



STEWARDING THE MACHINE: IMAGO DEI, GENESIS CREATION CARE, AND HUMAN-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI

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Organizations are more commonly integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into critical workflows, processes, and as team members to partner with technology for impact. Therefore, Christian leaders must consider what faithful technology stewardship requires. This article presents an exegetical examination of the Genesis creation narratives (1:26–28; 2:15) and the principle of the *imago Dei* as theological foundations for leadership in digitally mediated environments. Through exegesis of key passages on dominion, stewardship, work, and humanity's unique identity as image-bearers of God, the article explores distinctions between human beings and increasingly intelligent technological systems. While artificial intelligence may assist, optimize, and inform decision-making, it lacks the moral agency, accountability, or spiritual interiority uniquely granted to humanity. This distinction carries significant implications for leadership theory and organizational practice. The manuscript argues that human-centric leadership may be understood as a form of steward leadership in the age of intelligent machines, requiring leaders to intentionally design, govern, and constrain technological systems to preserve human dignity, relational depth, and organizational justice. This work contributes an exegetically grounded Christian leadership framework for responsible AI stewardship that maintains humanity at the center of technological transformation.

Keywords: *imago Dei*, artificial intelligence, human-centric leadership, technology ethics

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the modern workplace by mediating hiring decisions, communication flows, performance assessments, knowledge creation, and strategic direction. While these technologies promise enhanced efficiency, productivity, and innovation, they also prompt profound questions regarding human dignity, moral responsibility, and the very essence of work. Contemporary discourse on

AI often privileges technical competencies, risk management, and governance architecture, yet tends to marginalize deeper inquiries into theological anthropology and humanity's divinely bestowed vocation.

Within organizational discourse, narratives surrounding AI increasingly cast technological systems as substitutes for human labor rather than as tools designed to support and amplify human capacities. Such perspectives risk collapsing human value into mere metrics of productivity and economic output. For Christian leaders, this reductionism generates tensions that move beyond questions of organizational performance to implicate core theological concerns, namely, humanity's identity, purpose, and vocation within creation.

Genesis 1 and 2 offer a robust theological framework for interrogating these questions. The principles of *imago Dei* and creation stewardship depict humanity as uniquely fashioned to mirror God's character and to exercise responsible dominion under divine authority. These teachings underscore crucial distinctions between human persons and even the most advanced technological systems, particularly in matters of moral agency, accountability, and vocational calling.

Through exegetical engagement with the Genesis creation narratives and critical dialogue with contemporary leadership and AI literature, this article contends that human-centric leadership constitutes a renewed form of steward leadership for the era of intelligent systems. Specifically, it advances the thesis that faithful technological stewardship obliges leaders to preserve human dignity, sustain moral accountability, and ensure that technological innovation continues to serve human flourishing rather than supplanting human purpose.

This article unfolds by first interrogating AI replacement narratives and their attendant theological questions regarding human purpose, then exploring biblical perspectives on work and stewardship, investigating the distinctiveness of humanity as bearers of the *imago Dei*, evaluating the boundaries of AI's moral agency, and ultimately proposing human-centric leadership as a practical and theologically grounded framework for Christian technological stewardship.

AI REPLACEMENT NARRATIVES AND RESPONSIBILITY

The AI replacement narrative in organizational marketing and advertising subtly undermines the intrinsic value of human labor, ushering in a sophisticated form of labor arbitrage. These campaigns advance their agendas through both explicit imperatives (e.g., "stop hiring humans") and more insidious, psychologically charged strategies rooted in fear, avarice, or the allure of power (e.g., "remove bias from humans," "AI won't ask for a raise," "maximize your cost-cutting," "scale without humans").

Profit-driven marketing tactics erode worker confidence in the potential for mutually beneficial human-machine collaboration, intensifying apprehensions surrounding replacement rather than augmentation (Li et al., 2025). Organizational leaders who prioritize replacement over integration adopt a myopic, ultimately unsustainable approach marked by distrust (As'ad & Al Omari, 2025; Ozturkcan & Bozdağ, 2025). When organizations elevate efficiency and cost reduction above the well-being and intrinsic worth of their workforce, they imperil the foundation of their organizational purpose.

