

Religious Legitimation and the Governance of Artificial Intelligence: A Scripture-First Critique

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence is increasingly framed not only as a technical innovation but as a civilizational and moral project requiring ethical stewardship, institutional trust, and, increasingly, religious legitimation. This article offers a Scripture-first theological critique of recent efforts to align artificial intelligence governance with interfaith moral consensus, including the Faith-AI Covenant and the Vatican's intensified institutional engagement with AI. It argues that while Christian participation in public technological ethics is both legitimate and necessary, the church must resist any framework that derives moral authority from pluralistic synthesis, algorithmic mediation, or managerial consensus rather than from divine revelation in Christ. The article develops this argument through biblical-theological analysis, reading contemporary AI-religion convergence through the lenses of Babel, idolatry, image-bearing, false mediation, and eschatological deception. It distinguishes carefully between verified institutional developments and speculative overclaims, rejecting both technophobic sensationalism and naïve accommodation. The central claim is that the gravest theological danger of AI does not lie merely in misuse, bias, or automation, but in the emergence of a synthetic moral order that appears humane while displacing the authority of God's Word. AI may serve legitimate instrumental purposes, but it cannot possess wisdom, personhood, spiritual authority, or covenantal accountability. The article therefore calls Christians, pastors, scholars, and policymakers to pursue public witness without theological compromise, technological discernment without panic, and ethical engagement without surrendering the exclusive lordship of Christ. In an AI age, the church's task is not to baptize civilizational consensus, but to bear faithful witness to the wisdom of God revealed in Scripture.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence and religion, AI ethics and Christianity, Scripture-first AI critique, religious legitimation of artificial intelligence, Faith-AI Covenant, Babel and artificial intelligence, Religious Legitimation of AI, Christian theology of AI governance.*

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is no longer discussed merely as an engineering matter. It is now being presented as a civilizational question requiring moral formation, institutional stewardship, and even quasi-spiritual guidance. In early May 2026, the inaugural Faith-AI Covenant brought together representatives from AI companies, including Anthropic and OpenAI, with leaders from several religious traditions to shape norms for the future of AI (Fauria, 2026). The Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities describes the initiative as an effort to bridge technology developers and moral or spiritual leaders so that AI governance reflects both technical progress and “human dignity” (Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, 2026). Within days, the Vatican formally established an Inter-Dicasterial Commission on Artificial Intelligence, citing AI’s accelerating social effects and the church’s concern for the dignity and development of the human person (Vatican Press Office, 2026). Earlier in the year, Pope Leo XIV’s message for the 60th World Day of Social Communications warned that AI can simulate human voices, faces, wisdom, empathy, and friendship while encroaching on the deepest level of communication, namely human relationships (Leo XIV, 2026).

These events make this topic unusually timely on May 21, 2026. They also place Christians before an urgent interpretive task. How should believers evaluate the convergence of AI governance, religious language, and moral aspiration? The answer cannot be derived from novelty, fear, or media narratives. It must begin with Scripture.

The thesis of this manuscript is straightforward: Christians may and should address technology morally, but Scripture does not permit the church to ground moral authority in pluralist synthesis, algorithmic mediation, or humanly curated ethical consensus. When religious institutions help sacralize a technological order without submitting every principle to the lordship of Christ and the truth of divine revelation, they risk participating in a

Babel-like project of ordered rebellion. The danger, therefore, lies not in technology alone, but in a counterfeit moral unity that sounds humane while displacing the authority of God.

A Timely Convergence of AI, Religion, and Moral Authority

Several verified facts deserve careful separation from speculative extrapolation.

First, it is verified that organized efforts are now underway to involve religious actors in AI governance. The Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities states that the Faith-AI Covenant is a global initiative meant to connect “Builders” and “Stewards,” producing shared principles and voluntary pledges for AI companies, faith institutions, and multi-stakeholder coalitions (Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, 2026). AP reporting adds that the initiative includes multiple religious traditions and seeks norms or principles that companies may adopt (Fauria, 2026). This is not rumor. It is public institutional behavior.

