

THE MORAL ARC OF TECHNOLOGY

*From Power to Service in
the Light of Christian Ethics*



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THE MORAL ARC OF TECHNOLOGY: FROM POWER TO SERVICE IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Abstract

This essay argues that technology possesses a moral arc, but that its direction is neither automatic nor morally neutral. Technology can enlarge human agency, reduce suffering, increase access to knowledge, and enable new forms of social coordination; yet it can also intensify domination, inequality, surveillance, manipulation, ecological harm, and the erosion of human dignity. In a machine-driven age, especially under the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, the central ethical question is not merely what technology can do, but what kind of human being and what kind of society technology is helping to form. Drawing on biblical theology and contemporary ethical debates, this essay contends that Christian ethics offers a distinctive and urgently needed framework for evaluating technology: power must be reordered toward service. The essay begins with the biblical themes of creation, stewardship, fall, idolatry, and redemption, showing that Scripture neither rejects human creativity nor grants unlimited dominion to technical power. It then turns to Christ as the decisive moral model, whose understanding of power is expressed through self-giving service rather than domination. Building on this foundation, the essay examines modern technologies—and especially AI—as sites where questions of dignity, truth, labor, governance, community, and justice become acute. It engages recent

institutional developments in AI ethics and governance while arguing that regulatory frameworks alone are insufficient unless they are sustained by a deeper moral anthropology. The essay concludes that the moral arc of technology bends toward service only when technical capability is governed by wisdom, humility, accountability, solidarity, and love of neighbor. In Christian perspective, technology is most faithful to human vocation not when it magnifies control for its own sake, but when it becomes a disciplined instrument of care, justice, and the common good.

Keywords

Technology ethics; Christian ethics; artificial intelligence; human dignity; stewardship; service; power; common good; theological anthropology; digital governance.

The Moral Arc of Technology: From Power to Service in the Light of Christian Ethics

1. Introduction: Why Technology Has a Moral Arc

Technology is often described in neutral terms, as though it were merely a collection of tools awaiting human use. In ordinary language, people say that technology is neither good nor bad; everything depends on the user. There is some truth in that statement. A tool can be turned toward healing or harm. Yet it is incomplete. Technologies do not simply sit outside moral life as passive instruments. They shape perception, habit, speed, scale, power, memory, work, communication, and social relations. They make some actions easier, others harder, some values visible, others peripheral. Technology therefore participates in moral formation. It not only extends human agency; it also reorganizes the conditions under which human agency is exercised.

That insight has become especially visible in the age of artificial intelligence. Recent international governance efforts show that the world increasingly recognizes AI not merely as a commercial innovation but as a domain with serious implications for rights, dignity, democracy, safety, and accountability. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence makes human rights and human dignity its cornerstone; the OECD AI Principles, updated in 2024, frame trustworthy AI in relation to human rights and democratic values; the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on AI is the first legally binding international treaty in this field; and the EU AI Act, which entered into force in August 2024, has been phasing in obligations from 2025 onward. These developments reveal a growing consensus that technology cannot be left to momentum alone. ([UNESCO](#))

Christian ethics offers a distinctive way to interpret this moment. It asks not only what technologies do, but what they presuppose about human beings and what they encourage human beings to become. It asks whether technical power is serving life, justice, truth, and neighbor-love, or whether it is teaching humanity to organize the world around control, efficiency, and self-exaltation. The phrase "the moral arc of technology" is therefore not a claim that history automatically improves. It is a claim that technology always moves within a moral drama. It bends either toward domination or toward service, toward idolatry or stewardship, toward manipulation or truth, toward exclusion or solidarity.

The central thesis of this essay is that, in the light of Christian ethics, the proper arc of technology is from power to service. Power itself is not evil. Scripture recognizes that human beings are entrusted with capacity, creativity, authority, and responsibility. The problem arises when power becomes detached from truth, humility, accountability, and love. In that case, technology becomes a magnifier of the fall. When power is reordered toward service, however, technology can become an instrument of healing, justice, and care for the common good.

