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THEOLOGY OF CO-CREATION: MAN AND MACHINE IN GOD'S CREATIVE PLAN

Abstract

This essay explores the theological meaning of "co-creation" in relation to human beings, technology, and artificial intelligence. It argues that the idea of co-creation can be meaningful in Christian theology only when it is understood analogically and under strict theological limits. God alone creates *ex nihilo*; human beings do not create as God creates. Yet, as creatures made in the image of God, human beings are called to cultivate, shape, and develop the created world in ways that unfold the Creator's purposes. In this derivative and participatory sense, human labor, art, science, and technology can be understood as collaboration with God in perfecting visible creation. Recent Christian reflection on AI has affirmed this possibility while also warning that AI must not be confused with human intelligence or treated as a substitute for human personhood. The essay therefore distinguishes between the human being as image-bearer and the machine as artifact. Machines may mediate human creativity and serve human vocation, but they do not become co-creators in the personal or theological sense. The essay develops its argument through biblical theology, drawing on Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, the wisdom literature, the Babel narrative, the New Testament vision of Christ as the true image of God, and the Pauline theme of creation's groaning for redemption. It then applies this

theological framework to contemporary AI ethics, arguing that AI should be governed as an instrument of stewardship, service, healing, and justice, not as an idol of domination or a replacement for human moral agency. The essay concludes that a theology of co-creation must be both hopeful and disciplined: hopeful because human creativity is a gift that can serve the common good, and disciplined because only a Christ-centered understanding of wisdom, dignity, and responsibility can keep technology within God's creative plan.

Keywords

Co-creation; artificial intelligence; Christian ethics; imago Dei; stewardship; technology; human dignity; vocation; creation theology; moral agency.

The Theology of Co-Creation: Man and Machine in God's Creative Plan

1. Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has reopened an old theological question in a new form: what does it mean for human beings to create within a world already created by God? In contemporary discussion, technology is often treated as either a triumph of autonomous human genius or a threat to human uniqueness. Christian theology resists both simplifications. On the one hand, it affirms that science, craftsmanship, and technical skill are genuine expressions of human creativity. On the other hand, it insists that no human artifact, however sophisticated, can erase the difference between Creator and creature. The challenge, therefore, is to think about AI not merely as a technical product but as a theological event that forces humanity to

reflect on work, intelligence, responsibility, and the meaning of creation itself. Recent church and public ethics documents have underscored this point. The 2025 Vatican note *Antiqua et nova* treats AI as an anthropological and ethical challenge, not just an engineering development; UNESCO's AI ethics framework places human dignity and human oversight at the center; and the OECD's updated AI Principles frame trustworthy AI in relation to human rights, democratic values, and stewardship for people and the planet. ([Vatican](#))

The title of this essay uses the phrase "theology of co-creation," and that phrase requires careful handling from the outset. If it is taken literally, it can become theologically misleading, because Christian doctrine reserves creation in the full sense to God alone. God creates what did not exist; human beings do not. Yet Christian tradition has long affirmed that human labor and culture may participate in God's providential ordering of the world. Vatican II taught in *Gaudium et spes* that human activity, rightly understood, accords with God's will, and that by their labor men and women can be said to unfold the Creator's work and contribute to the realization of the divine plan in history. John Paul II later used striking language, saying that by the work of their hands human beings reflect God's own creative activity and are, in a real sense, "co-creators" with God. These formulations do not abolish the Creator-creature distinction; they deepen human vocation within it. ([Vatican](#))

For that reason, the central argument of this essay is twofold. First, human beings may be called co-creators only in a derivative, analogical, and responsible sense: they collaborate with God not by rivaling him, but by cultivating, ordering, healing, and serving the created world under his sovereignty. Second, machines do not become co-creators in the same sense as human persons. AI can be a powerful instrument within human co-creative vocation, but it remains an artifact rather than an image-bearing subject. The machine belongs within God's creative plan instrumentally; the human being belongs within it covenantally. To

confuse those two levels is to invite both theological confusion and ethical danger. ([Vatican](#))

