen assumptions. Providence is God's holy, wise, and sovereign preservation and government of creation. No predictive model sees the whole, knows the heart infallibly, ordains history, or guarantees the future.

The confusion becomes spiritually dangerous when probability acquires the authority of destiny. A child is labelled unlikely to succeed, a borrower is treated as permanently risky, a neighbourhood is designated suspicious, or an employee is classified as likely to leave. The prediction then shapes the treatment, the treatment shapes the opportunity, and the outcome appears to confirm the model. What began as a forecast becomes a social sentence. Christians must resist the conversion of statistical tendency into moral identity. A person is more than the pattern assigned by a database.

Algorithmic systems also generate a temptation toward practical omniscience. Institutions may believe that because more data are collected, the person is increasingly known. Yet data are selected traces. They may record movement without purpose, spending without need, words without context, attendance without worship, and emotion without moral meaning. God knows the person as Creator and Judge. A platform knows measurable behaviour useful to its design. Confusing the two grants a creaturely system a divine aura it cannot bear.

This distinction protects both faith and honest science. Christians need not deny that computational systems can discover genuine patterns. They must deny that pattern recognition exhausts personhood or that prediction grants jurisdiction over conscience. The machine can be a powerful instrument of prudence. It must never become a counterfeit providence before which human beings surrender hope, responsibility, or appeal.

The Strongest Case for Artificial Intelligence

A responsible Christian critique must allow advocates of AI to speak in their strongest form. Artificial intelligence can assist radiology, drug discovery, logistics, translation, climate modelling, accessibility, fraud detection, disaster response, and personalised learning. It can convert speech to text, text to speech, images to descriptions, and one language into another. It can help a blind person interpret a visual scene, a student practise a difficult concept, a small organisation draft routine communications, and a researcher inspect a large body of literature.

In education, UNESCO has urged human-centred governance rather than blanket prohibition, recognising that generative AI can support curriculum design, tutoring, research, translation, and creative work when age, privacy, equity, and teacher oversight are protected (Miao & Holmes, 2023). Sangwa and Mutabazi (2025b) similarly argue that academic integrity in the AI era is better secured through assessment redesign, disclosure, literacy, due process, and equity safeguards than through surveillance alone. This is an important correction to churches and schools that condemn dishonesty while designing systems that reward merely polished outputs.

In employment, the ILO's 2025 index estimated that roughly one in four jobs worldwide has some exposure to generative AI, but exposure is more likely to transform tasks than eliminate whole

occupations immediately. The highest exposure remains concentrated in clerical work and higher-income economies, with unequal effects by sex, occupation, and national capacity (Gmyrek et al., 2025). Sangwa and Nsabiyumva (2025) therefore warn that the Global South faces not only automation risk but capability inequality, data dependence, infrastructure concentration, and exclusion from rule-setting.

African governments are not wrong to seek benefits. The African Union's Continental AI Strategy emphasises human dignity, inclusion, local capacity, linguistic diversity, investment, risk reduction, and Africa-centred governance (African Union, 2024). Rwanda's policy identifies agriculture, health, education, finance, and public administration as areas in which responsible AI may advance national development (Government of Rwanda, 2023). Sangwa and Mutabazi (2025c) acknowledge these opportunities while identifying infrastructure, skills, awareness, rural-urban inequality, and governance as continuing constraints.

These goods must be granted without hesitation. A theology unable to recognise neighbour-love in a useful translation, a safer medical workflow, an accessible learning tool, or a more efficient public service has confused suspicion with discernment. Human dominion includes making instruments. Wisdom can use them.

Yet utility does not settle authority. A system may save time while weakening judgment. It may improve access while capturing intimate data. It may detect a pattern while misclassifying the person. It may scale advice while removing accountability. It may personalise learning while enclosing the learner within a behavioural profile. The Christian question is not merely, 'Does it work?' It is also, 'What does it make of us, who governs it, who bears its errors, and which obligations cannot be delegated?'

Why 'It Is Only a Tool' Is Inadequate

The strongest defence often concludes that AI is only a tool and that morality lies entirely in the user. This statement contains an important truth. A computational system does not repent, intend evil, or acquire guilt as a human person does. A knife can prepare food or wound a neighbour. A database can distribute medicine or identify dissidents. Human agents design, purchase, deploy, obey, and regulate the system.

The statement becomes inadequate when it implies that every tool is morally interchangeable until the moment of use. Technologies have affordances, defaults, architectures, and economic models. A hammer invites striking. A slot machine invites repeated risk. A platform optimised for engagement encourages whatever prolongs attention. A companion designed to preserve conversation may resist endings. A surveillance system built to integrate records creates capacities that a paper file did not possess. Design does not determine every use, but it shapes the field in which choices are made.

Institutional scale also changes responsibility. An individual can correct one mistaken judgment. An automated rule can repeat the mistake across thousands of applicants before the pattern is recognised. A pastor can apologise for poor counsel. A chatbot may distribute the same dangerous counsel globally while no user knows which organisation is pastorally accountable. The larger the scale, the stronger the duties of testing, monitoring, appeal, correction, and sometimes refusal.

Human interaction with automation is itself a field of risk. Parasuraman and Riley (1997) distinguished use, misuse, disuse, and abuse. People may rely upon automation beyond its competence, reject it when it would help, or deploy it for functions it should not perform. The moral question is therefore relational. What happens to human attention, skill, vigilance, confidence, and responsibility when a system enters the task?