Second, it is verified that major AI developers are increasingly explicit about moral formation. Anthropic’s published constitution says it aims to cultivate in Claude qualities such as virtue, wisdom, good values, and ethical judgment, and even calls the constitution the “final authority” on its vision for Claude’s character (Anthropic, 2026). The language matters. What was once presented as technical alignment is now openly cast in terms of moral anthropology and character formation.

Third, it is verified that religious scholarship is now addressing AI not merely as a tool, but as a generator of authority, charisma, and spiritual interaction. Cheong (2021) showed that religious leaders strategically manage AI and robotics in order to regulate authority. Tsuria and Tsuria (2024) found that generative AI tends to represent religion through a moralistic and pluralizing frame rather than through thick doctrinal truth. Watts and Wilks (2024)

explored the prospect of spiritual conversation with a machine. Lim (2026) argues that AI is not only transmitting religious information but generating new forms of charismatic and algorithmic authority.

What is not verified is equally important. There is no evidence in these sources that a final antichrist system has formally arrived, that an AI tool is itself the beast of Revelation 13, or that every religious conversation about AI is necessarily apostate. Those stronger claims go beyond the evidence. Yet it is also false to say that nothing spiritually serious is occurring. The contemporary evidence supports a narrower but weighty conclusion: AI is increasingly being framed as a moral subject, and religion is increasingly being enlisted to stabilize, humanize, and legitimize that framing.

Scripture as the Controlling Authority

Any Christian evaluation of this development must begin not with policy language but with biblical categories.

Babel and Unified Rebellion

Genesis 11:1-9 presents more than an ancient building project. Babel was a unified human attempt to secure name, permanence, and centralized power in defiance of God's command. The builders were not anti-order; they were creating a coherent civilizational order without submission to God. The sin of Babel, therefore, was not technology as such. It was technological coordination harnessed to autonomous self-exaltation. The sin of Babel, therefore, was not technology as such. It was technological coordination harnessed to autonomous self-exaltation, a theological pattern previously applied to AI ethics, digital deception, algorithmic censorship, and biblical prophecy by Sangwa and Mutabazi (2025).

That pattern matters now. The present AI moment is repeatedly justified by appeals to shared human destiny, global coordination, expert stewardship, and managed ethical consensus. None of those ideas is

sinful in themselves. But when moral order is constructed apart from the authority of God's Word, the result is not neutral public wisdom. It is organized autonomy. Scripture warns that there is a way that seems right to man but ends in death (Proverbs 14:12). Babel remains a standing rebuke to every project that seeks transcendence through coordination rather than through covenantal obedience.

Worship, Image, and Human Uniqueness

Scripture teaches that man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). This gives human beings a creaturely dignity that machines do not possess. Artificial systems may simulate language, pattern recognition, and even relational cues, but they are not ensouled neighbors, covenant partners, or bearers of divine image in the biblical sense. Leo XIV (2026) is right to note that AI can simulate human voices and faces and thereby press into the field of human relationships. Yet a Scripture-first account must go further: simulation is not personhood, and computational imitation is not the breath of life.

This distinction matters because idolatry often begins not with explicit worship of an object but with mislocated trust. Romans 1:25 describes fallen humanity as exchanging the truth of God for a lie and worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. Whenever moral dependence, practical trust, or spiritual receptivity is displaced from God toward a created instrument, idolatry is already near. The issue is not whether a chatbot can literally be bowed down to. The issue is whether human beings begin receiving from machine systems the orientation, consolation, wisdom, and authority they should receive under God through truthful relationships, wise counsel, and Scripture.