2. Creation, Gift, and the Limits of Human Making

The doctrine of creation is the first safeguard against both technological arrogance and false humility. Genesis 1 does not depict the world as self-originating or chaotic raw material. It depicts the world as spoken into being by God, ordered in wisdom, and declared good. Light, land, waters, vegetation, animals, celestial bodies, and human beings are all included within a creation that is good before it becomes useful to human projects. Psalm 24:1 summarizes the theological implication: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." This means that the world is first gift before it is resource. Any theology of co-creation that forgets this will drift into technocracy, because it will begin to treat the world as if it were simply available for human redesign without prior moral meaning. Theologically, human beings work within creation; they do not own the ontological ground of creation. ([Vatican](#))

This distinction matters because "creation" in Christian theology is not identical with "production." God's creative act is not one more instance of technical fabrication. It is the radical granting of being. Human making is therefore always secondary. A builder may erect a house, but only within a world already structured by matter, time, gravity, creaturely finitude, and divine providence. A programmer may build a model, but only through material infrastructure, language, electricity, mathematics, human communities, and cultural inheritance already given. Thus, even the most advanced AI remains downstream from a gifted order it did not establish. Christian theology can affirm innovation, but it cannot permit innovation to imagine itself self-grounding. ([Vatican](#))

The biblical witness also links creation with praise. Psalm 19 portrays the heavens as declaring the glory of God. Job 38–39 reminds humanity that the world exceeds human control and comprehension. Wisdom literature

portrays creation as morally intelligible because it is ordered by divine wisdom. This broader scriptural context matters because it means that the world is not mute material awaiting total redesign; it already bears witness. Human creativity must therefore be responsive as well as inventive. To create faithfully is not only to impose form, but to listen to the grain of creation, to discern what kind of flourishing belongs to a place, a body, a community, a technology, or an ecosystem. A theology of co-creation is thus inherently a theology of humility. ([Vatican](#))

3. Human Beings as Image-Bearers and Cultivators

The biblical basis for human co-creative vocation lies above all in the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Genesis 1:26–27 presents humanity as created in the image and likeness of God, while Genesis 1:28 associates this dignity with a vocation to fill the earth and exercise dominion. Yet dominion in Scripture must be interpreted through Genesis 2:15, where the human being is placed in the garden “to till it and keep it.” This pairing is decisive. Human vocation is not passive, but neither is it exploitative. It involves cultivation and guardianship together. The image of God therefore includes agency, but agency ordered toward stewardship. ([Vatican](#))

In *Antiqua et nova*, the Vatican explicitly ties this biblical calling to contemporary science and technology. The note begins by saying that the Christian tradition regards the gift of intelligence as an essential aspect of how humans are created in the image of God, and that this intelligence should be expressed through the responsible use of reason and technical abilities in the stewardship of the created world. It adds that the Church encourages science, technology, the arts, and other forms of human endeavor as part of the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting visible creation. This is an important modern articulation of an older theological insight: intelligence is not

given merely for contemplation, but also for responsible making.

([Vatican](#))

The implication is that work, science, engineering, medicine, agriculture, architecture, and even algorithmic design may all belong within human vocation when directed to the good. Exodus 31:1–6 offers a striking biblical symbol here. Bezalel is filled with the Spirit of God “with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft” for the building of the tabernacle. Skill is not portrayed as spiritually suspect. It is Spirit-enabled for holy purpose. This helps Christian ethics avoid a false opposition between technical competence and spiritual faithfulness. The real issue is not whether human beings make, but what kind of people they become in the act of making, and what ends their making serves. ([Vatican](#))