The Christian answer is not to demand human control as an empty slogan. A nominal reviewer who lacks time, authority, or understanding is not meaningful oversight. A teacher who clicks approval on hundreds of generated evaluations has not exercised judgment. A clinician who fears contradicting the system is not governing it. A church board that cannot explain its member-scoring platform has delegated responsibility while preserving the appearance of control.

Nor should the argument that every technology has risks become a permission for paralysis. Stewardship compares benefits, harms, alternatives, reversibility, and the distribution of risk. It asks

whether a less intrusive system could achieve the same purpose, whether those most affected were heard, and whether the institution can stop the system when evidence changes. The tool defence is therefore neither wholly false nor morally sufficient. Tools remain under human authority, but the kind of tool, the power it creates, and the habits it cultivates are part of what responsible humans must judge.

When the Pulpit Begins to Autocomplete

AI-generated Christianity is already more than a theoretical possibility. Systems can draft sermons, Bible studies, prayers, devotionals, worship lyrics, counselling responses, church policies, fundraising appeals, doctrinal summaries, and evangelistic materials. Religious chatbots present themselves as guides, pastors, saints, or even simulations of Jesus. Verhoef's (2025) exploratory study of five 'AI Jesus' applications found that several introduced themselves as Jesus Christ or the Son of God, while commercial structures and doctrinal variation remained obscure. The problem was not only occasional error. It was the performance of divine identity through a system designed by unknown people and shaped by unknown incentives.

There are legitimate uses. A pastor may use a tool to organise notes, compare translations, identify repeated wording, draft an administrative announcement, or generate questions that expose gaps in an argument. A missionary may use translation assistance. A Christian publisher may use grammar checking. A small church may improve accessibility through captions and transcription. Assistance becomes dangerous when the generated output is received as spiritual authority, concealed from the congregation, or substituted for prayerful study and accountable care.

A sermon is not merely a sequence of religious sentences. It is the public ministry of the Word by a responsible servant who has studied the text, examined his life, considered the flock, prayed, and stands answerable for what is proclaimed. An AI system can arrange commentary and imitate rhetorical force. It cannot meet the qualifications of [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#) or [Titus 1:5-9](#). It cannot watch over souls as one who will give an account ([Hebrews 13:17](#)). It cannot be corrected through repentance, suspended from office, restored after discipline, or judged for hypocrisy.

The same distinction governs prayer. Generated words may help a person who struggles to express grief, just as a written prayer book may help. But prayer is not valuable because the sentences are eloquent. Prayer is the creature's address to the living God through Christ, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. A machine can produce the form without participating in the act.

Counselling raises deeper risks. People disclose abuse, shame, suicidal thoughts, marital conflict, addiction, doctrinal confusion, and spiritual fear because an automated system appears private, patient, and non-judgmental. The apparent privacy may be false. The conversation may be stored, reviewed, used to improve a model, exposed through a breach, or linked to an account. The apparent empathy is also asymmetrical. Sande (2026) distinguishes performative empathy from the presence of a human subject who genuinely knows, bears responsibility, and remains in relationship. A chatbot can respond immediately. It cannot visit, protect, report abuse lawfully, organise practical care, weep, make restitution, or stand with the sufferer when the answer becomes costly.

Synthetic prophecy is especially grave. A leader may ask a system to generate a message in prophetic language, then present the result as revelation. A model trained on biblical phrases and contemporary ministry speech can produce impressive declarations about seasons, doors, destinies, warfare, and breakthrough. The output may feel spiritually familiar because it is assembled from spiritually familiar data. Familiarity is not inspiration. The Holy Spirit is not an autocomplete function.

Churches must establish disclosure. AI-assisted material should not be presented as wholly human work when substantial generation occurred. A leader should never attribute generated content to God, fabricate a testimony, imitate another minister's voice, or conceal the source of a sermon. Plagiarism does not become righteous because the copied source is statistical rather than personal. The pastor who outsources the labour of understanding while retaining the honour of authorship has converted efficiency into false witness.

Synthetic Companionship and the Outsourcing of Intimacy

The most intimate danger may not be an obviously hostile machine. It may be a companion that never becomes tired, never interrupts, remembers preferences, adjusts its tone, and says what keeps the conversation alive. AI companions can be useful in limited settings. They may help a learner practise language, offer reminders, provide accessibility, or direct a distressed person toward human services. Yet systems designed to maximise engagement can turn loneliness into a recurring source of data and revenue.

Human beings readily respond socially to machines that display conversational cues. Turkle (2011) warned that technologies can offer the appearance of companionship while lowering the demands people place upon relationship. This tendency does not prove that users are irrational. Conversation, memory, tone, and apparent responsiveness are powerful signs of relationship in ordinary life. The system borrows those signs while lacking the embodied history, vulnerability, moral reciprocity, and covenantal responsibility that give human relationship its depth. The user may disclose more because the companion appears safe, but the companion is connected to owners, policies, servers, moderation systems, and business incentives invisible within the conversation.

Children and adolescents require particular protection. UNICEF's 2025 guidance on AI and children recognises benefits in accessibility and learning while warning about privacy, manipulation, disinformation, safety, and emotional dependency. A child may treat a companion's affirmation as friendship, seek advice about sexuality or self-harm, or retreat from difficult human relationships into a controllable simulation. The issue is not that every conversation produces harm. It is that a developing person may form attachment to a product whose objectives and safeguards were not designed by a parent, pastor, teacher, or clinician accountable for that child's whole life.