For Christian leaders, decision-making and biblical stewardship require transcending worldly paradigms to navigate the intricate tensions among organizational efficiency, fiscal stewardship, and a profound understanding of human purpose—by pursuing spiritual discernment and wisdom through trust in God (Prov. 3:5). When leaders anchor their decisions solely in performance metrics and financial considerations, disregarding the purposeful design inherent in the *imago Dei*, the prospect for stewarding technological adoption in a way that preserves human dignity diminishes, paving the way for the dehumanization of the workforce in pursuit of transient profitability.

The literature on responsible AI emphasizes avoiding negative consequences, reducing harm, and ensuring explainability, accountability, and privacy (Mikalef et al., 2022; Radanliev et al., 2024; Rakova et al., 2021; Taylor, 2025). Ethical examinations across religious contexts offer parallel insights that are complementary to the pervasive practical recommendations for building these systems (UI Haq, 2026; Winter, 2026). However, gaps presently exist in exploring the creation calling of Genesis, the dominion focus, and human-centric leadership concepts related to AI implementation.

IMAGO DEI AND HUMAN DISTINCTIVENESS

The distinctiveness of humanity, articulated in Genesis 1:26 through the principle of the *imago Dei*, grants Christian leaders a profound lens for apprehending the sacredness and intentionality of human design. Many theologians further discern in this text an anticipatory glimpse of the triune nature of God, underscoring humanity's relational essence and representative vocation within the created order (Kristanto et al., 2024; MacArthur, 2015, p. 6). As bearers of God's image, humans transcend mere creatureliness, being vested with divinely ordained purpose and responsibility.

The vocation of humanity to create, cultivate, and labor arises organically from this divine blueprint, preceding the Fall and affirming that purposeful work and stewardship are intrinsic to God's original intent for humankind (Bethancourt, 2024, p. 23; Kristanto et al., 2024). Adam's mandate to tend and keep the garden illustrates that labor was not punitive or incidental, but integral to God's good creation (Gen. 2:15). MacArthur (2015) contends that work imbued Adam with meaning and fulfillment prior to the advent of sin (p. 16). Consequently, labor is rightly considered greater than economic exchange, in which workers actively participate in the divine purpose for humanity.

Kristanto et al. (2024) further depict the rebirth of Christians into the new creation as a summons to participate in God's restorative work within His kingdom. Within this calling, believers are invited to meaningful engagement through labor and stewardship, thereby embodying God's redemptive purposes in their work, including the use of AI (Kristanto et al., 2024; Xu, 2025). This understanding of vocation transcends personal satisfaction, framing work as a sacred act of faithful cooperation in God's ongoing creative and redemptive activity.

As technological transformation reshapes workflows and the workplace, Christian leaders are called to rigorously harmonize their theology of creation and vocation with the design and integration of AI technologies. Escalating global anxieties regarding technological proliferation only magnify this obligation (Press, 2024). In the face of both

utopian and dystopian visions of AI (Acampa, 2025), leaders must safeguard a human-centric understanding of work that affirms humanity's singular role and stewardship within creation. Preserving proper human responsibility over technological innovation is thus indispensable to ensuring that progress serves, rather than undermines, the divine calling entrusted to humanity.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF WORK AND STEWARDSHIP

Within the creation narrative, God created humanity with a singular vocation: responsibility and stewardship over all creation. Adam, as the inaugural steward, was charged with oversight of the created order and its living inhabitants, those that came before him (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:19; Bethancourt, 2024, p. 24). Unlike all other creatures, humans are uniquely fashioned in the image of God, thereby inaugurating a sacred role of representation, responsibility, and relationality within the cosmos (Wenham, 1987). This responsibility, far from sanctioning domination for self-interest, is framed as a call to faithful stewardship under God's supreme authority.

Endowed as image bearers, humans possess divinely granted faculties for creativity, intellect, and innovation. Exercising these gifts, humanity participates in the cultivation and unfolding of creation, generating technologies and systems that amplify human potential. Contemporary advancements, ranging from artificial intelligence to robotics, epitomize the extension of this God-given creativity. However, Christian leaders are entrusted with stewardship not only of God's natural creation but also of artifacts born of human ingenuity. As technological innovations increasingly emulate human faculties, including reasoning, communication, and decision-making, their evolution and application demand deepened ethical and theological vigilance.