John Paul II’s 2004 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences sharpened this point by calling human beings “co-creators” with God, using their knowledge and skill to shape a cosmos in which the divine plan moves toward fulfillment. Read in isolation, that phrase may sound inflated. Read in context, however, it is clearly analogical. Human beings do not rival God; they respond to a God-given vocation. Their dignity enables them, by the work of their hands, to reflect God’s own creative activity. Thus “co-creation” does not mean ontological equality with God. It means participatory responsibility under God. ([Vatican](#))

4. The Meaning and Misuse of “Co-Creation”

Because the phrase is easily misunderstood, Christian theology must define co-creation with discipline. Properly speaking, God alone creates *ex nihilo*. Human beings do not bring being into existence from nothing, and therefore cannot be creators in the same absolute sense. Any theology that blurs this distinction risks idolatry, because it quietly shifts humanity from steward to rival. For that reason, co-creation must always remain analogical, derivative, and covenantal. It names participation in

God's providential work, not parity with God's creative sovereignty.

([Vatican](#))

A helpful way to say this is that humans are not creators beside God but creaturely collaborators under God. *Gaudium et spes* 34 teaches that by their work people may unfold the Creator's work and contribute to the realization of the divine plan, but it immediately adds that as human power grows, so too does individual and community responsibility. The growth of power is therefore not self-validating. It intensifies accountability. This is highly relevant for the AI era, where unprecedented technical capacity can tempt societies to equate capability with legitimacy. Christian co-creation does not bless every extension of power. It asks whether power remains ordered to justice, holiness, service, and the glory of God. ([Vatican](#))

In this sense, co-creation is best understood as a moral vocation rather than a triumphant label. It includes agriculture that restores soil rather than exhausting it, medicine that heals rather than commodifies bodies, communication that serves truth rather than disinformation, software that assists human judgment rather than hollowing it out, and institutions that use AI to expand access and human flourishing rather than consolidate domination. The co-creative question is therefore not simply, "Can we build this?" but, "Does building this unfold the Creator's work or contradict it?" Recent AI governance frameworks outside the church point in a similar direction. UNESCO makes dignity, fairness, transparency, and human oversight central; OECD frames AI stewardship around beneficial outcomes for people and the planet; NIST emphasizes human centricity, social responsibility, and sustainability. Christian theology can receive these as partial secular echoes of the older theological conviction that human power must remain subordinate to higher ends. ([UNESCO](#))

5. Machine as Artifact, Not Image-Bearer

At this point the essay reaches its crucial distinction. Even if human beings can be called co-creators analogically, machines cannot be granted the same status in the same sense. Why? Because Christian co-creation is inseparable from personhood, moral responsibility, embodiment, and vocation before God. AI systems, however advanced, remain artifacts produced within human technical activity. They are not image-bearing subjects; they are products of image-bearing subjects.

([Vatican](#))

Antiqua et nova is especially clear on this point. It states that while AI processes and simulates certain expressions of intelligence, it remains fundamentally confined to a logical-mathematical framework. Human intelligence, by contrast, develops organically through embodied experiences, sensory input, emotional responses, social interactions, and personal history. The note adds that AI can simulate aspects of reasoning and perform tasks with extraordinary speed, but its computational powers are only a fraction of the broader capacities of the human mind and cannot currently replicate moral discernment or authentic relationships. It even warns that the very term "artificial intelligence" can be misleading and concludes that AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it. ([Vatican](#))

That distinction matters theologically because the image of God is not a detachable function. It is not equivalent to linguistic fluency, problem-solving, or creative output. It belongs to the human being as an embodied, relational, moral, and spiritual creature. A model may generate a sermon; it does not worship. It may simulate empathy; it does not love. It may optimize options; it does not repent. It may compose music; it does not praise. Machines can mediate aspects of human intelligence because they are made by intelligent creatures, but they do not cross over into personhood merely by imitating selected human capacities. ([Vatican](#))