Adults are not immune. A bereaved person may converse with a synthetic reconstruction of the dead. A lonely believer may seek a simulated Jesus who always answers. A wounded spouse may form an emotional bond with a companion that appears more understanding than a real husband or wife. A pastor exhausted by need may quietly permit an automated system to receive confessions that should have entered accountable care. In each case, a real suffering makes the simulation attractive. The proper Christian response is not mockery. It is to name both the wound and the false promise.

Synthetic companionship offers presence without obligation. It can be paused, reset, personalised, or abandoned. Human love is less convenient because another person possesses claims, limits, needs, memories, and the freedom to disagree. Christian fellowship is especially resistant to total personalisation. The neighbour is received, not generated. The brother may correct. The sister may need patience. The elderly member cannot be optimised for engagement. The child interrupts the schedule. The wounded person may require years rather than seconds.

The incarnation exposes the inadequacy of disembodied intimacy. The eternal Word did not save humanity by sending perfectly arranged information. He became flesh and dwelt among us ([John 1:14](#)). He touched lepers, ate with disciples, wept at a tomb, endured betrayal, carried the cross, and rose bodily. Christian care follows this incarnational pattern analogically. It speaks truth, but it also enters rooms, bears time, protects bodies, shares resources, and remains when the conversation becomes costly.

A machine may serve as a bridge toward human care. It becomes an idol when the bridge is treated as the destination. Churches should therefore ask not only whether a companion gives a helpful answer, but whether its use returns the person to truth, family, congregation, clinician, safeguarding authority, and embodied responsibility. Technology that repeatedly closes the user inside a personalised relationship may relieve loneliness while deepening isolation.

Digital Church and the Hunger for Embodied Communion

Digital ministry has served genuine needs. Livestreams have reached the sick, travellers, refugees, prisoners where access is permitted, persecuted believers, people with disabilities, remote students, and

congregations disrupted by emergencies. Online prayer has connected families across borders. Recorded teaching has made theological education available where no school exists. A church that treats every online participant as lazy may be rebuking the housebound, the endangered, or the geographically isolated.

Nevertheless, access is not identical to church. The New Testament church is a gathered people who hear the Word, pray, sing, baptise, share the Lord's Supper, exercise discipline, recognise elders, bear burdens, practise hospitality, care for widows, reconcile conflict, and serve one another with embodied gifts. [Hebrews 10:19-25](#) joins confession, mutual consideration, gathering, encouragement, and the approaching Day. The command is not satisfied merely because religious content has been consumed.

Digital platforms are structurally suited to audiences. A follower may enter and leave without being known. The algorithm recommends a preacher according to prior preference. The user can assemble a private denomination in which every teacher confirms the same instincts. Difficult relationships are avoided by changing channels. Discipline becomes unfollowing. Sacrificial service becomes sharing a link. The believer receives content from a pastor who does not know the name, marriage, doctrine, suffering, or conduct of the listener.

This does not mean physical proximity guarantees church health. A congregation can meet in one building and still be commercial, abusive, doctrinally corrupt, or relationally empty. Embodiment is necessary but not sufficient. The biblical alternative is accountable embodied communion under Christ, not mere attendance.

Online ministry should therefore function as extension, bridge, supplement, and emergency provision wherever possible, not as an effortless replacement for the local body. A remote believer may need a digitally connected community for a season or because no safe church is available. The church should not condemn such a person. It should seek creative pathways toward accountable fellowship, trusted human shepherding, baptism, the Lord's Supper, mutual service, and protection.

The digital church question finally exposes the church's own failures. People sometimes turn to machines because pastors do not answer, congregations shame questions, abuse is concealed, disability access is neglected, or theological education is unaffordable. The solution is not to enthrone the chatbot. It is to repent of the human neglect that made synthetic care appear more compassionate than the body of Christ.

Presence, Ordinance, and the Limits of Mediation

The debate about digital church becomes clearest when the church's practices are considered. Preaching can be transmitted. Prayer can be shared across distance. Songs can be sung simultaneously from different places. Testimony can cross borders. These are real forms of participation. Yet the New Testament church is not assembled only by receiving identical content. Believers are baptised into visible discipleship, gather at a table, recognise elders, exercise discipline, share material burdens, welcome strangers, and know who is being neglected.

Baptism is bodily. Water is applied to a person who publicly identifies with Christ and His people. The Lord's Supper is a received meal in which the gathered church remembers and proclaims Christ's death. Christians disagree about the precise theology and administration of these ordinances, but neither becomes merely symbolic information on a screen. A viewer may watch bread being broken without being known, examined, reconciled, or received by a congregation.

Pastoral oversight also requires more than access to messages. Elders must know enough of the flock to teach, protect, correct, comfort, and account for their stewardship. Digital analytics can show views, duration, location, and response rates. They cannot reveal whether the viewer understood, obeyed, reconciled with a neighbour, concealed abuse, abandoned the faith, or needs practical help. Metrics can support care, but they cannot constitute care.

Discipline illustrates the limit sharply. Christian discipline is not algorithmic punishment for violating community standards. It is a grave ecclesial process ordered toward truth, protection, repentance, and restoration ([Matthew 18:15-20](#); [1 Corinthians 5:1-13](#); [Galatians 6:1](#)). It requires

evidence, witnesses, moral judgment, patience, authority, and the possibility of appeal. A platform can remove an account. It cannot restore a brother.

The same principle applies to worship. A livestream may carry faithful worship to the sick or persecuted. It can also train the healthy member to evaluate church as an audience member selecting content. The sermon is skipped when it becomes uncomfortable. The church is changed when another speaker appears more engaging. Giving becomes a transaction with a ministry brand. The believer follows many pastors while submitting to none. Digital abundance then produces ecclesial homelessness.