2. Creation, Skill, and Stewardship: Technology in the Biblical Beginning

The Bible does not begin with a rejection of material life or human creativity. It begins with creation. Genesis 1 presents the world as the good work of God, ordered, differentiated, fruitful, and entrusted with blessing. Humanity is created in the image of God and given a role within creation. This role has too often been interpreted as license for domination, yet the wider biblical witness suggests something more responsible. Genesis 2:15 states that the human being is placed in the garden “to till it and keep it.” The language of cultivation is paired with guardianship. Human vocation is active, but never absolute.

This means that Christian thought should not approach technology with simplistic suspicion. Human making belongs, in a derivative way, to human imaging of the Creator. Scripture itself affirms skill, craft, and creativity. In Exodus 35:31, Bezalel is described as filled with the Spirit of God, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every craft. Technology in the broad sense—making, building, designing, ordering materials toward meaningful ends—is not foreign to biblical faith. It is part of cultural vocation.

Pope Francis made a similar point in his 2024 G7 address on artificial intelligence, where he affirmed that science and technology are products of human creativity and that AI arises from this God-given potential. In *Laudato Si'*, he likewise acknowledges that technology, when well directed, can improve quality of life, support medicine, engineering, communication, and sustainable development. The Christian question is therefore not whether technical power exists, but how it is morally directed. ([Vatican](#))

The biblical foundation of technology is thus stewardship rather than sovereignty. Psalm 24:1 declares, “The earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.” That verse places a limit on human possession. Human beings may

use, cultivate, organize, and invent, but they do so within a world that does not belong to them in an ultimate sense. Technology is accountable from the beginning because creation is not raw material in the metaphysical sense; it is divine gift. To misuse it is not only imprudent. It is unfaithful.

This biblical vision is especially important because many modern technological cultures begin with a different assumption: that value is defined by utility and that the world is fundamentally available for manipulation. Christian ethics counters this assumption by asserting that the world is first received before it is transformed. The order is gift, gratitude, stewardship, and then use. When that order is reversed, technology begins to drift from vocation toward domination.

3. The Fall and the Temptation of Mastery

If creation grounds the legitimacy of human creativity, the fall explains why technology so easily becomes an instrument of distortion. Genesis 3 is not only the story of individual disobedience. It is the story of the will to seize rather than receive, to define good and evil autonomously, to grasp rather than trust. That same pattern appears again and again in technological civilization. The problem is rarely making as such; the problem is the spiritual posture that governs making.

The Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is a paradigmatic text. Humanity gathers technical capacity—brick, architecture, urban coordination—not simply to dwell well, but to “make a name” for itself. Technology here becomes a means of self-exaltation and centralized power. Babel is not a condemnation of skill. It is a theological critique of technics ordered toward autonomy, prestige, and control. The story reveals that the deepest technological danger is not machinery itself but a civilization that seeks security, greatness, and immortality apart from obedience to God.

This pattern reappears in modern form in what Pope Francis calls the “technocratic paradigm.” In *Laudato Si’*, he writes that the ecological crisis has human roots and proposes reflection on the dominant technocratic paradigm and the place of human action in the world. In *Laudate Deum*, he sharpens the point, arguing that this paradigm assumes that reality, goodness, and truth flow automatically from technological and economic power, and warns that it encourages the treatment of nonhuman reality as mere resource. He further insists that not every increase in power represents progress for humanity.

This critique is profoundly biblical. Sin distorts power. It makes the human being imagine that capacity justifies control. It confuses “can” with “ought.” It normalizes the sacrifice of the weak to the strong, the future to the present, the person to the system, and the gift to the commodity. Technology under the conditions of the fall therefore becomes dangerous precisely because it can objectify what should be honored, accelerate what should be restrained, and scale what should remain morally contested.