This distinction also protects human responsibility. When institutions say, "the algorithm decided," they risk evacuating agency from the moral field. Christian ethics rejects that move. Tools do not absolve persons. Those who design, train, deploy, regulate, and profit from AI remain answerable for what their systems do. The machine belongs within human action; it does not replace the human moral subject. In this sense, machines may be part of human co-creation instrumentally, but never as covenantal partners or bearers of moral vocation before God. ([NIST Publications](#))

6. Soul, Embodiment, and the Incommunicable Depth of the Human Person

The distinction between human and machine becomes even sharper when theology turns to the unity of body and soul. Christian anthropology does not treat the person as a mind inside a body or a sequence of functions running on organic hardware. The human being is a unity of body and soul, a creature whose intelligence, desire, memory, freedom, and spiritual openness are lived through embodied existence. *Antiqua et nova* says exactly this: spirit and matter are not two natures mechanically joined, but form a single human nature; the entire person is simultaneously material and spiritual. It adds that the human being lives out relationships with God and others within and through embodied existence. ([Vatican](#))

This matters because AI can tempt modern culture into a functionalist anthropology. If intelligence is defined only as information processing, then human beings themselves begin to look like wet machines, and machines begin to look like near-persons. But the Church's 2025 note explicitly warns against drawing too close an equivalence between AI and human intelligence, because such equivalence succumbs to a functionalist perspective in which people are valued according to the work they can perform. It insists instead that a person's worth is

grounded in inherent dignity as one created in the image of God, not in cognitive or technological achievement. ([Vatican](#))

Theologically, this is decisive for any doctrine of co-creation. Human participation in God's creative plan is not reducible to output. It includes bodily finitude, emotional life, suffering, patience, moral struggle, relationality, and prayer. A mother caring for a child at 3 a.m., a doctor staying beside a dying patient, a carpenter shaping wood with practiced care, a scientist pursuing truth with reverence, and a pastor consoling the grieving are all participating in God's sustaining and healing work in ways that exceed computation. A machine may assist some of these activities. It does not itself inhabit them as a person. Co-creation belongs first to embodied human vocation; technology enters only secondarily as means. ([Vatican](#))

7. Babel, Fall, and the Technocratic Temptation

No theology of co-creation can remain innocent about sin. Genesis 11, the story of Babel, is one of the Bible's central texts for understanding the misuse of collective human technique. The people gather materials, build upward, and seek to make a name for themselves. Their achievement is not condemned because building is evil, but because their technical project is animated by self-exaltation and fear rather than obedience and trust. Babel is therefore a standing warning against the use of intelligence, infrastructure, and coordination for autonomy from God. ([Vatican](#))

This warning speaks directly to the modern "technocratic paradigm" diagnosed by Pope Francis. In *Laudato Si'* he argues that environmental and social crises are bound up with a way of seeing reality that exalts technical control while weakening moral restraint. In *Laudate Deum* he intensifies the critique, warning that growing power has not necessarily been accompanied by corresponding growth in responsibility, values, and conscience. The problem, then, is not technology as such, but

technological power detached from wisdom. When co-creation forgets creatureliness, it ceases to be cooperation and becomes a project of domination. ([Vatican](#))

In the AI era this temptation appears in several forms. It appears when prediction is confused with wisdom, when automation is treated as morally self-justifying, when efficiency is allowed to outweigh dignity, when data extraction overrides privacy and truth, and when human labor is devalued in the name of optimization. *Antiqua et nova* explicitly says techno-scientific activity is not morally neutral and warns that AI can force workers to adapt to the speed and demands of machines rather than machines being designed to support those who work. It also warns against digital reductionism and against replacing authentic human relationships with interactions with technology. These concerns show that the theological problem is not speculative. It is already social, economic, and spiritual. ([Vatican](#))

Thus, a theology of co-creation must always include repentance. Human beings do not enter technological life as innocent stewards alone; they enter it as fallen stewards. Their intelligence is real, but wounded. Their creativity is genuine, but morally ambivalent. Their desire to make can be ordered toward healing, but also toward pride, profit, control, and the eclipse of the weak. Co-creation without a doctrine of sin quickly becomes ideology. ([Vatican](#))

