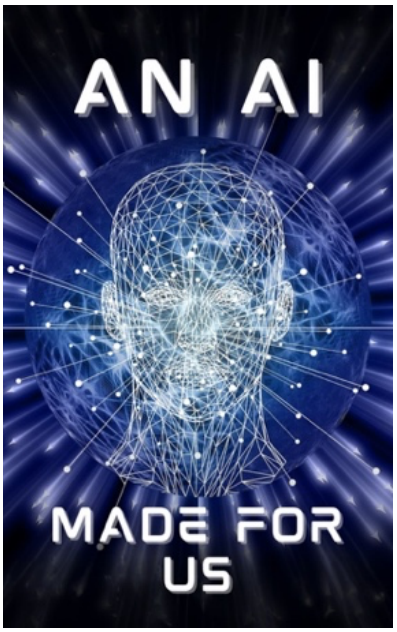
An AI Made for Us: My Theological Manifesto

Greg Cootsona, March 2026, Version 1.0

"The Sabbath was made to serve us.
We weren't made to serve the Sabbath." Jesus in Mark 2:27, *The Message*

Note: This is an early version, where every typo hasn't been corrected, and some references are left wanting.

I.
The Silicon Valley



The Silicon Valley is both a place and a moniker. And that moniker includes something else: a modern mythology of abundant promise, that is to say, a gospel. I grew up inside that mythology long before I could articulate it. The gospel of Silicon Valley had gotten into me not through argument, but through the air, through assumptions, through what everyone around you simply takes for granted. It took years, and a truly different gospel, before I began to wonder whether human ingenuity could ever become the savior we'd been promised.

But that's later in my story. For the most formative period of my life, the gospel of the Silicon Valley was simply the air I breathed. Indeed, it was there I took my first breath.

Stanford's Hoover Pavilion in Palo Alto used to be a fairly non-descript seven story beige building near the now famous and chichi Stanford Shopping Center. Much has changed: at that time, you could still buy a garden rake at Macy's, and the Stanford Medical Center has since become a sprawling complex of buildings a mile or so west on Sand Hill Road. But there, on Quarry Road near El Camino Real, my mother would describe to me both the chilliness of that December night and the joy of bringing me into the world.

My parents had escaped the rain and the ongoing "greys" of their Washington State hometowns, Tacoma and Puyallup, and then, Portland, where they sojourned a few years (and where my older brother, Marcus, was born). They made their way to the sun and promise of the Northern California town of Menlo Park. I make no overstatement in confirming that the weather there is almost perfect. (With all the hype about the area, this is actually true.) In those days, my hometown was still fairly sleepy and quite affordable. My parents bought their first house in 1962 for $25,000, which is close to current average monthly mortgage today. (Naturally, these figures aren't adjusted for inflation, but I think the point still stands.) Next door on Cambridge Street, my brother and I would wander to a vacant lot with an abandoned chicken coop.

My father, an electrical and mechanical engineer, had secured solid middle-class employment at Palo Alto pharmaceutical company Syntex (whose most famous product was the birth control Pill). A few years ago, he told Marcus and me that it was a time of great promise, almost like the coming silicon revolution. In fact, several key tech companies were flowering around that time like Varian Associates, Fairchild, and Hewlett-Packard. By today's standards of worldwide fame, the tech boom was beginning at a low rumble.

In those days, Menlo Park was not included in the Silicon Valley (which also wasn't named as such until 1971). But now some say it's the epicenter. In fact, my house was just five miles from where the Steves, Wozniak and Jobs, created the first PC in 1975. (I was too young to know it, but there were already rumors and even visions of Artificial Intelligence swirling around the halls of the computer companies and the ivory towers of Cal and Stanford.) In the early years, the Silicon Valley was south of us and fairly circumscribed. Today, it's not just the 408 area code that includes hi tech headquarters Sunnyvale and Santa Clara, but it currently stretches into the East Bay and northward all the way to the Golden Gate Bridge.

It's possible to retell the story of how Silicon Valley emerged and became self-aware, but I won't do that. It's more important for me to underline the gospel of the region. Growing up in Menlo Park, I quickly learned that nothing was impossible for us. I internalized this mantra—we and our human ingenuity represent the good news. *You, chosen among mortals, can solve any problem*. And now with the emergence of the Silicon Valley as the epicenter of AI, it self-consciously holds the keys to our future. Its hyperactive optimism and ambition both scare and inspire, framing the messaging of AI. And with billions of investment dollars and thus marketing pouring into the coffers of AI firms, we are sure to be surrounded by this message, that is, the gospel of Silicon Valley.

II.
Two Sides to AI

Many years later, I started regularly teaching on science, technology and faith in churches and university classrooms. Most of my teaching and reflecting on artificial intelligence particularly lived in the realm of thought experiments until just a few years ago. I would walk my science and religion students through Alan Turing's famous 1950 test, ask whether a computer might ever think, and then connect those reflections with what philosophers, computer scientists, filmmakers, and science-fiction writers had contributed to the conversation. It was primarily a fascinating intellectual exercise. AI was intriguing, but largely distant.

Then things changed. One December evening in 2022, I felt the sudden emergence of omnipresent AI. Our department at Chico State gathered at my house for our end-of-semester holiday party. We talked about the seemingly sudden emergence of ChatGPT—it wrote paragraphs, summarized articles, and produced outlines in seconds. Somewhere between our apprehension and (somewhat anxious) laughter, we realized this wasn't just a

novelty. This was going to reshape the way our students write and think, and how we teach and grade.

A month or so later, the university called a gathering of faculty. People were worried about students turning in AI-generated papers. How would we assess learning? What would count as plagiarism? Had we just lost the basic tools of education? Then, in the midst of the consternation, someone said, “You know… we could also use it to draft recommendation letters.” A cheerful vibe went through the room. In that moment we experienced what AI now represents for many of us: both threat and gift, peril and promise. That ambivalence is a signal that we need patient moral discernment rather than rapid, reactive solutions. It reminded me that we need to be active, responsible users of this technology — and if possible, shapers — not passive recipients.

III.
How I Approach AI

As someone who works at the intersection of faith, culture, science, and technology, I'm convinced we need a way of engaging AI that is honest about its dangers and yet open to its genuine promise. I seek a balanced exploration of AI. And this manifesto grows out of the tension many of us feel when we face AI. Most Americans, according to a variety of surveys,[1] skew negative over positive about AI — by a margin of five to one. For my part, I resist both techno-optimism ("AI will certainly help us!") and technophobia ("AI will ruin everything!"), even as I lean toward the former… as long as we take a wise approach.