The biblical answer is not anti-technology asceticism. It is moral conversion. The will to mastery must be judged. The creature must remember that it is a creature. Wisdom must interrupt ambition. Otherwise, technical power becomes spiritually intoxicating. It persuades humanity that more control equals more flourishing, even when evidence suggests the opposite.

4. Christ and the Reversal of Power

The decisive Christian answer to the problem of power is not an abstract principle but a person. Jesus Christ redefines greatness. In Mark 10:42–45, he contrasts the rulers of the Gentiles, who “lord it over” others, with the pattern expected of his followers: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.” Luke 22:25–27 repeats the contrast even more sharply, and John 13 dramatizes it when Christ washes the

feet of his disciples. Philippians 2:5–11 presents the same pattern in theological depth: Christ does not cling to status but empties himself, takes the form of a servant, and becomes obedient unto death.

This Christological reversal is essential for technology ethics. If Christ is the measure of true humanity, then Christian reflection on technology cannot be centered on domination, prestige, or control. It must be centered on service. Technical power is morally legitimate only insofar as it serves persons, communities, truth, and creation under God. A technology may be impressive and still be ethically malformed. Christian ethics judges it not first by novelty, profitability, or scale, but by whether it mirrors the servant pattern of Christ.

This point is not sentimental. It has institutional consequences. A hospital that deploys AI to improve diagnosis while preserving accountability and compassion is moving from power toward service. A firm that uses automation only to intensify worker surveillance or eliminate obligations to employees is moving in the opposite direction. A state that uses predictive systems to protect vulnerable populations with transparency and due process differs morally from a state that uses them to control dissent and classify populations without remedy.

Pope Francis has repeatedly applied this logic to AI. In his 2024 G7 address he stated that AI is, and must remain, a tool in human hands, and emphasized the need to safeguard proper human control over decisions. In the 2025 Vatican note *Antiqua et nova*, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education argue that the development and use of AI should uphold human dignity and promote the integral development of the human person and society. These interventions are significant because they reject both technophobia and technolatry. Technology is to be governed, not worshiped; directed, not allowed to define the good by itself. ([Vatican](#))

To say that the moral arc of technology should move from power to service is therefore to say that it should be conformed to a Christological logic. The question becomes: does this technology imitate the ruler who dominates, or the Lord who serves?

5. Technology Is Never Merely a Tool

A common modern error is to imagine that ethics begins only after a technology has been built. The actual design, scale, infrastructure, ownership model, interface logic, and deployment context are treated as technical matters, while ethics appears later as regulation or responsible use. But technologies already embody values before anyone “uses” them. They privilege certain behaviors, distribute capability unevenly, impose rhythms, collect certain forms of data, normalize certain kinds of attention, and shape the horizon of action.

That is why contemporary ethical frameworks increasingly focus on design and governance rather than on abstract post hoc principles. UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence centers dignity, human rights, transparency, fairness, accountability, and human oversight. The NIST AI Risk Management Framework identifies trustworthiness characteristics that include safety, security and resilience, transparency, explainability, privacy enhancement, and fairness with harmful bias managed. WHO’s guidance on AI for health likewise insists that ethics and human rights must be placed at the heart of design, deployment, and use. These frameworks recognize that ethics is not a decorative layer placed on top of technical systems. It must inform the entire lifecycle. ([UNESCO](#))

Christian ethics supports this lifecycle view because Scripture understands action as flowing from the heart, the imagination, and the ordering of love. What is built is never separable from what is desired. If a technological system is designed primarily for extraction, control, addiction, or status maximization, then later efforts to humanize it will be

constrained by the architecture already in place. This is one reason why the moral arc of technology cannot be discussed only in terms of end-user responsibility. Institutions, corporations, research labs, governments, and investors participate in moral agency as well.