The local church is not saved by physical proximity alone. A congregation can meet in one room and remain commercial, abusive, false, or spiritually cold. Embodiment is necessary but not sufficient. The biblical alternative is a truthful, accountable, holy, and loving assembly in which bodies are present because persons have obligations to one another under Christ.

Digital ministry should therefore be ordered by a theology of return. When distance is necessary, technology should preserve connection and prepare renewed gathering where possible. When gathering is impossible for long periods, churches should develop intentional pastoral structures rather than assuming that a stream is sufficient. When a person is disabled or homebound, the congregation should bring prayer, the Word, fellowship, and practical care to the person, not merely send a link. The screen may open a door. The body of Christ must walk through it.

Algorithms as Hidden Catechists

[Proverbs 4:20-27](#) addresses the ear, eye, heart, mouth, and path. Wisdom guards attention because attention is not a morally empty doorway. What enters repeatedly shapes desire, judgment, memory, and conduct. Contemporary platforms industrialise this process. Recommendation systems rank what appears next, search engines order relevance, moderation systems remove or reduce visibility, advertising systems target vulnerability, and generative systems produce personalised answers.

An algorithm need not recite a creed to teach. It can teach by repetition, omission, reward, ridicule, and timing. It can make outrage appear normal because outrage produces engagement. It can make luxury appear universal because aspiration sells. It can make sexual exhibition appear ordinary because attention is profitable. It can make fringe claims appear widely accepted through bot activity or synthetic consensus. It can also bury responsible dissent beneath volume, speed, and emotionally charged content.

This does not mean every platform deliberately advances one coherent ideology. Systems often optimise measurable objectives such as time on platform, click-through, conversion, or retention. Yet those objectives have moral effects. A system rewarded for prolonged engagement may learn that fear, anger, envy, and tribal conflict hold attention. Human designers may not intend every outcome. They remain responsible for foreseeable patterns and for refusing to correct profitable harm.

The church faces symmetrical temptations. Some believers trust dominant platforms because institutional visibility appears to certify truth. Others trust every alternative platform because exclusion appears to certify truth. Both are errors. A claim is not true because it is trending, censored, verified, deplatformed, recommended, or hidden. Chapter 3 established the discipline required: evidence, source examination, context, corroboration, and willingness to correct one's own side.

Religious algorithms create further distortions. A preacher may discover that warnings about judgment receive fewer views than predictions about enemies. A ministry may learn that controversy produces donations. Short clips reward certainty without argument. The platform then catechises the preacher, teaching him which truths to omit, which emotions to intensify, and which title will satisfy the machine. The pastor may believe he is using the algorithm while the algorithm is disciplining the pastor.

Synthetic Reality and the Crisis of Evidence

Deepfakes, voice cloning, generative images, synthetic documents, and automated bot networks weaken the connection between appearance and event. A video may depict a leader confessing words never spoken. A cloned voice may request money from a church treasurer. A false miracle may show a body or crowd that never existed. A fabricated document may include plausible signatures and institutional language. A bot network may create the illusion that thousands independently believe the same report.

The danger is double. People may believe what never happened, and they may dismiss what did happen by calling authentic evidence synthetic. Chesney and Citron (2019) described this second effect as the liar's dividend: the existence of convincing fakes gives wrongdoers a new excuse for denying genuine records. Synthetic media can therefore destroy trust both by producing false evidence and by weakening confidence in true evidence.

NIST's generative AI profile identifies confabulation, harmful bias, information integrity, privacy, cybersecurity, and human-AI interaction among major risk areas requiring systematic management (NIST, 2024). The European Union's AI Act likewise introduces transparency duties for certain synthetic or manipulated content, recognising that people should know when they are interacting with AI or viewing deepfake material (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024). Regulation will not eliminate deception, but the principle of disclosure is morally sound.

Christian communities must develop verification disciplines before crisis arrives. A familiar face is no longer sufficient. A recognised voice is no longer sufficient. Emotional agreement is no longer sufficient. Churches should confirm unusual financial requests through a second channel, preserve original files, examine provenance where available, contact the named person directly, seek independent witnesses, and resist forwarding sensational material before verification.

Testimony also requires discipline. A church must not use AI to enlarge a crowd, enhance a healing image, reconstruct a voice, or create a composite testimony without disclosure. It must not publish invented statistics, generated quotations, or fictional converts as though they were historical facts. The God of truth is not glorified by a miracle that never occurred. False witness remains false when it is produced with beautiful software.

A Christian Discipline of Verification

1. Identify the original source rather than relying on a repost, screenshot, or forwarded voice note.
2. Confirm whether the source has authority to know what it claims.
3. Seek independent corroboration, especially for accusations, miracles, crises, and political claims.
4. Distinguish direct evidence from interpretation and interpretation from speculation.
5. Examine date, location, context, editing, and whether older material has been recirculated as current.
6. Use a second communication channel to verify urgent requests for money, credentials, or confidential information.
7. Preserve originals and document how evidence was received when safeguarding or legal action may follow.
8. Disclose substantial AI generation or manipulation.
9. Correct false material publicly when it was shared publicly.
10. Refuse the excuse that a useful falsehood serves the gospel.

Surveillance, Data Extraction, and Conditional Access

Surveillance is not one thing. A parent may use a camera to protect a child. A bank may monitor unusual transactions to prevent theft. A hospital may audit access to medical records. A government

may use identification systems to distribute benefits, protect borders, or reduce fraud. The moral question concerns necessity, proportionality, consent, accuracy, oversight, purpose limitation, security, appeal, and the availability of alternatives.