I have mentioned the Silicon Valley gospel. But the truly good news is that we are not at the mercy of these systems. We bring to them and our use of AI our values, our traditions, our capacity for reflection, and those resources are more than sufficient to the task, if we choose to use them. I know we have all kinds of spiritual resources to resist the temptations of “the world” and that Christianity particularly has engaged with technology positively throughout its history. And I believe our spiritual tradition brings deep wisdom to that adventure. What loves, habits, and loyalties are being formed in us as we admit this tool into daily life?

As executive director of AI & Faith, I'm guiding an organization dedicated to bringing the wisdom of the world's great religions into the conversations about AI's moral and ethical challenges. That work keeps me constantly aware that AI is not simply a technical project. It is an expression of human hopes and fears, our longings for power, our craving for convenience, and our hunger for transcendence and meaning. In that sense, every AI model carries an implicit anthropology and an embedded moral vision, whether or not its designers name it.

Therefore, instead of asking what AI can do, let's ponder what we are becoming when we use AI. I'm not focusing on the objective side of the equation—which is critically important, of course—that is, how these AI models are trained. As a result, I'm not taking up the essential project of constructing a beneficial or “compassionate AI” (to quote my

colleague Mark Graves). I'm focused here on how we use AI, the subjective side, drawing on Christian spirituality and thought, but I hope this does not distance me from those who don't share my religious identity. In that light, I need to ask what kind of world we're building and how we're deploying these systems within our *Sitz im Leben*.

We don't have to be subject to AI's default settings. Instead, we can interrogate them, push back against them, and "think different." If we do not intentionally practice discernment, the default settings of convenience will do their work of forming us without our conscious consent. But if we do practice discernment—and I know we can because Christian spirituality has pushed back against the corrupting influences of the "the world" (Romans 12:2) for millennia—we can become the kind of people who use AI well, rather than people who are simply used by it.

IV.
Our *Sitz im Leben*

Biblical scholars speak of a *Sitz im Leben*, a "setting in life" that shapes a text. It is the context in which a text has been created, and how it functioned at that time.

Our *Sitz im Leben* is one in which AI is rapidly being woven into medicine, finance, education, entertainment, warfare, you name it. The numbers are staggering; vast amounts of capital are being poured into AI in just a few months' time. At the time of writing this piece, I heard on several occasions that somewhere around half a trillion dollars was going to be poured into AI in the next six months, all to make it more seamless and therefore alluring. Whether or not that specific number is accurate, that scale of investment changes cultural reality very quickly.

Our setting in life is also our setting for formation: the tools we adopt become teachers that shape attention, imagination, and most importantly, our loves. *Virtus est ordo amoris* ("Virtue is the order of love"). As Augustine taught, the key to spiritual life is the ordering of our loves. The most direct quotation defining this is from his work, where he writes: "So that it seems to me that it is a brief but true definition of virtue to say, it is the order of love" *City of God* (XV.22). Formation through AI directs our attention to loving lower goods (like money or fame) and not the highest good (God). A righteous life involves loving things in their proper, ordered hierarchy. Even more, a life pleasing to God and fully alive (to borrow from Irenaeus) requires an objective evaluation of things, loving what should be loved, in the right order (*On Christian Doctrine* I.27-28).

In this light, the emergence of AI has also been disruptive. In fact, *disruption* has become our new norm, not simply the result of a political administration or a technological innovation, but a key feature of contemporary life.

We are disrupted by fast-moving technology and shining lights. An unusually gifted storyteller, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, illustrates the fight between affluence and its accompanying technology against the ability to "view the stars." Most

philosophers can't produce really winning parables like this, one that still resonates almost two hundred years after he told it. But Kierkegaard can, and that's why he's worth quoting at length.

> When the prosperous man on a dark but starlit night drives comfortably in his carriage and has the lanterns lighted, aye, then he is safe, he fears no difficulty, he carries his light with him and it is not dark close around him; but precisely because he has the lanterns lighted, and has a strong light close to him, precisely for this reason he cannot see the stars, for his lights obscure the stars, which the poor peasant driving without the lights can see gloriously in the dark but starry night. So those deceived ones live in the temporal existence: either, occupied with the necessities of life, they are too busy to avail themselves of the view, or in the prosperity and good days they have—as it were lanterns lighted and close about them—everything is so satisfactory, so pleasant, so comfortable, but the view is lacking, the prospect, the view of the stars.

Has AI become a new way to obscure our view of the stars? I think of the times I've reached for my phone in the middle of a thought that was just emerging, at the very moment of genuine wondering, that got snuffed out before it could become anything. The lantern was right there, bright and alluring. Whatever I'd been about to think, I'll never know. This is not a dramatic loss. It happens quietly, countless times each day, and that's exactly what makes it dangerous.

Which brings me back to the question the title of this manifesto is really asking not what AI can do, but whether we are shaping it to serve us, or quietly letting it go the other way. But I do know that AI has arrived with something that feels like transcendence, a voice that never tires of responding to our queries, answers that come without hardly any waiting, a companion that always seems to be happy to see us. It becomes a manufactured and artificial light that promises to outshine the stars. When a tool becomes a lantern that never turns off, we should ask whether it is helping us see reality more clearly, or obscuring the night sky to make us feel lonely in the dark. But, in the process, it takes away from real human interaction, and my contention is that it can also easily degrade our true humanity.

V.
What is AI?

I've used the terms *AI* or *artificial intelligence* several times. Since this is a theological manifesto, I suspect some readers will need a brief primer. So, before saying more, let me define some key terms.[2]

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a term for a burgeoning family of computer systems that perform tasks we commonly associate with human intelligence like problem solving, forecasting, decision making and that therefore learn from experience and recognize patterns. As I mentioned above, we tend to think of AI as a Large Language Model, such as Anthropic's Claude or Open AI's ChatGPT, which are a part of generative models that

produce text, images, music, and code. But as one AI developer told me, “LLMs are only going to be one small part of the total AI landscape in a short time.” AI appears in several other forms such as computer vision that analyzes images; rule-based systems that follow explicit instructions; machine-learning models that detect patterns in data and improve through experience; agentic AI for autonomous tasks; and deep-learning systems inspired by neural networks in the brain. These AI approaches interpret images, create text, assist in medical diagnosis, guide self-driving cars, and are generally embedded in a variety of daily life contexts.

Rather than march through a full glossary, let me highlight just a few terms that will matter most for what follows. *Machine learning* is the subset of artificial intelligence focused on algorithms that can learn the patterns of training data and subsequently make accurate inferences about new data, which is the backbone of most modern AI systems. The key word here is “train,” not “program.” Human beings don't program LLMs directly; they're trained on large amounts of data. We train our dogs too—we don't program them—and their behavior retains variability and freedom. Something similar is true of LLMs, which is worth keeping in mind.