Theologically, this means that repentance is not only personal. It is structural. A machine-driven world cannot be made humane by appealing only to individual virtue while leaving systems of incentive, ownership, and deployment untouched. Christian social ethics has long known this. Sin becomes embedded in institutions. Grace, therefore, must also take institutional form—through law, governance, transparency, labor protections, due process, accountability, and a culture that refuses to identify success with domination.

6. Artificial Intelligence as the Contemporary Test Case

Although the moral arc of technology applies broadly, AI has become the clearest contemporary test case because it intensifies long-standing questions about power, knowledge, agency, and service. AI can sort, predict, recommend, classify, generate, optimize, and simulate at scales previously impossible. It is already influencing medicine, education, work, law, communications, and public administration. Pope Francis noted at the G7 that AI is a powerful tool now affecting work, communications, culture, education, politics, and even the way people conceive human identity. That diagnosis captures why AI cannot be treated as merely another industry trend. It is anthropological in consequence. ([Vatican](#))

The international regulatory response confirms the scale of concern. The OECD Principles describe trustworthy AI in relation to human rights and democratic values. The Council of Europe Convention requires that activities within the AI lifecycle remain consistent with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, and it includes expectations regarding risk and impact assessment, prevention and mitigation measures, and the possibility of bans or moratoria for certain applications. The EU AI

Act establishes a phased, risk-based regime in which prohibited practices, literacy obligations, governance rules, and high-risk system obligations take effect on a staged timeline from 2025 through 2027. These are not marginal legal developments; they are signs that modern societies recognize the capacity of AI to reshape fundamental social goods. ([OECD](#))

From a Christian perspective, AI is neither uniquely demonic nor automatically emancipatory. It is a magnifier. It can magnify care, diagnosis, accessibility, efficiency, and foresight. It can also magnify bias, surveillance, disinformation, worker displacement, and concentration of power. For that reason, it becomes an ideal lens through which to understand the broader moral arc of technology. AI forces societies to decide whether technical intelligence will be governed by service or by domination.

The Rome Call for AI Ethics expresses this service-oriented aspiration explicitly. It was launched in 2020 to promote an ethical approach to AI, with signatories committing to principles including transparency, inclusion, accountability, impartiality, reliability, and security and privacy. It also insists that AI should serve every person and humanity as a whole, respect human dignity, and not exist merely for profit or the gradual replacement of people in the workplace. This language closely parallels core Christian ethical concerns. ([Rome Call](#))

7. Human Dignity in a Quantified Age

One of the deepest dangers of machine-driven systems is anthropological reduction. Human beings become legible to systems as datasets, profiles, risk categories, scores, engagement metrics, productivity indicators, or behavioral predictions. Such forms of legibility can be useful in limited contexts, yet they become morally destructive when they are mistaken for the person. A score is not a soul. A prediction is not a destiny. A profile is not a neighbor.

Christian ethics resists this reduction through the doctrine of the imago Dei. Human dignity does not arise from efficiency, predictability, intelligence quotient, economic output, or optimization value. It arises from being created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26–27, Psalm 8, Psalm 139, and James 3:9 all point toward a view of the person as irreducibly valuable. In biblical perspective, the human being is never exhausted by what can be measured. God sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). That truth is a direct challenge to technological cultures that increasingly trust only what can be counted, ranked, and rendered machine-readable.

The concern is not hypothetical. UNESCO frames dignity and human rights as the ethical center of AI governance. The Vatican's *Antiqua et nova* explicitly distinguishes human intelligence from artificial intelligence and roots human intelligence in the biblical claim that human beings are made in God's image. The note argues for an integral vision of the person and warns against reducing intelligence to merely functional or computational categories. ([UNESCO](#))

In practical terms, this means that systems used in education, hiring, credit, healthcare, policing, migration, welfare distribution, or online governance must not be allowed to define the worth of persons according to opaque patterns of statistical inference. A Christian ethic of dignity insists on contestability, explanation where relevant, and above all the refusal to identify machine classification with moral truth. To be known by a system is not the same as being known justly. To be efficiently managed is not the same as being honored.