The unparalleled distinctiveness of humanity compels a spiritually discerning approach toward anthropomorphized technologies. No created entity, regardless of its sophistication, can claim the intrinsic worth or vocation of those who uniquely bear the *imago Dei* (Wenham, 1987, p. 29). Genesis further reveals that, even in a state of original innocence, Adam and Eve were tempted to seek autonomy and wisdom apart from divine provision (Gen. 3). The fundamental concern was not knowledge per se, but the aspiration for autonomy and insight divorced from God's design and command. In the context of human fallenness, the alluring promises attached to AI—efficiency, expanded knowledge, augmented decision-making—may similarly entice leaders toward misplaced faith, the consolidation of power, or a diminishment of authentic human responsibility.

Bethancourt (2024) contends that Christians embody God's kingdom at the intersection of purpose, passion, and divine placement. Yet, as bearers of the divine image, humanity is perpetually accountable for its decisions, with obedience marking the path to alignment with God's will (Bethancourt, 2024, p. 24). Thus, Christian leaders must earnestly pursue God's guidance, rigorously interrogating the motives, presuppositions, and potential consequences that accompany technological adoption, both independently and with wise counsel for proper accountability. Ethical leadership demands vigilant scrutiny of how AI and related technologies might amplify greed, centralize power, or engender dehumanization inconsistent with biblical convictions.

THE IMAGO DEI AS HUMAN IDENTITY

The “image” and “likeness” of God, conferred uniquely upon humanity, embody characteristics and capacities that set human beings apart within creation. Scholars frequently link the imago Dei to humanity’s moral nature, relational depth, intellect, and volition (Murphy & Knight, 2010; Wenham, 1987, p. 29). While theological perspectives vary on the precise contours of the image (Peters, 2018; Rabie-Boshoff & Buitendag, 2021), Genesis affirms humanity’s distinct vocation and identity as reflecting God’s own character and purpose within the created order. Thus, humanity’s uniqueness lies not simply in human capability but in the ontological reality of being created to embody and represent the divine.

Genesis further underscores the intentionality of human creation by depicting God as shaping humanity from the dust of the earth (2:7). Wenham (1987) observes that this imagery conveys deliberate craftsmanship and divine artistry (p. 59). Humanity is thus portrayed not as a product of chance, but as the fruit of purposeful design. In parallel, human beings use their God-given faculties of creativity, intellect, and design to develop technologies and innovations. Through these endowments, leaders construct systems and tools that profoundly shape individuals and organizations. For Christian leaders, the stewardship of technological integration must be exercised under divine authority and guided by robust ethical principles.

Despite humanity’s capacity to construct sophisticated systems and technologies, Scripture delineates unequivocal boundaries between human creativity and divine prerogative. Genesis 2:7 describes God breathing the “breath of life” (*New International Version*, 2011) into humanity, animating formed dust into a living being (Phillips, 2001; Wenham, 1987). The act of imparting life remains the exclusive domain of God, and participating in creation is both foreseen by and a gift from God (Peterson, 2016; Eph. 1:4–5; James 1:17; Jer. 1:5). While humanity may engineer technologies that mimic functions like reasoning, communication, learning, and decision-making, such feats do not amount to the creation of life or the conferral of personhood.

These theological distinctions carry profound implications for Christian leadership amid technological advancement. Anthropomorphized technologies must be regarded as subordinate instruments, never as equivalent forms of life. Accordingly, Christian leaders must exercise rigorous theological discernment when encountering narratives of AI sentience, digital personhood, or artificial life. The imago Dei is uniquely bestowed upon humanity (MacArthur, 2015, p. 6; Peterson, 2016), neither transferable nor reproducible by technological means. While AI may simulate elements of human cognition, it lacks spiritual vitality, moral consciousness, and the image-bearing identity imparted solely by God.

This distinction likewise bears significant weight for leadership accountability. Responsibility for technological outcomes cannot be abdicated to algorithms, systems, or automated processes. Human accountability remains the fulcrum of technological stewardship, as humans retain ultimate control over the systems they design and deploy. Therefore, Christian leaders must oversee technological implementation in ways that uphold human dignity, sustain ethical responsibility, and ensure that technology serves rather than supplants humanity’s divinely ordained purpose within creation.

THE LIMITS OF AI MORAL AGENCY

Artificial intelligence may increasingly demonstrate capabilities that resemble human reasoning, decision-making, and communication; however, leaders should not equate these demonstrations with moral agency. Moral agency traditionally requires more than the ability to process information or generate outcomes and involves intentionality, ethical discernment, moral responsibility, and the capacity to act in accordance with an internal understanding of right and wrong (Graves, 2023; Hallamaa & Kalliokoski, 2020). While AI systems may optimize decisions based upon patterns, probabilities, and programmed objectives, they do not possess an intrinsic moral awareness through which ethical judgments are personally understood or experienced (Barbosa & Alves Costa, 2024; Telakivi et al., 2026). Their outputs remain derivative of human design, training data, and computational processes rather than emerging from an internal moral framework.