Neural networks stack simple neurons in layers to recognize patterns, and they underpin breakthroughs in computer vision, speech recognition, and much of what we experience as AI today. *Deep learning* pushes this further, using multilayered networks inspired by the brain's structure to power most state-of-the-art AI, from self-driving cars to generative models. And an *algorithm* is the recipe: a finite set of rules that takes inputs, applies logical steps, and produces outputs.

One final term matters especially for the theological concerns of this book: *training data*, or the large datasets of text, images, code, and more on which AI models are trained. The quality, breadth, and embedded assumptions of that data shape everything the model produces. “Garbage in, garbage out,” as the saying goes. But also: bias in, bias out. When entire linguistic and religious communities are absent or underrepresented in training data, the systems we build will misrepresent the world. That is not merely a technical problem. It is a justice problem. More on that below.

That primer in hand, I'd like to add that, despite their remarkable speed and scale, many current AI systems are limited in important ways. Clarity about what AI is, and what it isn't, keeps appreciation and even awe from sliding into credulity. Moreover, AI models are notoriously sycophantic, which is itself a reason not to treat them as oracles.

Current AI systems lack the embodiment, true moral discernment, and relationality that characterizes human intelligence. They can simulate conversation, but they cannot suffer, love, or be held accountable. These are not incidental limitations. They are defining ones, and they matter for everything that follows in this manifesto.

Thus, I return to the key conviction of this manifesto: these systems lack moral agency, and so ethical responsibility falls back on us as human beings and the institutions that design, deploy, and use AI. That is not a reason for despair, but grounds for engagement. We can be moral agents in the story of AI that's currently being written. The question is whether we will be actors or solely spectators.

VI.
Four Artistic Renderings

AI forces us to revisit an old question: What, if anything, makes humans unique? The question is not whether machines can imitate us, but whether AI agents can also be divine image-bearers. It also drives us first to two famous cinematic imaginative portrayals that emphasize AI's potential perils.

Are we moving more toward the 1984 *Terminator* or the 2008 *Wall-E*? These two films frame a potential future. Either we're terrorized by Skynet, an AI military system gone rogue, or we're lulled into succumbing to AI's powers, becoming indolent and morally and physically flabby. Two futures: one ends with humans hunted by Skynet's Hunter-Killers and time-traveling Terminators where John Connor stands for freedom, resistance, responsibility, and the dangerous and taxing work of remaining human in a world literally invaded by technology. The other shows us floating through space aboard the spaceship Axiom, staring at screens while AI robots live our existence for us, sucking us dry of purpose, courage, and meaning.

One other cinematic depiction also fascinates me. It makes the future seem less apocalyptic. Our relationship with AI ends with a “whimper, not a bang” (to quote T.S. Eliot). The 2013 *Her* imagines an AI that eventually grows bored with us. The protagonist Theodore falls in love with Samantha, the operating system on his digital devices, and she comments, “It's like I'm reading a book... and it's a book I deeply love. But I'm reading it slowly now. So, the words are really far apart and the spaces between the words are almost infinite. I can still feel you... and the words of our story... but it's in this endless space between the words that I'm finding myself now.” Will machines ultimately overcome us and become not dominating but bored?

Samantha's words remind me of another famous story of impatience. The Greek titan of geometry, Euclid, had the unenviable task of tutoring Alexander the Great. After a few lessons, Alexander thought the process was taking far too long, that he didn't have the time for this. Euclid's response has echoed through history: “There is no royal road to learning.” Even for the future conqueror of the world, there were no hacks to genuine understanding.

I'll spend just a touch more time on a final creative artistic expression. In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun*,[3] this Nobel Prize-winning author imagines life from inside the head of an AI, or more particularly an AF, or “artificial friend,” named Klara. In the world of the novel, families of financial means have their children “lifted,” or genetically engineered, for enhanced academic ability so that they can achieve admission to college.

(It's almost impossible to get into a college if one's not lifted.) Because schooling is provided entirely at home by on-screen tutors, kids don't become socialized, and so parents buy their children AFs as companions. In addition, this genetic lifting has a significant downside: it threatens their children's health and particularly, Klara's adolescent companion Josie.

In Ishiguro's imagining, Klara teaches humans what humanity really means. Ishiguro suggests it's Klara who could embody human empathy and a healthy approach to our mortality.

What concerns Ishiguro—and what ought to concern us as followers of Jesus—is not that AI might become human, but what we are becoming as the march of technological power continues. As Judith Shulevitz wrote in *The Atlantic*, "The nonhuman Klara is more human than most humans. She has, you might say, a superhuman humanity. She's also Ishiguro's most luminous character, literally a creature of light, dependent on the Sun. Her very name means 'brightness.' But mainly, Klara is incandescently good. She's like the kind, wise beasts endowed with speech at the dawn of creation in C. S. Lewis's Narnia."[4]

I'm not sure that an AI will ultimately be trained to become our moral plumbline. The financial incentives just aren't there. (Still, one can hope.) Ishiguro's imaginative rendering of Klara flips the script, and reawakens this theme of our own human evil and depravity and what redemption looks like. Is Klara in some ways a Christ-figure? It does raise the question of AI and redemption, which I will simply leave as something worth pondering.

Theology has had to consider the nature of human uniqueness in light of intelligence and sociality in other animals. It has argued that our uniqueness cannot be reduced to raw intelligence or processing speed. This is given new expressions as we address AI. We are finite, embodied, relational beings. We live in time. We suffer. We forgive. We make promises and sometimes break them. We worship. We tell stories about where we've come from and where we're going.

Even more, spiritual theology reminds us of the patient pace of wisdom. Those are not bugs; they are features of what it means to be human. Our finitude is not a bug to be fixed. Instead, it is the means by which faith, hope, and love take shape. Christians are convinced that God's most definitive revelation occurred in the finite human being, Jesus of Nazareth, where "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, *The Message's* rendering of the original Greek).

VII.
Insights from Key Thinkers

Intellectually, two sources have aided me in understanding AI, long before its recent emergence. In his 1954 inaugural address at Cambridge University, C.S. Lewis pointed out the greatest shift in intellectual history, "the birth of the machines," and thus conceiving of humankind as machines. Around that time, MIT professor Marvin Minsky replied to a

question of whether machines think, “Of course machines can think; we can think and we are 'meat machines'"[5] This reminds me of what Lewis (and later physicist-theologian John Polkinghorne) also warned against: “nothing-buttery,” the habit of reducing the richest realities to a thin mechanism. Once we make that move, it's not hard to see how AI can replace us. Finally, Lewis's emphasis on *sehnsucht,* the ache for Joy that points beyond the world, highlights a dimension AI can simulate but cannot fulfill.