The machine-driven world also creates the temptation to value only what is productive. Elderly persons, persons with severe disability, the chronically ill, children, the digitally excluded, and those whose lives do not align with metrics of performance can become invisible within optimization cultures. Christian ethics insists that these are precisely the persons whose dignity must become more visible, not less. The measure

of a humane society is not how efficiently it serves the already powerful, but how faithfully it protects those who can be easily overlooked.

8. Truth, Communication, and the Spiritual Conditions of Freedom

Technology also shapes the ecology of truth. Communication systems are not morally neutral channels. They can either support truthful deliberation or reward distortion, emotional manipulation, and accelerated reaction. In a digital environment saturated with synthetic media, algorithmic amplification, microtargeting, and generative content, the question of truth becomes inseparable from the question of human freedom.

Biblically, truth is not merely informational accuracy. It is covenantal. The commandment against false witness guards the possibility of justice, trust, and neighborly life. Ephesians 4:25 urges believers to speak the truth because they belong to one another. John 8:32 links truth with freedom. James 3 warns that speech can set whole worlds on fire. In this light, technologies that amplify deception, impersonation, or manipulation are not just technical risks. They corrode the moral conditions of community.

Recent rights-based analyses have raised similar alarms. OHCHR has warned that AI-mediated information systems affect freedom of expression and the information environment, and has highlighted risks related to privacy, manipulation, and the concentration of informational power. The broader concern is that AI can shape not only what people know, but how they come to know, what they trust, and how easily they are nudged without awareness. Christian ethics interprets this not only as a media problem but as a spiritual one. If conscience, discernment, and deliberation are subtly colonized by systems optimized for engagement or influence, freedom itself is thinned.

Pope Leo XIV's 2026 World Communications Day message, building on the Vatican's recent AI reflection, warns that relying on artificial statistical compilations can diminish cognitive, emotional, and communicative capacities if people evade the effort of thinking for themselves. This is an important observation. A technology can increase access to information and still weaken judgment if it encourages passive intellectual dependence. ([Vatican](#))

From a Christian standpoint, service to truth requires more than content moderation or fact-checking. It requires cultivating habits of patience, attentiveness, honesty, and accountability. Technology serves truth when it strengthens these habits; it undermines truth when it rewards speed over wisdom, outrage over understanding, and plausibility over fidelity. The moral arc of technology in communication is therefore not simply from analog to digital, but from manipulation to truthful service.

9. Work, Vocation, and the Risk of Instrumentalizing the Worker

Technology has always reorganized labor. Sometimes it relieves drudgery and opens new forms of productivity; sometimes it concentrates power, displaces workers, intensifies surveillance, and fragments skill. Christian ethics has long approached work not merely as an economic necessity, but as part of vocation, stewardship, and social participation. Genesis presents work before the fall, which means that labor in itself is not a curse. At the same time, Scripture consistently resists exploitative labor relations. Deuteronomy 24:14–15 forbids oppression of hired workers. James 5:4 condemns withheld wages. The sabbath command resists totalizing productivity by establishing limits that protect human beings, households, and even animals.

This biblical framework is highly relevant to AI. Contemporary policy and ethical discussions increasingly note that AI may transform jobs even when it does not simply erase them. The problem is not only unemployment; it is also degrading forms of automation in which

workers remain present but are subordinated to algorithmic pace, classification, and monitoring. The machine-driven workplace can become more efficient while also becoming less humane.

The Rome Call explicitly rejects an AI future whose sole goal is greater profit or the gradual replacement of people in the workplace. Pope Francis likewise linked AI with questions of labor in his G7 address, noting its growing effects on the world of work. The moral concern here is not nostalgia. It is the defense of work as a human good rather than a mere cost center. ([Rome Call](#))

John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* remains especially relevant. Its central claim is that work is "for man," not man "for work." Applied to contemporary technology, one may extend the principle: AI is for the worker and for the common good, not the worker for AI-driven optimization. If a system strips workers of agency, obscures responsibility, renders them disposable, or intensifies inequality between owners of technical capital and those subjected to its operations, then the moral arc has bent toward domination.