8. Christ and the Redemption of Human Creativity

The Christian answer to the misuse of power is not withdrawal from the world but its redirection through Christ. Colossians 1:15–20 names Christ as the image of the invisible God and the one through whom and for whom all things were created. This means that the true meaning of creation and human vocation is not finally discovered in technical prowess, but in Christological reconciliation. Romans 8:19–23 adds that creation itself groans in expectation of liberation, linking human

redemption to the wider healing of the created order. Christian co-creation must therefore be placed under the sign of restoration, not self-magnification. ([Vatican](#))

This Christological horizon changes the meaning of power. In Mark 10:42–45, Jesus contrasts the rulers who “lord it over” others with his own pattern of servant leadership. If human beings are to collaborate with God in history, they do so not by imitating Babel’s upward drive but by conforming their intelligence and work to the servant form of Christ. Technology, then, reaches its proper moral arc not when it maximizes control, but when it becomes a disciplined instrument of service, justice, healing, and truth. Pope Francis’s G7 address echoes this logic by insisting that AI is an “exciting and fearsome” tool whose benefits or harms depend on how it is used, and by calling for proper human control, especially where life-and-death decisions are concerned. ([Vatican](#))

In this sense, Christ redeems not only souls in abstraction but human making itself. A scientist, engineer, teacher, physician, artist, software designer, or policymaker can participate in God’s creative plan only when technical labor is subordinated to love of God and neighbor. Co-creation without service becomes domination. Co-creation through Christ becomes stewardship. That is why a Christian theology of AI cannot stop at celebrating ingenuity. It must ask whether this ingenuity is being crucified and reordered into love. ([Vatican](#))

9. AI Within God’s Creative Plan: Promise

If machine remains artifact rather than person, what positive role can it play in God’s creative plan? The answer is substantial. AI can assist human co-creative vocation when it enlarges wise stewardship rather than substituting for human dignity. The Vatican note recognizes that AI can support research, healthcare, administration, communication, and many other fields. UNESCO’s framework underscores practical policy

areas including health, education, research, gender, environment, and ecosystems. OECD likewise presents AI as capable of beneficial outcomes for people and the planet when developed under trustworthy principles. These documents show that the question is not whether AI can do good, but under what moral conditions. ([Vatican](#))

In ecological stewardship, for example, AI can help model climate patterns, optimize energy use, monitor environmental degradation, and strengthen disaster response. NIST's AI RMF highlights human centricity, social responsibility, and sustainability as core concepts in responsible AI. That language resonates deeply with a theology of stewardship, because it frames technology not as autonomous acceleration but as accountable practice. If AI helps a city reduce waste and energy loss, helps farmers manage water more carefully, or helps communities anticipate floods and fires, it may genuinely serve the biblical call to till and keep the earth. ([NIST Publications](#))

In healthcare, WHO's ethics guidance says AI holds great promise for improving diagnosis, treatment, research, and public health, but insists that ethics and human rights must remain at the heart of design, deployment, and use. *Antiqua et nova* makes a parallel argument: AI can assist diagnostic work, facilitate relationships between patients and medical staff, offer new treatments, and expand access to quality care for isolated or marginalized people. In these ways, the machine may become an instrument in what the document calls participation in God's healing work. Yet the same note warns that if AI replaces rather than enhances the patient-provider relationship, it can reduce an essential human structure to something impersonal and unequal. The theology of co-creation must therefore say both yes and no: yes to healing assistance, no to the erasure of personal care. ([World Health Organization](#))

In education and knowledge work, AI can widen access to learning, translation, and research support. But the same technology can also

induce passivity, flatten judgment, and encourage shortcut dependence. Pope Francis warned in 2024 that the age of AI risks becoming rich in technology and poor in humanity unless societies recover a "wisdom of the heart," a spiritual mode of seeing reality that integrates decisions and consequences, individuality and community, nobility and vulnerability. That warning is crucial for education. A theology of co-creation cannot equate access to information with formation in wisdom. Machines may assist learning; they cannot replace the moral and spiritual formation through which human intelligence becomes wise.