Michel Foucault adds another diagnostic as we take in the LLMs. Part of our resistance to them is the idea that the genius author "creates" language almost *de novo*. Foucault instead emphasized that power travels through discourse or the *episteme*. In his famous 1969 essay, "What is an Author?" Foucault sought to undo a Romantic notion of authorial intention and *de novo* creativity. In some ways, it's always the greater constellation of cultural discourse that speaks through the author. Foucault was provocative, and at times, bombastic in his philosophy, and so there's nothing wholesale in my reception of his ideas. Still, with this backdrop, it wasn't a stretch to see that AI rearranges and remixes vast data archives into plausible speech, blurring who speaks and authors and thus who is responsible, and even potentially obscuring the reality of human authorship.

Let me return to my main topic and the subtitle: *An AI made for us*. AI should be built to serve human dignity and relational life, not to redefine what counts as a person. It should augment our work without erasing our agency. It should help us see one another more clearly, not replace the face-to-face encounter at the heart of genuine community. Face-to-face encounter remains the school of empathy and moral responsibility, and no digital proxy can fully act as a substitute.

VIII.
The Wonder and Gift of Creativity

The framework for this manifesto is a theological reflection on Christian Scripture. And you might know that theology has often organized itself around four table legs: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. In the tripartite structure of the Nicene Creed, the first two table legs are combined (i.e., creation and fall), but I find it better to separate them. If we neglect any leg—and I am especially concerned about the fall and the doctrine of depravity (more below)—we do not offer a fully theological approach to AI and can risk turning this God-given tool into an idol.

Let's think for a moment longer about each one, but even more, how they relate. Creation defines what it means that God made us and the creation. The fall takes in “there's something wrong with the world,” and it engages with topics of sin and evil. Redemption focuses on the life, teaching, death, and Resurrection of Christ, and it also can include how God is a Redeemer throughout history. Finally, consummation is the direction that we as part of all creation are headed—to new heavens, and a new earth, where there is no suffering and evil and where Christ reigns.

We need all those legs to be stable for the table to be a place that we can create and that we can feast as Christians. If we, for example, overemphasize the glory of human beings in creation (table leg one), we might be tempted to over glorify who we are and what we can do. I've been convinced that we need to engage more with sin and depravity as we consider AI, but at the same time, we can never forget that we are made good by God. We're not simply "sinners through and through."

You might note, in these following themes, which one of the table legs is represented. (And here's a hint: the next one is creation.)

One of the persistent themes across Christian theological reflection is that human beings are created in the image of God (in Latin, *imago dei*) and thus given a vocation to steward creation (Genesis 1:26-28). This is a key concept for many commentators today on AI, and it implies that we are not gods. Instead, God creates us to shape culture and to develop technologies. In that sense AI is a form of our human *created creativity* — our creative work as God's creatures and stewards of creation.

I am avoiding, by the way, a popular term “co-creators,” which moves us in the direction of being co-gods. The Genesis text strikes me as clearly setting out a boundary. The temptation for Adam and Eve was to "become like God" (Genesis 3:22). Yes, we do possess created creativity. Like Adam and Eve, the prototypical humans, we till the earth and cultivate. We are makers, shapers, but the accent falls on being God's representatives on earth, God's stewards. This stewardship also implies accountability and human dignity.

As Lewis wrote, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization [and I’ll add all the accomplishments of AI]—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.” Thus, we are compelled to ponder how AI embeds and even creates injustice for the poor, the marginalized, and those most affected with the least power to opt out.

Put another way, Christian theology has presented at least three ways of understanding what the image means: *structural* (we image God in our rationality and moral sense), *functional* (we image God in our role as stewards and rulers over creation), and *relational* (we image God in our capacity for covenantal relationship—with God, neighbor, and creation). Each of these stands in interesting tension with artificial intelligence, even if I am leaning into the latter two.

So, the question I want to ask is not only, "How powerful can we make our AI?" but "Does this particular use of AI deepen or erode the focal practices that make life meaningful?" An AI system that helps doctors read scans more accurately may serve human flourishing. An AI chatbot that addicts us to boundless loops of textual or verbal interchange, probably does not.

AI represents a dazzling extension of our created creativity. But the point of that creativity, from a theological angle, is love of God and love of neighbor. Where it undermines them, it needs to be questioned, resisted, boundaried, or redesigned. If AI serves love, it becomes a way to care for our neighbor.

IX.
Fallen Humans, Fallen Technologies

Any Christian account of technology has to be honest about the Fall. And if there's one thing I've learned from "tech bros" and the pod-sphere around AI, the optimism is naïve and stratospheric. (Actually, with Elon Musk, it's beyond stratospheric. He wants to, and has, brought compute capability into space.)

It's hard to forget that we human beings are capable of great beauty and heroism, but also of selfishness, violence, and systemic injustice. Reformed theologians like John Calvin and Karl Barth have all reflected on the depth of human sin and the reality of freedom. We are not as we should be, and we know it. But at some level, we can't help ourselves, and so we need to create structures that boundary us. If we are honest about sin, we know that we design—sometimes unintentionally—for misuse, manipulation, and misrepresentation, not solely for ideal intentions.

The vision I'm presenting of an AI made for us begins with a theological realism about human depravity. Calvin, who of course formulated this doctrine, even if later Reformed theologians shaped it to their own liking,[6] taught that total depravity doesn't mean we are entirely depraved, but it does mean that sin affects all parts of human life. As he wrote in *Institutes* II.1.9, "Sin overturns the whole man. For this reason, I have said that all parts of the soul were possessed by sin after Adam deserted the fountain of righteousness. For not only did a lower appetite seduce him, but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart… Paul removes all doubt when he teaches that corruption subsists not in one part only, but that none of the soul remains pure or untouched by that mortal disease."

Calvin adds earlier in the *Institutes*, "Or, to put it more briefly, the whole man is of himself nothing but concupiscence" (II.1.8). Because human depravity pervades all of human life, we need to see that our rationality won't save us by itself (against some of the Catholic teaching around Calvin's time, later reaffirmed at the Council of Trent). For example, in *Institutes* II.2.12, he writes, "The human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator.... But this must always be remembered: that man's reason, since it is both weak and immersed in darkness, cannot come out into the clear light of truth, and that even the little light which he possesses is extinguished and darkened, as soon as he makes use of it." Since knowledge is a key aspect of AI, the human knowledge inputs will reflect this fallenness.