By contrast, technology moves toward service when it supports safer workplaces, removes degrading hazards, augments human judgment without erasing it, expands access to education and retraining, and shares productivity gains more justly. Service in this context means honoring the worker as a person, not merely extracting performance from labor through increasingly sophisticated systems.

10. Care, Embodiment, and the Limits of Substitution

Another area where the arc from power to service becomes morally decisive is care. Modern technologies, including AI, promise efficiency in healthcare, counseling, education, and social support. Some of these promises are real. WHO's guidance on AI for health recognizes substantial potential in diagnosis, treatment, research, and public health,

while insisting that ethics and human rights must remain central and that accountability to affected communities and persons must be preserved. ([World Health Organization](#))

Yet Christian ethics asks a further question: what forms of care are weakened when systems are designed primarily for substitution rather than support? Care is not merely delivery of accurate information. It often requires presence, embodied attention, moral discernment, compassion, patience, and relationship. The Good Samaritan in Luke 10 does not optimize assistance from a distance. He stops, sees, tends wounds, bears cost, and takes responsibility. Jesus' ministry repeatedly embodies this same proximity. He touches the sick, notices the forgotten, and addresses persons rather than only problems.

Technology serves care when it strengthens these human practices. It becomes morally suspect when it displaces them in ways that make institutions feel more efficient while leaving persons more isolated. An AI assistant may help summarize medical records, but it does not itself assume covenantal responsibility for a patient. A digital counselor may offer immediate responses, but it does not experience the vulnerability, prudence, and relational depth of human accompaniment. An automated tutor may personalize exercises, but it does not replace the formative role of a teacher who recognizes a student's fears, aspirations, and moral development.

The Vatican's *Antiqua et nova* emphasizes the integral development of the human person, and this phrase is crucial. Human beings are embodied, relational, moral, and spiritual. Care that ignores embodiment may still process needs, but it may fail to honor persons fully. The service-oriented use of technology therefore requires intentional preservation of human presence, especially in contexts of suffering, development, formation, grief, aging, and spiritual struggle. ([Vatican](#))

In Christian perspective, love is not infinitely automatable. Service through technology must remain aware of what machines can facilitate and what they cannot morally replace.

11. Governance, Accountability, and the Common Good

Because technology now structures large parts of collective life, governance is indispensable. Good intentions are not enough. Systems of great scale require rules, transparency, remedies, impact assessment, and institutions capable of enforcing public norms. Christian ethics supports governance not because law can save the human heart, but because justice requires more than exhortation.

Recent AI governance frameworks reflect this recognition. The Council of Europe Convention requires consistency with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, and identifies risk and impact assessments, mitigation measures, and even possible bans or moratoria on some AI applications. The EU AI Act establishes enforceable obligations on a risk-based basis, while the NIST AI RMF offers a practical governance framework organized around govern, map, measure, and manage. The OECD Principles add a broad international standard that links innovation with trustworthiness, human rights, and democratic values. ([Portal](#))

These developments resonate with biblical themes. Scripture never treats power as self-legitimizing. Kings are judged. Merchants are judged. Judges are judged. Prophets repeatedly challenge rulers who convert office into self-interest. Romans 13 is often misread as unconditional affirmation of state authority; in context of the wider biblical canon, authority is accountable precisely because it is meant to serve justice. Micah 6:8 condenses the matter: do justice, love mercy, walk humbly. Technology governance should be read in the same key.