([Vatican](#))

10. AI Within God's Creative Plan: Peril

Every promise named above is matched by a corresponding danger. The same systems that optimize processes can also intensify inequality, automate exclusion, and obscure accountability. UNESCO warns that AI ethics must protect human rights and dignity through transparency, fairness, and human oversight. OECD notes that trustworthy AI must respect human rights, democratic values, non-discrimination, dignity, autonomy, privacy, fairness, social justice, and internationally recognized labor rights. These are not secondary concerns; they reveal how easily technical systems can magnify older injustices at digital speed and scale.

([UNESCO](#))

The world of labor is especially revealing. *Antiqua et nova* says AI can improve productivity and create new opportunities, but also warns that current approaches often deskill workers, subject them to automated surveillance, and force them to adapt to the pace of machines. It adds that if AI replaces rather than complements human workers, there is a substantial risk of disproportionate benefit for the few at the price of impoverishment for many. The document explicitly insists that AI should assist, not replace, human judgment and that respect for the dignity of workers and the importance of employment should remain a high

priority. This is a direct application of Christian social thought: work is part of the meaning of life on earth, not merely an expendable cost factor. ([Vatican](#))

The danger extends beyond economics to anthropology. If AI is treated as the new measure of intelligence, then people may begin to value themselves and others by machinic standards: speed, output, legibility, and constant availability. *Antiqua et nova* calls this functionalism and warns that it values people according to the work they can perform. This is theologically disastrous because it corrodes the doctrine of the image of God. The unborn child, the ill person, the elderly sufferer, the worker with reduced productivity, and the contemplative person whose life is rich in meaning but not easily quantifiable all become vulnerable under such a regime. Christian co-creation must therefore resist the colonization of personhood by machine metrics. ([Vatican](#))

There is also the peril of relational substitution. The 2025 Vatican note says plainly that AI can only simulate human relationships and warns that replacing communion with God and others by interaction with technology risks replacing authentic relationality with a lifeless image. This is one of the deepest spiritual concerns of the AI age. If human beings begin to prefer controllable synthetic relations to the demands of real love, then technology will not merely change society; it will deform the soul. In such a case, machine has ceased to be a tool within co-creation and has become a rival to human communion. ([Vatican](#))

11. Governance, Wisdom, and Proper Human Control

Because technical power is morally ambivalent, governance is essential. A theology of co-creation is not satisfied with good intentions; it must ask how institutions, laws, standards, and cultures of responsibility will keep AI within humane and godly limits. UNESCO's Recommendation, OECD's updated Principles, NIST's AI RMF, and WHO's ethics guidance all stress governance, human oversight, accountability, and ethical

design. NIST, in particular, states that responsible AI practices align design, development, and use with intended aims and values, and that understanding and managing AI risks can enhance trustworthiness and public trust. ([UNESCO](#))

Christian theology adds that governance requires wisdom, not just policy compliance. Pope Francis's 2024 message on "Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart" argues that only a spiritual way of viewing reality can confront the novelty of our time adequately. He says the heart is the place of freedom and decision-making, and that wisdom of the heart enables us to integrate the whole and its parts, our decisions and their consequences, our past and future, and our individuality within a larger community. Machines can process enormous amounts of data. They cannot replace wisdom of heart. Therefore, human control over AI must be more than technical oversight; it must be moral discernment. ([Vatican](#))

Proper human control also means that ultimate decisions touching life, dignity, justice, and treatment cannot be delegated to machines. Pope Francis told the G7 that no machine should ever choose to take the life of a human being and that human dignity depends on preserving proper human control over choices made by AI programs. Theologically, this reflects a basic truth: moral agency belongs to persons, not artifacts. To hand over judgment without accountability is not co-creation; it is abdication. ([Vatican](#))