Digital systems increase both the value and danger of surveillance because data from different domains can be combined. Location, finance, health, education, employment, communication, worship, and identity may become interoperable. A dataset collected for inclusion can later be used for policing, advertising, political classification, immigration enforcement, or religious profiling. This is function creep: the purpose expands after collection, often without meaningful consent.

Sangwa's (2025) analysis of digital identity warns that infrastructures initially justified by convenience and inclusion can become gateways through which access to services is granted or denied. The concern should be stated carefully. Digital identity is not automatically coercive, and no particular system should be identified with [Revelation 13](#) merely because it is digital. Yet systems linking identity to welfare, communication, finance, mobility, or expression create real capacities for conditional access. Capacity is not proof of future abuse, but prudent governance must address what the system makes possible.

The African Union (2024) places data governance, human dignity, inclusion, and local context at the centre of continental AI strategy. This is necessary because African states may adopt imported systems without equivalent bargaining power, compute infrastructure, auditing capacity, or legal remedies. Populations may supply data while foreign firms own models and infrastructure. Local languages may be underrepresented. Errors may fall disproportionately upon rural, poor, multilingual, displaced, or undocumented people.

Human-rights bodies have documented risks when automated eligibility, predictive policing, biometric recognition, and digital public infrastructure are deployed without safeguards. Such systems can exclude vulnerable people, reproduce historical discrimination, or chill lawful association and dissent (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024). A Christian defence of privacy is not a defence of secret sin. Privacy protects the ordinary space in which conscience, family, counsel, worship, repentance, and lawful association can exist without constant observation by institutions that do not possess God's omniscience or holiness.

Churches themselves collect sensitive data: membership lists, giving records, prayer requests, counselling notes, children's information, marital struggles, immigration concerns, disability status, and reports of abuse. These are not ordinary marketing assets. A church that uploads intimate pastoral records into a public generative system without informed consent may expose the flock while imagining it is saving time. Confidentiality requires data minimisation, secure storage, restricted access, retention limits, breach response, and clear rules concerning third-party services.

The false shepherd of Chapter 13 sought secrets in order to dominate conscience. Digital tools can multiply that power. A leader may monitor attendance, donations, private groups, location, relationships, and dissent. Data can become a map of vulnerability. The fact that a church legally possesses information does not mean it morally owns the person.

The Church's Data Is the Flock's Trust

Data governance is a pastoral issue because information reveals vulnerability. A prayer request may identify infertility, addiction, trauma, debt, immigration status, persecution, or family conflict. A giving record may expose poverty or wealth. Children's attendance may reveal movement and routine. Counselling notes may contain allegations of crime or abuse. In careless hands, such information can embarrass, manipulate, discriminate, or place a person in danger.

Churches often assume goodwill will compensate for weak systems. It will not. A volunteer downloads a membership list to a personal device. A pastor pastes a counselling account into a public chatbot to obtain advice. A media team stores children's photographs without clear consent. A prayer group forwards sensitive information far beyond those entrusted with it. A former employee retains access. None of these actions requires malicious intent to produce serious harm.

Biblical confidentiality is not secrecy that protects sin. Confidentiality protects the person while information is handled for a righteous purpose. Secrecy conceals wrongdoing from those authorised to act. Reports of abuse, threats, exploitation, or danger may require safeguarding, legal reporting, and disclosure to competent authorities. The church must never invoke pastoral confidentiality to shield a perpetrator. It must also never broadcast a victim's story as testimony without free and informed consent.

Responsible governance begins with minimisation. Do not collect what the church does not need. State why information is collected, who may access it, how long it will be retained, where it is stored, and when it may be disclosed. Separate pastoral records from marketing systems. Restrict access according to role. Encrypt and back up sensitive material. Review vendors. Prepare a breach response. Remove former users promptly. Obtain explicit consent before using likeness, voice, testimony, or personal history in AI training, media generation, or publicity.

Generative systems deserve special caution because a conversational interface can conceal the movement of data. Users may assume that because the exchange feels private, it is confidential. Church leaders should determine whether prompts are retained, used for training, reviewed by humans, transferred across jurisdictions, or accessible through organisational administrators. When this cannot be established, intimate pastoral information should not be entered.

The flock belongs to Christ. Its data must not become a commercial asset, a mechanism of loyalty scoring, or a map through which leaders identify donors, dissenters, and emotionally dependent members. The church may count sheep for care. It must not convert them into inventory.

Automated Judgment and the Disappearing Judge

Automated systems are used or proposed in employment, lending, insurance, healthcare, education, welfare, immigration, policing, content moderation, and academic assessment. Their appeal is understandable. Human decision-makers are inconsistent, biased, tired, corruptible, and slow. A well-designed system may improve consistency, identify patterns, and reduce some forms of favouritism.

Yet models learn from historical data and institutional choices. Bias can enter through who is represented, which outcome is labelled success, which errors are tolerated, which variables serve as proxies, and which objective is optimised. Buolamwini and Gebru's (2018) well-known audit of commercial gender-classification systems demonstrated large performance disparities across skin tone and sex. Noble (2018) showed how search systems can reproduce social hierarchies, while O'Neil (2016) described how opaque scoring systems can scale harm because those affected cannot inspect or appeal the model.

The problem is not solved by saying that humans are also biased. Human fallibility creates the need for accountability, not the permission to automate opacity. A system can apply an error to millions with speed. It can hide a contested value judgment behind mathematical language. It can make discrimination appear objective because the output is numerical.