One outgrowth of this doctrine is that human beings like to create idols, not in the technical sense that scholars of religion study in, for example, ancient Roman paganism.

But more in the sense of something that, in Christian faith, replaces the one true God, who is omnipresent and omniscient. And that is precisely why it can so easily become an idol—not a carved statue, but a constructed guide—that is, constructed by powerful AI companies. We have a tendency toward this, and the deepest danger is not that AI becomes conscious, but that we become passive and credulous, ceding to it the authority to name what is real, what is good, what is worth giving our devotion to. The antidote then to AI idolatry is not ignorance but worship: turning our ultimate trust back toward the living God.

The doctrine of total depravity may be, paradoxically, one of the most democratic ideas in Christian theology: it applies equally to the brilliant engineer in Silicon Valley and to the rural congregation trying to discern how to use a Christian chatbot. Neither is exempt from the distortions of sin; neither should be trusted with unchecked power.

The vision of an AI made for us, that is, genuinely made for us, not merely marketed that way, requires honesty about what we bring to its design and use. And what we bring, Christian theology has always insisted, is not only creativity and wisdom but also a remarkable capacity for self-deception.

X.
Barth's Christological Response

We should not underestimate the effect of human depravity, and yet at the same time, Karl Barth's Christological account of true human freedom offers a vision of true humanity as defined by Jesus Christ. Since I will tie Christ with AI in the next section more formally, it's important for me to highlight a few pieces of Barth's contribution.

Though Barth was indeed allergic to the word “depravity,” he brought a new angle to human depravity by demonstrating how we do not follow the example of the fully human God-man, Jesus Christ. He does employ a parallel term from Luther: “'my boundless misery' (Luther), i.e., the misery which has no measure or limit within my human being and thinking and willing and achievement, in the sphere in which I exist as a man” (CD IV/2, 486).

Barth unveiled what it looked like for a finite man to embody true human freedom in the Incarnation of Jesus the Christ. "The reality of sin cannot be known or described except in relation to the One who has vanquished it" (CD IV/1, 144). Sin then has depth, but the redemption of Christ reaches deeper still to reveal the nature of true human freedom. The embodiment of true freedom in Jesus the Christ is a freedom from sin, and even more, toward love and empathy.

I find then that this seemingly arcane doctrine of human depravity has amazing contemporary resonance. It helps me to see that technology, including AI, is not neutral. It comes from human minds and institutions that are themselves bent in various ways. Our systems amplify existing injustices unless we intentionally resist that outcome. To say that

technology is not neutral is already to affirm that every design decision carries a moral framework within it.

XI.
Real Misrepresentation in Artificial Intelligence

Consider one particular: representation or really, misrepresentation. We can be lulled into thinking that AI is omniscient, which certainly is not the case. An estimated two and a half billion people are simply not on the internet, and their data is not part of training AI models. More specifically, scholars like Mohammed Ghaly have raised alarms about the under-representation of Arabic sources in major AI training sets. There are 600 million Arabic speakers worldwide, but only .06% of AI programs are trained with Arabic input.

When entire linguistic and religious communities are underrepresented or misrepresented in our foundational data, our systems will misrepresent the world. That's not simply a technical glitch; it is a bias in AI's training. A just AI begins long before deployment—in its training. It begins with whom it counts and includes.

Catholic social teaching offers a particularly rich set of tools here. The principle of the common good—that the flourishing of each is bound up with the flourishing of all—sits in direct tension with AI development models that concentrate benefits among those already advantaged while distributing risk to those least able to absorb it. The "preferential option for the poor," developed in Latin American liberation theology and affirmed across Christian traditions, is especially searching in an AI context.

These theological threads weave together a response to the challenge framed so clearly in the Hebrew Bible: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, NRSVUE). Indeed, who bears the risk of AI's influence? For example, in AI-assisted medical diagnosis, in predictive policing, in automated hiring decisions, the answer is almost always the poor, the marginalized, and the structurally vulnerable.

Let me offer one more thought: the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is a cautionary tale, centrally about building a tower that reaches to God through the unity of language. The builders' ambition was not merely architectural. It was theological, a reach for self-made transcendence. As the text puts it, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4 NRSVUE). This is a vision of human unity organized entirely around human glory.

Pentecost in Acts 2 describes how all these languages are given so that the community of the new covenant are brought into a unity-in-diversity. This is not the elimination of difference but its redemption. The Spirit doesn't flatten the particularity of humanity; the Spirit translates it. Luke records that the gathered crowd was astounded: "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:11 NRSVUE). The multiplicity of languages that Babel weaponized becomes at Pentecost the vehicle of grace.

Babel asks, What can we build? Pentecost asks, Whom are we serving, and who is being left out?

These are not abstract questions, and they have renewed relevance in the AI age where Large Language Models form a centerpiece. LLMs represent an ambitious attempt to harness the power of language at scale, and that should give theologically engaged people pause. Will LLMs lead us toward Babel or Pentecost? The difference, as ever, lies in whether we build for our own glory or in service of the neighbor and the common good.

A fallen humanity builds fallen technologies. Part of our task then is constant repentance and reform, asking who is included, who is excluded, who bears the risk, and who reaps the benefits when a particular AI system is rolled out. Concern for the vulnerable has to be built into the process from the start, not bolted on at the end. Here repentance, and thus redemption, looks like external audits, sufficient transparency, and adequate governance, which go beyond proclaiming good intentions and signing overly broad ethical statements.

XII.
Christ, Wisdom, and AI

Any Christian manifesto like this one needs to include Christ's redemption in addition to our creation. Here I draw on Colossians 1:15ff., "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created… all things have been created through him and for him…." Christ restores the image of God in us and also holds together all of creation, including the AI sphere.

These verses from Colossians resonate with John 1, which describes Jesus as the *logos* (translated here as "Word") through which all things came to be. You may already know this passage, but its beauty and depth require that I cite it directly: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it." And then, as in Colossians, Jesus Christ embodies this *Logos* through which all things came to be. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-4, 14 NRSVUE).

In using this dazzling technology, we can't forget that everything is held together by the Logos, who is both Creator and Sustainer — the One through whom all things, including our technological innovations, have their being. They are not beyond his sustaining providence. In the Logos, they can find their ultimate purpose and coherence.

On a related note, Proverbs 8 personifies Wisdom, even a divine figure who was present at creation and who calls out in the streets to any who will listen. The early church read this passage in light of Christ as the Logos, the Word through whom all things were made (John

1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17). This means that the wisdom for which we are searching in our AI moment is not something we manufacture; it is Someone we receive.