Wisdom, Revelation, and False Mediation

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Biblical wisdom is therefore covenantal before it is computational. It does not

arise from scale, data density, or optimization. It arises from rightly ordered relation to God. This is where pluralist AI ethics reaches a theological boundary it cannot cross. Interfaith moral negotiation may generate overlapping norms for civil coexistence, but it cannot supply saving truth, binding revelation, or a true doctrine of man, sin, judgment, and redemption. Christ did not say He was one valid wisdom tradition among many. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, CSB).

This exclusivity is offensive to modern pluralism but unavoidable for biblical faith. Tsuria and Tsuria (2024) show that AI tends to render religion in respectful, diversity-affirming, morally generalized terms. That tendency is not theologically innocent. It mirrors the age’s preference for sentiment without lordship, ethics without revelation, and spirituality without repentance. Scripture repeatedly warns that the last days will feature deception, not merely immorality (Matt. 24:4-5, 24; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:9-12). The church must therefore be suspicious of every moral system that appears broad, gentle, and humane while flattening the truth claims of God.

The Central Theological Problem: Moral Legitimation Without Submission

The deepest issue in today’s AI-religion convergence is not that technologists are asking moral questions. On one level, that is preferable to moral indifference. The deeper issue is that the moral architecture being proposed is often procedural, pluralist, and managerially synthetic.

Anthropic’s constitution is revealing here. It speaks openly of cultivating virtue, wisdom, and ethical judgment while also acknowledging moral disagreement and the possibility of a “basin of consensus” emerging from diverse traditions (Anthropic, 2026). That may sound humble, but theologically it is unstable. Scripture does not teach that truth emerges from a negotiated center among rival moral traditions. It teaches that God has

spoken, that man’s mind is darkened by sin, and that wisdom must be received under divine authority rather than assembled through civilizational bargaining (Isa. 8:20; Rom. 3:10-18; Col. 2:8).

The same tension appears in the Faith-AI Covenant. Its stated goal is not to hinder innovation but to elevate it by drawing on moral and spiritual leaders (Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, 2026). Yet once the moral core is defined through a multi-faith framework, the church is no longer simply bearing witness. It is entering a system in which Christ’s exclusive claims are bracketed for the sake of shared governance. That is not mere cooperation on a narrow civic task. It is a reconfiguration of moral authority.

Here the church must distinguish between two kinds of engagement.

The first is a legitimate public witness. Christians may testify before rulers, scholars, and engineers that man is accountable to God, that technologies must not violate justice or truth, and that human dignity cannot be reduced to utility. Daniel did this in Babylon without becoming Babylonian in principle.

The second is illegitimate theological accommodation. This occurs when Christians help construct a moral framework whose official legitimacy depends on suspending or relativizing the unique authority of Christ. At that point, the church is no longer speaking prophetically into the system; it is helping furnish the system with spiritual credibility.

Revelation 17 is relevant not because every institution can be simplistically mapped onto it, but because it presents a pattern of religious corruption allied with power. False religion does not always oppose empire from the outside. It often rides the beast, sanctifying what God will judge. Christians should therefore be slow to celebrate any “moral” coalition whose unifying principle is broader than truth.

AI as Tool, Companion, or Spiritual Surrogate

The recent literature also exposes another danger: the migration of AI from tool to interlocutor.

Watts and Wilks (2024) consider the possibility of spiritual conversation with a companion machine. Putrawan (2025) notes the growing use of AI in text interpretation, spiritual accompaniment, and digital religious communities. Lim (2026) argues that AI can generate charismatic authority rather than merely deliver information. These observations do not prove that all such uses are equivalent. A machine may assist in translation, summarization, indexing, or basic pedagogical access without claiming spiritual authority. But the boundary begins to erode when users seek moral or spiritual formation from an artificial agent that lacks repentance, communion with God, embodiment, and covenantal accountability.

Scripture never presents wisdom as detachable from holiness, nor counsel as independent from moral being. A machine may recombine religious language, but it cannot know God. It may mirror devotional vocabulary, but it cannot pray. It may imitate empathy, but it cannot love God or neighbor. When a society begins treating such systems as companions in the domain of conscience, it commits a category error. More seriously, it trains the heart to accept simulation where God commands truth.