Scripture further distinguishes humanity through characteristics that extend beyond cognitive ability alone. Humanity's creation in the image of God establishes individuals as relational, accountable, and morally responsible beings (Gen. 1:26–27). Unlike human beings, AI systems lack spiritual life, conscience, or the capacity for obedience and repentance before God (Coghill, 2023; Graves, 2023; Martín-Peña, 2024). The Genesis narrative portrays humanity as uniquely accountable for choices and actions, beginning with Adam and Eve's responsibility within creation (Gen. 3). Moral accountability was assigned to humanity rather than to any created object or tool. Consequently, technological systems that imitate aspects of human cognition should not be elevated to a status that assumes equivalent moral responsibility or personhood.

The limits of AI moral agency carry significant implications for Christian leadership and technological stewardship. Organizations may increasingly be tempted to defer difficult ethical judgments to algorithmic systems in the name of speed, efficiency, or perceived objectivity. Yet transferring responsibility to technology risks obscuring the accountability that properly belongs to human decision makers (Graves, 2023; Messer, 2025). Christian leaders must therefore retain ownership of ethical outcomes arising from technological implementation and maintain active oversight of AI-assisted decisions. Human responsibility before God cannot be delegated to machine systems, regardless of their increasing sophistication. Ethical leadership requires recognizing AI as a tool that may support decision-making processes but cannot replace the moral discernment and accountability uniquely entrusted to human image bearers.

HUMAN-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP AS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DECISION-MAKING

The theological distinctions delineated by the principles of *imago Dei*, stewardship, and the inherent limits of AI's moral agency establish the foundation for a leadership paradigm committed to preserving humanity's divinely ordained vocation amidst technological progress. Human-centric leadership thus emerges as a principled stewardship perspective for organizational decision-making in intelligent systems. This perspective foregrounds the intrinsic dignity, value, and purpose of individuals, regarding technology as an auxiliary instrument rather than a surrogate for human responsibility (Barresi, 2025). Within Christian leadership, this vision transcends concerns of employee welfare or organizational efficiency, embodying faithful

stewardship that intentionally aligns technological integration with God's creative and redemptive purposes for humanity.

Human-centric leadership perspectives also acknowledge that technological systems are never morally neutral artifacts isolated from human agency (Dorsch & Deroy, 2024; Hampton & DeFalco, 2022; Li & Kang, 2025). Technologies are imbued with assumptions, values, priorities, and objectives through human design and governance (Hampton & DeFalco, 2022). Accordingly, leaders serve not as passive recipients but as active stewards, remaining ultimately accountable for the ramifications of technological implementation. Opposing views that assign independent agency or leadership authority to technological systems are in contrast with and distort biblical anthropology by obscuring the unique moral responsibility entrusted to human beings (Billsberry, 2026; Peters, 2025). Since AI lacks authentic moral agency and spiritual accountability, ethical responsibility cannot be transferred to algorithms or automated processes. Christian leaders must therefore deliberately cultivate technological environments that promote relational depth, protect human dignity, and establish accountability structures that avert dehumanization and resist the centralization of power.

Interpreted through the lens of the Genesis creation narrative, human-centric leadership embodies humanity's foundational vocation to cultivate and steward creation under divine authority. Adam's commission to tend and keep the garden exemplifies leadership rooted not in domination but in responsible cultivation and vigilant care (Gen. 2:15). In today's technological context, this stewardship imperative summons leaders to cultivate organizational ecosystems in which innovation elevates human flourishing. Human-centric leadership thus constitutes an intentional and principled methodology for guiding and governing technological advancement in a manner that sustains humanity and coheres with God's creative and redemptive purposes.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Christian leaders endeavoring to steward artificial intelligence faithfully should anchor their decisions in the theology of creation as found in Genesis, as well as in the principles of human-centric leadership. The following practical recommendations offer concrete ways to ensure that the integration of AI upholds human dignity, responsible stewardship, and the core ethical commitments of the Christian tradition.