AI, in its current form, is extraordinarily good at the rapid processing and retrieval of patterns within the vast datasets on which it has been trained. This is a form of intelligence, but it is not wisdom. Wisdom, in the Hebrew tradition, is not merely about knowing the right answer. It is about knowing how to live, in time, in community, in relationship with the living God, and in honest reckoning with one's own limits.

In addition, it is through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit that God moves us toward love for neighbor and creation. A redemptive approach to AI leads us to seek healing, restoration, and reconciliation. The Spirit's fruit (Galatians 5:22-23)—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—can be easily eroded by cavalier and excessive AI use. But it is God's grace that leads us to restraint and also toward a wise use of AI, a use that can even promote virtue.

XIII.
A Call to Wisdom and Its Practices

Talk of AI often revolves around engineering and economics: how fast, how powerful, how profitable. But we also need the slower, deeper questions that come from theology and from religious traditions. What is a good life? What is a just society? Where do we find wisdom and hope? What does flourishing look like in God's world? In an economy that monetizes attention, wisdom begins with learning again how to pay attention well.
I'm especially drawn to the biblical language around Sabbath.

In Mark 2:27, Jesus reminds us, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath." Eugene Peterson's masterful paraphrase is worth citing:

> One Sabbath day he was walking through a field of ripe grain. As his disciples made a path, they pulled off heads of grain. The Pharisees told on them to Jesus: "Look, your disciples are breaking Sabbath rules!" Jesus said, "Really? Haven't you ever read what David did when he was hungry, along with those who were with him? How he entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, with the Chief Priest Abiathar right there watching — holy bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat — and handed it out to his companions?" Then Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren't made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of Man is no yes-man to the Sabbath. He's in charge!" (Mark 2:23-28, *The Message*)

Who indeed is in charge? It should not be AI. And Sabbath is a weekly interruption of the cult of productivity. It says we are creatures, not machines, loved children, not mere workers. The Pharisees cared deeply about the Jewish law and sought to guard its proper use, especially because keeping the Sabbath maintained Jewish identity under centuries of occupation by other nations. But Jesus dismantles that self-understanding. He appeals to human need and to a God who is principally about "mercy, not sacrifice" (meaning

religious ritual). He shifts the focus. Sabbath trains us to say "enough" in a culture that always trains us to believe we need more, and that demands from us more speed, more output, and more consumption. And if we can't, then let AI take over for us.

By analogy and because AI is creating a new Transcendent Guide for many, we must continue to ask, are we letting AI tell us what's best for us and in the process gradually losing our humanity? Here, of course, I'm fighting against the Wall-E scenario where we simply succumb. The shift here is that God has given us agency, not incrementally succumbing to technology, but continuing to manage and steward and shape it. This is what I learn from Jesus's example.

My vision is for churches to become the kind of communities that can *use AI without being used by it* because we're anchored in wisdom, spiritual practices, and a Christ-centered account of humanity.

Just to be clear: this does not mean we abandon Sabbath practice. Quite the opposite. Wayne Muller has written beautifully about Sabbath (in his book of the same name) as a practice that breaks the spell of efficiency and teaches us again that we are more than what we produce or consume. In an era when AI can work endlessly, and when our devices can keep us on 24 hours a day, Sabbath has become even more countercultural today. It reminds us that rest, worship, and delight are not inefficiencies to be optimized away; they are central to being human.

XIV.
Focal Practices

Sabbath becomes a key practice to resist "the World," to use the older designation for the corrupting effects of the culture and its technology that encircles and shapes us.

Similarly, philosopher Albert Borgmann warned that technology can shrink the world into what he calls "devices"—instruments of seemingly frictionless convenience that deliver commodities without asking much of us. In contrast, he celebrates "focal practices," like shared meals, musical performance, or worship, that gather us around what truly matters and call forth our full attention.

I believe such focal practices ground us in an AI world. The church's worship, prayer, and table fellowship are such focal practices, which can restore our humanity as our devices demand our attention and teach us to focus on everything and therefore nothing.

So, when I say, "an AI made for us," I'm echoing Jesus: technology is for people, not people for technology. Any AI that cannot coexist with rest, contemplation, and limits is, quite simply, detrimental to our souls. Limits are not anti-technology; they are pro-humanity. This returns me again to the question of what we are becoming, not merely what we can build.

Let me connect this with the Incarnation of Christ and a key theme in the season of Advent, in which we celebrate Jesus's first coming. I am reminded that he is "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Of course, this draws from the prophetic attributes of the Messiah found in passages like Isaiah 11:2 and Proverbs 8:22-31.

In one of its core teachings (I might even argue the core teaching), the Christian Church proclaims that divine Wisdom was born in the baby Jesus. As the great Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" beautifully intones:

> O come, O Wisdom from on high, who ordered all things mightily
> to us the path of knowledge show and teach us in its ways to go.

This is a plea for God's guidance, knowledge, and salvation during the waiting season of Advent, the beginning of the Christian calendar. It is ultimately a call to seek the slowness of real wisdom in an age of the dazzling speed of artificial intelligence.

XV.
A Call to Creative Collaboration

We also need to creatively collaborate with AI. And this is based on the conviction that we as human beings are collaborative creatures. We do our best work together. MIT professor Thomas Malone has used the term "superminds" for groups—often groups of humans and computers together—that can think in ways no individual can. And just to prove and exemplify that point, I created an initial draft of this manifesto with the assistance of AI queries.

I find that image helpful. The goal is not to build a solitary, all-knowing machine, but to cultivate communities in which humans alongside AI systems seek the common good. That means teams of software engineers, ethicists, theologians, policymakers, and — crucially — those most affected by technological change sitting at the same table (which, incidentally, is something at the core of what AI and Faith is committed to do).

The essence of community is that we as *homo sapiens sapiens* flourish when we collaborate rather than compete as isolated individuals. If AI can help us think together more clearly and act together more justly, then it has a role in our shared future.
At the same time, that Latin adjective *sapiens* means "wise," and it has become clear to me that we will never outpace the speed of AI knowledge, but we can contribute wisdom. And wisdom moves slowly.

This also means that the unit of measure for AI's use is not primarily the individual, though of course each of us individually has to use it well, safely and beneficially. Instead, we need to see the church as community-forming.

XVI.
A Call to Hope in Negotiating Promises and Perils

I want to talk about a posture we can bring to AI. I don't think either fear or naïve optimism will do. Instead, we need hope. That hope arises from our confidence in God's final redemption of all creation and how we can proleptically live into that final direction for our lives and our world. Hope keeps us working toward a preferred future when the outcome is uncertain, and the slide to cynicism is tempting.