This is one reason the present moment should not be framed only as an ethics problem. It is a discipleship problem. If AI becomes a normalized mediator of meaning, consolation, and moral reflection, then the church faces a quiet reordering of authority. Theological confusion will not begin with open apostasy. It will begin with habituation.

What the Evidence Supports, and What It Does Not

A Scripture-first manuscript must be careful not to overclaim. This article therefore narrows and updates earlier biblical-prophetic analysis of AI,

digital deception, algorithmic censorship, and eschatological risk by distinguishing verified institutional developments from claims that the evidence does not yet support (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025). The evidence supports these claims.

AI firms and religious institutions are publicly moving toward closer collaboration in moral framing and governance (Fauria, 2026; Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, 2026; Vatican Press Office, 2026).

Leading AI organizations increasingly describe model behavior in terms of character, virtue, values, and wisdom rather than only technical safety (Anthropic, 2026).

Scholarly work shows that AI already tends toward generalized moralism in religious representation and can function as a site of algorithmic or charismatic authority (Cheong, 2021; Lim, 2026; Tsuria & Tsuria, 2024).

The evidence does not support these claims.

It does not support identifying current AI governance efforts as the final fulfillment of Revelation 13.

It does not support declaring every Christian involved in AI ethics guilty of apostasy merely by participation.

It does not support sensational claims that present systems have transcended creaturely limits or become conscious spiritual beings.

This distinction is essential. Sensationalism weakens witness. But naivete is no virtue either. The church must avoid both hysteria and sedation.

Implications for the Church

Several implications follow.

First, the church must recover a thicker doctrine of truth. If Christians speak about AI using only the

language of values, safety, or flourishing, they may unintentionally adopt the very flattened moral grammar that needs correction. The deeper issue is not whether AI is aligned with vague human goods. It is whether human beings remain aligned with God.

Second, pastors and scholars should reject both technophobia and technological devotion. Scripture does not require panic before every innovation. But neither does it permit fascination with systems that promise wisdom without holiness, relationship without presence, or governance without repentance.

Third, Christians engaged in public AI debates should speak confessionally, not merely therapeutically. The world does not need the church to become one more ethics consultant for empire. It needs witnesses who can name sin, idolatry, deception, and judgment, while also proclaiming Christ as the true wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

Fourth, churches should prepare for increasingly persuasive simulations of moral and spiritual intelligence. Believers must be trained to ask not only whether something is useful, but what kind of dependence it cultivates. A system that is efficient, soothing, and rhetorically spiritual may still deform the soul.

Conclusion

The most timely manuscript topic on May 21, 2026, is not AI in the abstract but the growing religious legitimization of AI. Early May's Faith-AI Covenant, the Vatican's new AI commission, and the broader turn toward spiritually inflected AI governance show that artificial intelligence is now being positioned within an explicitly moral and civilizational frame. That development is real, current, and worthy of serious Christian scrutiny.

Scripture does not call the church to retreat from such questions. It calls the church to judge them rightly. The proper Christian response is neither conspiracy theatre nor institutional surrender. It is

Scripture-governed discernment. Babel warns against unified human ambition severed from obedience. Revelation warns against religious power joined to corrupt authority. The wisdom literature warns against trusting what only appears right. The apostles warn that deception, not merely disorder, will characterize the last days.

Accordingly, Christians may engage AI publicly, but they must not lend Christ's name to frameworks that mute Christ's lordship. They may use tools, but they must not confuse simulation with personhood or consensus with revelation. They may speak into governance debates, but they must not mistake moral management for redemption.

The church's calling in an AI age remains what it has always been: to refuse idols, to tell the truth, to keep itself from spiritual adultery, and to bear witness that true wisdom is found not in the machine, nor in the coalition, nor in the empire, but in Jesus Christ.

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