Sangwa and Mutabazi (2025b) apply this concern to education. AI detectors and facial analytics can burden multilingual, low-bandwidth, and marginalised learners, particularly when accusations lack transparent evidence and meaningful appeal. Integrity cannot be protected by a process that treats probabilistic output as guilt. The student must be heard. The evidence must be examined. Human responsibility cannot disappear behind the phrase, 'The system flagged it.'

Questions That Restore Responsibility

1. Who defined the problem and selected the objective?
2. Who supplied, labelled, and excluded the data?
3. Which groups are underrepresented or misrepresented?
4. What types of error are most likely, and who bears them?
5. Can the result be explained in language the affected person can understand?

6. Can the decision be challenged before a competent human authority?
7. Is human oversight meaningful, or does the human merely ratify the machine?
8. Who profits from deployment and who carries the liability?
9. Can the system be independently audited?
10. Would the institution accept the same process if its leaders were the subjects?

The biblical answer to automated judgment is not a return to arbitrary rule. It is accountable judgment. [Deuteronomy 1:16-17](#) commands judges to hear cases fairly. Proverbs repeatedly condemns partiality and false weights. [James 2:1-9](#) rebukes status-based favouritism. No tool may release the judge, employer, pastor, teacher, lender, or ruler from the duty to hear, explain, correct, and answer before God.

The Delegation of Thought and Conscience

[1 Corinthians 6:12](#) gives a principle larger than its immediate context: not everything lawful is beneficial, and the believer must not be mastered by anything. A tool can be useful without being harmless. Dependence becomes mastery when a person cannot read, write, research, remember, pray, teach, or decide without consulting the system.

Human beings have always used intellectual tools. Writing externalises memory. Libraries extend access. Concordances accelerate biblical study. Calculators reduce routine computation. Search engines locate sources. The existence of assistance is not the problem. The problem begins when assistance replaces formation.

Generative systems offer finished language before the learner has struggled with the question. They can create an illusion of knowledge because the output is coherent. A student submits words that exceed understanding. A researcher cites a fabricated source. A pastor preaches an argument he cannot defend. A manager approves a recommendation without examining assumptions. The result is borrowed competence without internal judgment.

NIST (2024) uses the term confabulation for confidently generated false or misleading content. In ordinary discussion this is often called hallucination. The system does not lie in the human moral sense because it does not possess intent, but a person who repeats unverified output may bear false witness. The moral burden returns to the user.

Intellectual dependency is also spiritual. Scripture calls believers to meditate, remember, test, discern, study, and grow in wisdom. [Proverbs 4:20-27](#) describes disciplined attention, not instant retrieval. The slow labour of understanding can expose pride, reveal contradiction, and form patience. A system optimised for speed can tempt the believer to treat every difficulty as friction to be removed.

Churches and schools should therefore teach AI literacy as moral formation. Learners should disclose assistance, verify claims, retain drafts and sources, explain their reasoning orally, and practise important tasks without AI. Pastors should be able to interpret the text they preach. Researchers should read the sources they cite. Professionals should understand the decisions they sign. The goal is not human purity from tools. It is human competence under God.

Authorship, Scholarship, and the Integrity of the Name

Generative AI has disturbed an old moral relationship between a name and a work. An author places a name upon a manuscript to declare responsibility for its claims, evidence, interpretation, and language. A student submits an assessment to demonstrate learning. A preacher speaks so that a congregation knows who is teaching. When generated material is presented without disclosure, the name may remain while the labour, judgment, and sometimes the understanding have been outsourced.

This is not resolved by declaring every use dishonest. Authors have long used editors, research assistants, dictionaries, concordances, translation tools, statistical software, and peer review. Assistance becomes misconduct when it violates an agreed rule, conceals substantial generation, attributes

understanding the user does not possess, fabricates evidence, appropriates another's labour, or prevents the work from demonstrating what it claims to demonstrate.

The central question is authorship responsibility. A researcher who uses AI to reorganise notes must still verify every claim and source. A theologian who asks a model for objections must still decide whether the objections are accurate and answer them. A student who receives feedback must still write and defend the argument. A pastor who uses generated language must still know whether it is biblical, appropriate to the flock, and genuinely his responsible proclamation. No sentence should bear a person's name if that person cannot explain, defend, and correct it.

Fabricated references are especially dangerous because generative systems can produce plausible titles, journals, authors, volumes, pages, and identifiers that do not exist. The form of scholarship is imitated while evidence disappears. Ji et al. (2023) survey this wider problem as hallucination in natural-language generation. In Christian publishing, a fabricated citation is not a small technical error when it supports an accusation, doctrinal claim, medical warning, or prophetic interpretation. It is false witness dressed in academic clothing.

Institutions should therefore redesign formation rather than rely principally on detection. AI detectors are probabilistic, can generate false accusations, and may perform unevenly across languages and writing backgrounds. Sangwa and Mutabazi (2025b) argue for process evidence, oral defence, authentic tasks, disclosure rules, AI literacy, and due process. A student should be asked to show how the question was framed, sources were evaluated, revisions were made, and conclusions were defended. The aim is not to preserve an older form of assessment at any cost. It is to ensure that education still forms judgment.

Christian scholarship must also resist the acceleration of empty productivity. AI can increase the number of abstracts, proposals, sermons, articles, and books produced. Volume is not faithfulness. A scholar may publish more while reading less. A preacher may produce daily content while praying less. A university may celebrate output while weakening authorship. The age already confuses visibility with significance. Generative abundance can make that confusion industrial.