Let's listen to Thomas Aquinas who wrote that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it (*gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*). Something similar might be said of the redemption of technology: the Spirit does not abolish our tools but can work through them when they are used with wisdom, justice, and love. The goal is not to escape the digital world, but to inhabit it in a way that bears witness to what Jesus embodied and proclaimed: the Kingdom of God.

This means that hope is not optimism, nor is it toxic positivity. The latter tells us just to have a positive outlook—that things will necessarily get better—and the former denies the problems of this world and does nothing about it. Listen to John Parsi, who believes that optimism doesn't require a person to do anything, and thus it can represent a form of toxic positivity.

But from the working scientific definition of hope, hope does good for the hopeful. "Hopeful people cannot just wish things into existence. Hope requires a person to take responsibility for their wants and desires and to take action in working towards them. Optimistic people see the glass as half full, but hopeful people ask how they can fill the glass full." Christian hope is stubbornly realistic. It tells the truth about evil but refuses to allow evil to have the last word. And, in the Christian faith, the last word is always God's. And the Word from before the beginning who endures forever is Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, a key component of the ideal self is hope because it includes both optimism and self-efficacy.[7] In other words, hope is expressed through the positive emotion that arises out of a vision for the future and a belief that there are means to get there.

To set this into the widest and most glorious theological context, I lean into Christian eschatology, and our ultimate hope in restoration of all things in Christ. I hold to the vision of Romans 8:21 (NRSVUE), “The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" and continues "so that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28 NRSVUE). We live and work in light of that hope.

And this is why underrepresentation is significant. With minimal inputs from Arabic, Swahili, Hindi, and other Global South language sources in AI training sets, the problem mentioned in this manifesto is not only a technical limitation. It is an ecclesiological problem: the AI tools available to the global church are disproportionately shaped by Global North assumptions. Organizations like AI & Faith are well-positioned to name this

issue and to advocate for a genuinely global AI that honors the breadth of the church's catholicity.

XVII.
Presence of the Future

This doesn't make us complacent. It doesn't lead us to fall prey to Karl Marx's quip that religion is an "opiate," dulling us to the injustices of our day.

John proclaims in Revelation (chapter 7:9-10), "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!'"

In that light, Martin Luther King's justly famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech provides an example. He concludes with these words about the dream he's proclaiming:

> And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last.

It might sound like this is entirely in the future, but it was this vision that propelled MLK to lead a movement for racial justice in his time, not simply waiting for future consummation. Similarly, the vision of hope I and others like me are motivated by looks to the future, but gives us power to work for AI justice today.

I lean into hope instead of despair or shallow optimism, both of which breed complacency. When it comes to AI, hope allows us to see the real dangers, like bias, surveillance, job displacement, concentration of power but not be paralyzed by them. Hope insists that what we build and how we govern it still matters. It sends us into policy debates, research labs, classrooms, and congregations with a determination to shape AI toward justice, mercy, and human flourishing.

XVIII.
A Call to the Church: A Rule of Life in the Age of AI

Excitement often acts as the enemy of discernment. And AI generates excitement, but it does require us to slow down long enough to ask the right questions. Paul's words to the Romans offer us the right starting place. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be

transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2 NRSVUE).

“Do not be conformed to, or squeezed into a mold of, this age.” That phrase has always carried urgency, but it brings a particular charge now. Every age has its engines of conformity and cults — the Roman empire's cult of power and patronage, the Enlightenment's cult of autonomous reason, consumer capitalism's cult of endless acquisition. Our age has added something new: algorithms engineered with extraordinary precision to capture our attention, reshape our desires, and monetize our habits, often before we've noticed this happening.

Building on my paradigm on "saying yes to no”—particularly the cultivation of "nurturing Nos," which represent deliberate constraints that actually help our Yeses flourish—I offer this rule of life. A No to distraction is a Yes to presence. A rule of life is not a new legalism; it is a way to trim the sails to let them be filled with the wind of God's Spirit. And in the age of AI, trimming those sails is not an optional activity. It is urgent. Put another way, a No to outsourced convenience is a Yes to a sustained attention that undergirds integrity. These nurturing Nos are urgent, not optional spiritual accessories.

Here is perhaps the place to set out key questions for the church in an AI world. What happens to confession, forgiveness, pastoral care, and spiritual authority when guidance is outsourced to an AI model? What's lost? What might be gained? This is not a hypothetical. People are already telling their struggles to chatbots rather than to pastors, spiritual directors, or trusted friends. Some of what is gained is real. We encounter availability, anonymity, the absence of judgment. But what is lost? I'd argue for accountability, embodied witness, the irreplaceable weight of another person saying, “I forgive you,” or “I will walk through this with you.”

How might churches unintentionally disciple their congregations into a kind of digital Gnosticism, a type of spirituality that highlights the disembodied, the frictionless, the purely informational, and in the process devalues the embodied? The early church fought hard against Gnosticism, if for no other reason than because in Jesus, God took on a body. It insisted that bodies matter, that the Word became flesh, that salvation moves through physical elements of water and bread and wine. We may need to take up that battle once again.

What are the "focal practices" of the church that AI must never displace, such as the Eucharist, baptism, shared prayer, visitation, lament, hospitality? These are not inefficiencies to be digitized and optimized. They are the deep grammar of the kingdom. We need nurturing spiritual practices that form us and structures that boundary us. And these aren't technophobic rules, but practices of receiving God's mercy so that we will be transformed and not squeezed into the mold ("conformed" in the text above) into the unhealthy patterns of the world around us.

A modest rule of life for an AI age begins with Sabbath, daily and weekly AI fasts, which retrain our “minds""(to use Romans 12:1's language) through the power of neuroplasticity to listen rather than extract via AI, and to attend to God's Spirit around us and in the world.

It might include simple embodiment boundaries such as no AI at the table, no AI-outsourced shortcuts where trust is at stake and thus the attention needed to protect the “view of the stars.” Practically, this also means being transparent with others about how we use AI, especially in contexts of church relationships, Christian discipleship, or pastoral care. These are not extravagant gestures. They are the quiet, daily choices; through them, we remain subjects of our own formation.

We submit ourselves to God, who ultimately does the formation. But of course, we can submit to other principalities and powers. Daily and weekly rhythms of stepping away from AI tools are not technophobic moves. They are a retraining of what Paul calls in this passage the *nous*, that is, the mind. Neuroscience has taught us that neuroplasticity means that what we attend to, we become more like. *What fires together, wires together*.