Service-oriented governance requires at least five things. First, clarity about ends: technology should serve human dignity and the common

good, not merely market dominance. Second, accountability: there must be identifiable human and institutional responsibility for harms. Third, contestability and remedy: persons affected by high-stakes systems should not be trapped under opaque decisions. Fourth, protection of the vulnerable: children, the poor, minorities, the disabled, and the digitally excluded require special attention. Fifth, humility about limits: some applications may need restriction, moratoria, or prohibition.

The Christian language of the common good is especially helpful here. Technology often arrives wrapped in individualized benefit—convenience, personalization, speed. Yet many of its deepest effects are social: on trust, work, public reasoning, ecological cost, institutional legitimacy, and community life. A common-good perspective asks not only what a technology does for me, but what it does to us. Does it strengthen solidarity or increase fragmentation? Does it deepen democratic accountability or centralize hidden power? Does it reward truthfulness or amplify manipulation? Does it promote justice or reproduce structural exclusion?

12. From Power to Service: A Christian Grammar for Technology

If Christian ethics is to shape the moral arc of technology, it must offer more than critique. It must offer a constructive grammar. Several interrelated principles can guide that grammar.

The first is **stewardship**. Technology is entrusted power, not absolute ownership. It must answer to the Creator, to neighbor, and to future generations. This principle opposes both reckless acceleration and fearful refusal. It asks instead how capacities can be used responsibly.

The second is **service**. Mark 10 and John 13 make service the criterion of legitimate greatness. Applied to technology, this means that power should lift burdens without degrading persons, widen access without

exploiting the weak, and solve problems without rendering human beings secondary to systems.

The third is **human dignity**. Because each person bears the image of God, no one may be treated as mere raw material for data extraction, behavioral engineering, labor optimization, or institutional convenience. Dignity must remain prior to utility.

The fourth is **truthfulness**. Technology should not be built around deception, opacity, or manipulative persuasion. It should strengthen epistemic responsibility, not weaken it.

The fifth is **justice**. The benefits and burdens of technology are rarely distributed equally. Christian ethics therefore asks who gains, who pays, who is excluded, and whose voice was ignored during design and deployment.

The sixth is **sabbath and limit**. Not every possible use of technology is morally required. A healthy society needs boundaries, pause, restraint, and protected domains where efficiency is not the highest value. Sabbath is therefore not anti-innovation. It is anti-idolatry.

The seventh is **solidarity**. Technologies should be judged not only by individual convenience but by their effects on shared life. Christian faith treats persons as neighbors, not isolated consumers.

The eighth is **hope**. Christian ethics does not respond to technological crisis with fatalism. It believes in repentance, reform, and the possibility of redirection. The moral arc can bend toward service, but only through intentional moral work.

These principles are not alien to contemporary governance. They overlap significantly with the principles articulated in UNESCO's Recommendation, the Rome Call, the OECD framework, WHO guidance, and recent Vatican statements. What Christian ethics adds is a deeper anthropological and spiritual grounding. It explains why service should

govern power, why dignity outranks efficiency, and why limit is a form of wisdom rather than weakness. ([UNESCO](#))

13. The Arc of Technology in the Life of the Church and Society

The church has a particular role in shaping this moral arc. It cannot regulate global platforms, write treaties, or engineer advanced models at scale. But it can form persons who refuse to equate technological progress with moral progress. It can teach that power without love becomes violence, that efficiency without dignity becomes cruelty, and that knowledge without wisdom becomes danger.

In worship, the church declares that human beings are creatures before they are users, beloved before they are measured, and responsible before they are optimized. In teaching, it can develop theological literacy about digital life, AI, labor, ecology, and public responsibility. In pastoral practice, it can resist replacing embodied care with technological convenience where such replacement diminishes the vulnerable. In public witness, it can support policies that defend privacy, dignity, labor protections, ecological responsibility, and truthful communication.

Christian higher education also has a strategic role. Engineers, managers, designers, programmers, policy analysts, educators, and theologians need frameworks capable of integrating technical competence with moral anthropology. A graduate who can build systems but cannot ask what those systems are doing to the soul of institutions is not yet fully formed. The arc from power to service requires interdisciplinary moral education.