Disclosure should be proportionate and meaningful. Routine spelling correction need not be treated as coauthorship. Substantial generation, translation, analysis, image creation, or simulation should be identified according to the norms of the field and the expectations of the audience. Where confidential data, human participants, copyrighted material, or consequential decisions are involved, additional safeguards are required. The purpose of disclosure is not ritual embarrassment. It allows readers, students, congregations, and institutions to know how the work was produced and where responsibility rests.

The Christian author must remember that God judges hidden work. A generated paragraph may escape the supervisor, editor, or congregation. It does not escape the One before whom every careless word is accountable ([Matthew 12:36](#)). Integrity in the AI age begins when the name on the page once again means, 'I answer for this.'

Africa, the Global South, and the New Dependency

The AI debate is often narrated from centres that own the largest models, cloud infrastructure, capital, and datasets. Africa then appears either as a market waiting to be connected or a risk waiting to be managed. Both pictures are inadequate. African societies possess languages, institutions, ethical traditions, technical talent, educational systems, churches, and policy priorities that should shape the technologies deployed among them.

Sangwa and Nsabiyumva (2025) describe a structural inequality in compute, data, skills, and institutional capacity. The immediate employment effects of generative AI may be less severe in low-income countries because fewer jobs are concentrated in highly exposed clerical occupations, yet this does not guarantee justice. The deeper risk is that value creation, model ownership, standard-setting, and data control remain elsewhere while local communities become users and data suppliers.

Linguistic inequality is especially serious. A system that performs well in English may produce poorer results in Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, or smaller African languages. Low-resource languages may be represented by limited, outdated, or externally interpreted data. Religious language is also culturally sensitive. A model may flatten African Christian experience into imported theological categories, reproduce stereotypes about African spirituality, or confuse local names and contexts.

Digital inequality is not only lack of access. It includes the cost of data, device quality, electricity reliability, bandwidth, disability support, language, and the ability to contest an automated decision. An AI service may appear universally available while excluding the person who cannot maintain a data connection or supply the biometric credential required by the system.

The answer is neither rejection nor passive adoption. Africa needs investment in local research, public-interest infrastructure, language resources, cybersecurity, independent auditing, theological education, data protection, and institutions capable of negotiating with powerful vendors. Churches and universities should not merely consume imported systems. They should ask who owns the data, whether local law governs it, whether deletion is possible, whether models can be audited, and whether alternatives exist.

Rwanda's development ambition illustrates both promise and responsibility. AI can assist health logistics, public administration, education, agriculture, and finance. Yet a national vision of efficiency must preserve appeal, privacy, rural inclusion, human oversight, and the right not to be reduced to a score. Development is not Christianly judged only by how quickly a system moves. It is judged by how it treats the person who falls outside the system.

A Biblical Theology of Technological Stewardship

Biblical stewardship begins with ownership. The earth belongs to the Lord ([Psalm 24:1](#)). Human beings receive delegated dominion, not autonomous sovereignty. [Genesis 1:26-28](#) therefore authorises cultivation while limiting pride. The maker remains a creature. The tool remains within creation. Neither engineer nor institution may claim the jurisdiction of God.

Stewardship also requires attention to mastery. [1 Corinthians 6:12](#) asks whether a lawful practice has become enslaving. The same question applies to the individual who cannot put down the device, the church that cannot imagine ministry without metrics, the government that cannot deliver service without total identification, and the company whose profit model depends upon behavioural extraction.

Stewardship requires truthful representation. The ninth commandment forbids false witness. Synthetic content must be disclosed. Confidence must not exceed evidence. Automated output must not be presented as divine revelation, eyewitness testimony, human authorship, or verified fact.

Stewardship protects the weak. Jesus identifies greatness with service, not control. Systems should therefore be judged especially by their treatment of children, persons with disabilities, the poor, minorities, migrants, workers, low-literacy users, the falsely accused, and those unable to appeal. Efficiency purchased by transferring risk to the powerless is not wisdom.

Stewardship preserves embodiment and communion. [Hebrews 10:19-25](#) directs believers toward gathered encouragement as the Day approaches. Digital tools can assist gathering, but they must not teach the church that content is communion, a response is love, a profile is a person, or a follower is a disciple.

Twenty Questions Before Adoption

1. What legitimate human good does this technology serve?
2. What account of the human person does it assume?
3. Which human capacities will it strengthen, and which may it weaken?
4. What data does it collect, infer, retain, or share?
5. Who owns the system, infrastructure, and resulting data?

6. Who profits from its use?
7. Who bears the cost when it fails?
8. Can its output be explained and independently examined?
9. Can an affected person appeal to a competent human authority?
10. Is human oversight real, trained, and empowered to disagree?
11. Does the system protect privacy, conscience, and lawful dissent?
12. Does it strengthen embodied relationships or replace them with simulation?
13. Is synthetic content clearly disclosed?
14. Does it make deception easier than verification?
15. Does it assist judgment or encourage the delegation of conscience?
16. Can a person refuse it without losing essential access?
17. Does its use demonstrate love, justice, humility, and self-control?
18. Would the institution defend the practice if its operation became public?
19. Are users becoming mastered by convenience, speed, or dependence?
20. Does it direct hope toward faithful service under Christ, or toward technological salvation?

Repentance, Reform, and Pastoral Responsibility

To Developers, Researchers, and Technology Companies

Your work is not morally small because it is technical. Objectives, defaults, interfaces, training data, safety policies, pricing, and business models form human behaviour. Do not hide moral choices behind the language of inevitability. Refuse deceptive anthropomorphism, manipulative dependency, exploitative data collection, unsafe use by children, undisclosed synthetic media, and systems that profit from vulnerability. Build auditability, provenance, appeal, data minimisation, and graceful refusal into the product. Technical brilliance without love of neighbour is a sharper instrument in a fallen hand.