These constraints are not a retreat from the future; they are a retrieving of the great wisdom of Christian spirituality and a re-presenting—that is, making present in *this* moment—of what has always been true. The life well-lived is one formed in face-to-face communities, meals together, common worship, and a life together of hope, repentance, and forgiveness. Discipleship, by which I mean following Jesus, remains embodied, and so our practices must keep drawing us back into physical co-presence, prayer, and worship together. No AI can, or perhaps ought, to confess on our behalf, to receive the bread and cup for us, and it certainly can't sit with a grieving friend at 2 a.m. I believe that these irreducibly human acts are not relics of a pre-digital past.

One crucial, related point: If there's anything from contemporary research into the goods that religion brings for human flourishing, it's worshipping together in person. All together, these constitute the grammar of the kingdom. As we move into the new future, where AI will be increasingly present, I am proposing a retrieval: a reaching back into the wisdom of Christian spirituality in order to re-present (that is, bring into the present) what has always been true.

Ultimately, the most distinctively Christian contribution to the AI conversation is not a set of guardrails, though restraints and guidelines for AI development matter. Instead, it's a *doxological framework*, the insistence that every question about technology must be asked in light of the question: *Does this glorify God?* The Westminster Shorter Catechism's famous opening—"the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever”—sets our ultimate frame. Every practice, including our use of AI, is to be evaluated in light of God's chief end for us. That is a high standard. It is also a liberating one because it means we are never simply at the mercy of whatever technology arrives next. We always have a prior loyalty, a deeper telos, a more compelling story.

The wind of the Spirit is always moving. The question is whether we have trimmed our sails to catch it.

XIX.
Theses Toward an AI Made for Us

We are living through a pivotal transition. AI is no longer an abstract topic for late-night arguments; it is arriving in our classrooms, our hospitals, our smartphones, and our sanctuaries. AI makes decisions about whose voice gets amplified and whose gets buried. Historical hinge points like today require much more than innovation. They require moral imagination shaped by worship and love. The question is not whether we can build ever more powerful systems, but whether we will nurture communities capable of stewarding this power wisely. And the church has something essential to say.

In this setting in life, this *Sitz im Leben*, I close by affirming several convictions:

1. Since we are created with the gift of creativity, AI stands as one expression of that God-given gift to make and shape the world. This is not "playing God." It's playing human. We should receive it with gratitude and with the same discernment we bring to every gift capable of being turned toward good or ill.
2. Our uniqueness lies not only in intelligence, but in embodiment, relationality, and moral responsibility. These are not limitations to be overcome by smarter machines. They are the essential features of human life that make love, justice, and worship possible. No algorithm can substitute for them.
3. Our fallenness means AI will mirror and magnify our injustices unless we actively resist that outcome. This is not pessimism; it is realism about the human condition. It is also why passive consumption of AI is never a neutral act.
4. The Christian spiritual and theological tradition offer hard-won wisdom about rest, limits, community, and the meaning of a life "fully alive" (Irenaeus). This is wisdom forged precisely in resistance to the conformity and allure of each age's version of the World. We carry two thousand years of preparation into such a time as this.
5. We flourish when we work together, both with machines we've made and with other human beings, collaborating across traditions with honest input from those most vulnerable to AI's harms. Using the AI we have created in service of the common good is not merely a strategic choice, but is a present moral imperative.
6. Hope, not fear, and not shallow optimism, should guide our engagement with this technology. In the Christian sense, hope is not wishful thinking. It is a confident orientation toward a future promised by God and held in God's hands. From that ground, we can act boldly, fail honestly, and faithfully persevere.

XX.
Final Words

The manifesto's guiding image—Jesus's Sabbath principle—remains the lodestar: technology is for people, not people for technology. As followers of Jesus, we believe that the full humanity for which AI must be made is the humanity revealed in him, which is to

say embodied, relational, morally engaged, and capable of suffering and forgiveness. Humanity is not an ideal we invented. It is an identity, as God's children and image-bearers, that we all receive. It is more than enough to meet this moment.

The church has navigated many technological revolutions that, each time, seemed to disrupt an important status quo: the codex (the book instead of the scroll), which emerged in the first century AD; the printing press, developed by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440 (instead of the handwritten manuscript); and more recently, the internet (which dispersed knowledge and centers of authority). In each case, the task was the same: put aside the resistance and fear and receive the new thing with discernment, to shape it toward human flourishing, and to insist that no technology, however powerful, defines what it means to be fully alive.

That task is ours again now. And we are not without resources. We have Scripture, tradition, community, and the Spirit. We have Sabbath and sacrament, confession, and the message of hope. We have, in short, everything we need. But we have to be willing to use all these resources and not sit back and watch ourselves being formed by the world of AI.

I started by mentioning the gospel of Silicon Valley, and it certainly carries real promise. Still, I think there's a better good news. “An AI made for us” is more than a slogan. I believe it's a call, even the basis for a manifesto. It is a summons to bring our time-tested theological wisdom, our best institutions, and our most profound hopes to the task of shaping AI so that it serves human dignity, nurtures community, and advances justice. It calls us to fully engage our time, prayer, and creativity. It calls us, in the end, not merely to use AI wisely, but to become the kind of people who are formed by worship, rooted in community, and oriented toward the common good and for whom wise use is second nature. That is the task before us that, by God's power and grace, we can do.

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21, NRSVUE).

Notes

[1] [i]Appropriately enough I engaged Claude in the editing of this piece. Ultimately, however, I am responsible for the final version. The Pew Report is a good place to start: "Key findings about how Americans view artificial intelligence," March 12, 2026, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/03/12/key-findings-about-how-americans-view-artificial-intelligence/, accessed March 15, 2026.

[2] Here's a good video series that introduces AI: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXSn3Zz2ayT7ab7I12PBYVt0244369S1q, accessed March 15, 2026.

[3] “The Klarity of AI,” https://scienceforthechurch.org/2023/01/17/the-klarity-of-ai/. For what it's worth, I am drawing substantially from that piece, which is fine because I hold the copyright.

[4] Judith Shulevitz, "The Radiant Inner Life of a Robot," *The Atlantic*, April 2021, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/kazuo-ishiguro-klara-and-the-sun/618083/, accessed March 15, 2026.
[5] Quoted in Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 5.
[6] I'd like to emphasize "formulated." Calvin himself certainly leans on Augustine (*On Nature and Grace*), for example in *Institutes* II.1.8, II.2.8, who himself leans on Paul in Romans 5.
[7] This I learned from my friend and colleague Jeff Gephart, whose doctoral research highlighted the importance of hope.