Civil society more broadly must also recover the courage to speak normatively. Technological discourse is often dominated by speed, investment, disruption, and adoption. Yet a society worthy of human beings must ask slower questions. What should not be automated? What kinds of opacity are incompatible with justice? When does convenience

become spiritual laziness? When does personalization become manipulation? When does innovation become a euphemism for concentrated power? These are not anti-progress questions. They are questions of moral adulthood.

14. Conclusion: Technology Under the Sign of the Towel

The Christian symbol that best interprets the moral arc of technology is not the scepter but the towel. In John 13, Christ takes the position of a servant and washes feet. There, power reveals its true form—not by coercing, but by attending; not by demanding visibility, but by assuming responsibility; not by making others instruments, but by honoring them in love. This is the deepest possible counter-image to a civilization tempted to confuse scale with greatness and control with wisdom.

Technology will continue to expand. AI will become more capable. Systems will become more predictive, adaptive, and infrastructural. None of this is likely to reverse. The real question is whether humanity will become more responsible as its powers increase. Pope Francis warns that immense technological development has not necessarily been matched by corresponding growth in responsibility, values, and conscience. That warning should be heard not as pessimism but as an invitation to maturity. ([Vatican](#))

The moral arc of technology does not bend by itself. It bends through moral imagination, institutional accountability, theological depth, public courage, and communities willing to say that some things matter more than efficiency. In the light of Christian ethics, technology reaches its proper end not when it makes humanity feel godlike, but when it helps human beings serve one another more faithfully under God. The question is not whether technology gives power. It does. The question is what kind of power it gives, to whom, at whose expense, and toward what end.

If power is ordered toward self-exaltation, technology becomes Babel renewed. If power is ordered toward service, technology becomes one more arena in which human vocation is purified and redirected. The moral future of technology, then, will be decided not chiefly by capability, but by discipleship—whether humanity learns again that the highest use of power is love in action.

Glossary

AI Act

The European Union’s risk-based regulatory framework for artificial intelligence, with phased implementation beginning after its entry into force in August 2024.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

Machine-based systems capable of generating outputs such as predictions, recommendations, classifications, or content that influence physical or virtual environments.

Common good

A social condition in which institutions, relationships, and material arrangements enable persons and communities to flourish together, not merely as isolated individuals.

Dignity

The inherent worth of every human being, grounded in Christian theology in the doctrine that humanity is created in the image of God.

Imago Dei

Latin for “image of God,” the biblical doctrine that human beings uniquely reflect God’s image and therefore possess irreducible value and moral responsibility.

Instrumentalization

Treating a person, community, or aspect of creation merely as a means to another end, rather than as worthy of respect in itself.

Moral arc of technology

The direction in which technological power is shaped and used—either toward domination, control, and exploitation, or toward service, justice, and the common good.

Sabbath

A biblical practice of holy rest that teaches limits, resists endless productivity, and reminds human beings that they are creatures rather than masters of all time and labor.

Service

A Christ-centered use of power that seeks the good of others through responsibility, humility, care, and sacrifice rather than domination.

Stewardship

Responsible care of resources, institutions, power, and creation under God's authority and for the benefit of others.

Technocratic paradigm

A mindset in which technological and economic power are treated as sufficient sources of truth, progress, and moral legitimacy.

Theological anthropology

A theological account of what a human being is, including dignity, vocation, embodiment, sin, responsibility, and relationship to God and neighbor.

Transparency

A condition in which systems, processes, or institutional decisions are sufficiently understandable to allow meaningful oversight, responsibility, and contestation.

Trustworthy AI

AI designed, governed, and used in ways that protect rights, support accountability, manage harmful bias, and serve human-centered values.

Vocation

A calling before God; in this context, the human calling to cultivate, create, govern, and serve in ways faithful to divine purposes.

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