Prioritize Human Augmentation Over Replacement

Christian leaders should prioritize assessing and deploying artificial intelligence to augment human capabilities, avoiding supplanting human contribution. Leaders should assess technological initiatives by discerning whether they truly enrich human labor or, conversely, undermine meaningful participation, agency, and contribution. While efficiency remains a valid organizational aim, Christian leaders must judiciously balance prospective gains against the potential diminishment of purpose, dignity, interpersonal connection, and opportunities for individuals to exercise their God-given capacities.

Sustain Robust Human Accountability Structures

Organizations must preserve transparent and robust frameworks of human accountability. Decisive actions, especially those about hiring, performance evaluation, healthcare, financial outcomes, or ethical risk, must remain firmly within the domain of human responsibility. While automated recommendations and algorithmic insights may inform deliberations, they must never entirely supplant prudent human judgment. Leaders should be vigilant not to abdicate ultimate authority or moral responsibility to technological systems, particularly when the stakes involve individuals' welfare, communal wellbeing, or the integrity of the organization itself.

Undertake Rigorous Theological and Ethical Impact Assessments

Prior to deploying AI systems, Christian leaders must conduct thorough theological and ethical impact assessments. Such assessments should probe the underlying assumptions of each system, discern which individuals or communities might be vulnerable to unintended harm or marginalization, and ascertain whether the proposed implementation genuinely upholds human dignity. Leaders must also reflect on whether the technology enables meaningful work or, conversely, has the potential to diminish opportunities for human participation, responsibility, creativity, and vocation with the intention to mitigate impacts. This evaluative process equips organizations to discern whether their use is consonant with ethical and theological convictions.

Design for Relational Transparency and Connectivity

Christian leaders should conceive technological processes with a view toward sustaining relational transparency and authentic human connection. They must remain cognizant of the risk of permitting technology to estrange individuals or substitute meaningful exchange; leaders must cultivate systems that encourage genuine dialogue, collaboration, and interpersonal engagement. Moments for empathy, mentorship, compassionate presence, and sincere relationships should be deliberately woven into both the design and the enactment of technological initiatives to maintain a human-centric focus.

Establish Robust AI Stewardship Practices

Organizations must establish formal stewardship protocols for artificial intelligence to ensure the principled deployment of emerging technologies. Such protocols might include articulating institutional AI charters that delineate permissible uses, accountability standards, transparency benchmarks, and the contours of human oversight. Thoughtful governance safeguards the alignment of AI systems with organizational values, ethical imperatives, and the enduring obligation to uphold human dignity.

Cultivate Spiritual and Practical Discernment among Leaders

Christian leaders are called to cultivate both spiritual and practical discernment in communal ways as they navigate the organizational complexities of AI-related decisions. Wisdom, in this context, must be pursued through prayer, attentive engagement with Scripture, and wise counsel of the faith community, avoiding an

uncritical reliance on technological prediction, data analysis, or optimization. Technological considerations should remain subordinate to higher theological and ethical priorities—such as faithfulness, wisdom, justice, stewardship, and the inviolability of human dignity.

CONCLUSION

As AI revamps organizational processes and leadership considerations, Christian leaders confront questions that transcend mere technical capability, reaching into the heart of theological identity and vocational responsibility. The Genesis creation narrative offers a foundational lens for navigating these complexities, rooting humanity's role in the principles of the *imago Dei* and stewardship. Human beings are fashioned to embody God's image through responsible cultivation, relational depth, and moral accountability.

This exegetical inquiry contends that, despite the accelerating sophistication of technological capabilities, artificial intelligence remains categorically distinct from humanity. While AI may simulate aspects of reasoning, communication, and decision support, it lacks the moral agency, spiritual interiority, and Godward accountability intrinsic to human image-bearers. Thus, ethical responsibility for technological outcomes remains firmly anchored in the domain of human leadership.

Accordingly, human-centric leadership emerges as a faithful expression of stewardship in the era of intelligent systems. Christian leaders are summoned to adopt technological innovation with spiritual discernment, ensuring that technological systems remain subordinate to humanity's God-given vocation and purpose. Ultimately, the pressing challenge for Christian leaders is how humanity will steward its creations in ways that faithfully mirror the character and intentions of the Creator. Technological progress, when severed from human dignity, risks dehumanization; by contrast, technological stewardship rooted in faithful leadership may cultivate environments in which innovation serves both human flourishing and God's redemptive purposes.

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