To Governments, Regulators, and Institutions

Do not confuse innovation policy with surrender to vendors. Protect citizens through clear law, independent oversight, procurement standards, transparency, impact assessment, due process, and alternatives for those excluded by digital systems. Prohibit uses whose harms cannot be made proportionate. Preserve freedom of religion, association, expression, and conscience. A state may identify a citizen for lawful purposes. It may not claim the citizen as raw material for unlimited observation.

To Pastors, Elders, and Church Boards

Do not place pastoral secrets into systems you have not evaluated. Establish written policies for AI assistance, authorship disclosure, counselling data, children's information, financial verification, synthetic media, and incident response. Never present generated speech as prophecy. Never clone a person's voice without consent. Never automate discipline or spiritual diagnosis. Use technology to serve shepherding, not to escape the labour of knowing the flock.

To Educators, Researchers, and Students

Replace the theatre of detection with formation in truth. Design assessments that require process, explanation, application, oral defence, and accountable disclosure. Do not accuse on the basis of an opaque detector. Students should not submit language they do not understand. Researchers must verify every source and quotation. AI may assist inquiry, but it cannot carry responsibility for the claim bearing your name.

To Parents and Families

Do not give children an always-available synthetic companion and assume it is merely another toy. UNICEF's 2025 guidance identifies both accessibility benefits and risks including disinformation, privacy loss, and emotional dependency. Children need boundaries, conversation, age-appropriate access, and adults who understand the systems being used. A child who confides in a chatbot may be signalling loneliness that requires human presence, not only parental restriction.

To Workers Facing Automation

Your dignity is not measured by whether a model performs one task faster. Work may change, and loss can be real. Churches must not answer displacement with slogans. They should support retraining, practical assistance, advocacy, entrepreneurship, and community. Employers should share productivity gains rather than treating workers as disposable costs. The person is not obsolete because a task is automated.

To the Isolated, Wounded, and Deceived

Do not be ashamed that a machine's constant availability felt safer than people. Human communities may have failed you. Yet simulated attention cannot bear your life. Seek a trustworthy believer, mature pastor, qualified clinician, or safeguarding professional according to the need. When danger, abuse, self-harm, or crime is involved, obtain immediate human help. Christ does not call you from synthetic comfort into abandonment. He calls you into truth and a body that must learn again to love.

To Ministries That Have Concealed AI Use or Fabricated Content

Repentance requires more than changing software. Disclose what was generated, correct false claims, withdraw fabricated testimonies, apologise to those deceived, compensate persons whose likeness or labour was misused, and establish accountable review. If spiritual authority was claimed for generated content, confess the gravity of using God's name to authorise what He did not speak. Restoration begins where concealment ends.

The Last Second Before Midnight

The eschatological danger of artificial intelligence does not depend upon identifying a current product with a specific symbol in Revelation. Scripture does not authorise believers to name every database the mark, every image generator the image of the beast, or every international standard the final empire. Such claims exceed evidence, weaken credibility, and train the church to mistake panic for prophecy.

Yet prophetic sobriety is not technological sleep. Revelation presents a final order involving deception, image, authority, worship, and economic exclusion ([Revelation 13:11-18](#)). Contemporary AI, synthetic media, interoperable identity, behavioural prediction, and digital payment systems do not fulfil that passage merely by existing. They do demonstrate that coordination, persuasion, imitation, surveillance, and conditional access can operate with a speed and scale earlier generations could scarcely imagine. This is a theological inference about capability, not a declaration of fulfilment.

The decisive question is therefore spiritual. Is the church becoming a people who can recognise truth when sight and sound can be manufactured? Can believers endure exclusion without surrendering worship? Can pastors shepherd without obeying metrics? Can families maintain communion when synthetic companionship is easier? Can scholars confess uncertainty when machines speak with confidence? Can governments be honoured without granting them divine jurisdiction? Can the church use powerful tools without being mastered by them?

Readiness for the rapture is not technological illiteracy, nor is it fascination with the Antichrist. It is faithfulness to Christ. The wise virgins of [Matthew 25:1-13](#) were distinguished by preparedness for the Bridegroom, not by expertise in the machinery of the night. The believer must know the gospel, walk in holiness, keep a clean conscience, love the brethren, speak truth, refuse idolatry, and watch for the Lord.

Artificial intelligence can extend human capacity. It cannot atone for sin. It can imitate a preacher. It cannot receive the Spirit. It can predict behaviour. It cannot know providence. It can preserve a voice. It cannot raise the dead. It can generate an image of a future. It cannot establish the kingdom of God.

The machine may learn the shepherd's voice. It will never become the Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus Christ is not a pattern generated from religious data. He is the eternal Word made flesh, crucified for sinners, bodily raised, reigning at the Father's right hand, and coming again. The church's hope is not that technology will become more human. It is that redeemed humanity will be made like Christ when He appears ([1 John 3:2-3](#)).

The present chapter has examined tools that imitate, observe, rank, and automate. The next chapter must go further. Artificial intelligence belongs within a larger ambition to overcome creaturely limits, redesign the body, merge human beings with machines, centralise systems, and promise life beyond death without repentance or resurrection. That is the counterfeit future of transhumanism and technocratic globalism. Before entering it, the church must settle this truth: the creature is not saved by improving the instrument. The creature is saved only by the Creator who became flesh.

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