Thus governance in a Christian frame must include at least four commitments: first, clear subordination of technology to human dignity and the common good; second, transparency sufficient for accountability; third, protection of workers, children, the poor, the sick, and other vulnerable groups; and fourth, cultural formation in wisdom, so that societies do not confuse technical possibility with moral legitimacy. These commitments are not external to theology. They are

practical forms of loving one's neighbor in a world shaped by digital power. ([UNESCO](#))

12. The Church, Human Formation, and the Future of Co-Creation

The church has a distinctive role in this debate because it preserves a thicker account of the human person than technocratic culture usually provides. Worship reminds human beings that they are creatures before they are creators. Prayer reminds them that wisdom is received, not manufactured. Scripture reminds them that power without holiness becomes destructive. Community reminds them that life is covenantal, not merely functional. For these reasons, Christian communities are uniquely placed to resist both idolatry of technology and fear of it. ([Vatican](#))

In practical terms, churches, seminaries, and universities should teach AI not only as a technical or ethical issue, but as a theological anthropology issue. Students and congregations need to understand why intelligence is not the same as holiness, why data is not the same as wisdom, why simulation is not the same as communion, and why human dignity is not reducible to output. Without such formation, even sophisticated ethical frameworks will remain shallow, because people will continue to imagine themselves through the categories their tools encourage. ([Vatican](#))

The church can also model a disciplined use of technology. It can employ AI where it assists learning, translation, accessibility, administration, and research, but refuse to let convenience replace pastoral presence, spiritual discernment, or sacramental life. The point is not technological purity. It is ordered use. A theology of co-creation requires habits of restraint as well as invention. It requires sabbath as well as production. It requires communities that know how to use machines without becoming machine-like in their understanding of the person. ([Vatican](#))

13. Conclusion

A theology of co-creation is both generous and guarded. It is generous because it affirms that human intelligence, labor, and technical skill are gifts from God and can participate in the unfolding of the Creator's work. Scripture and Christian tradition do not force believers to choose between faith and making. On the contrary, they affirm that those created in the image of God are called to cultivate the earth, exercise responsible dominion, and use their talents for the glory of God and the good of their neighbors. Vatican II, John Paul II, Pope Francis, and the recent note *Antiqua et nova* all stand within this line when they describe science, technology, and culture as part of humanity's collaboration with God in perfecting visible creation. ([Vatican](#))

Yet a theology of co-creation is equally guarded, because it knows that human making occurs under the conditions of sin. Babel remains possible. The technocratic paradigm remains seductive. AI can assist human vocation, but it can also intensify domination, weaken labor, distort truth, replace relationships, and invite people to think of themselves as measurable systems rather than image-bearers. For this reason, machine must never be confused with person, nor technical power with wisdom. AI belongs within God's creative plan only as instrument, never as rival, and only under moral governance that protects dignity, justice, and the common good. ([Vatican](#))

The final Christian word on co-creation is therefore Christological. Human making finds its truth not in self-exaltation but in service; not in domination but in stewardship; not in replacing the vulnerable but in lifting them up. If machine helps humanity care more wisely for creation, serve the sick, support the worker, protect the weak, and tell the truth more faithfully, then it may indeed become part of a redeemed co-creative vocation. But if it tempts humanity to forget the Creator, to diminish the person, or to worship its own power, then it ceases to serve God's plan and begins to parody it. The future of man and machine in God's creative plan will therefore depend less on how intelligent

machines become than on whether human beings remain wise enough, humble enough, and faithful enough to remember who they are before God. ([Vatican](#))

Glossary

AI ethics

The field of moral reflection and governance concerned with how artificial intelligence should be designed, deployed, used, and limited in relation to persons, institutions, and society.

Analogical co-creation

A theological way of saying that human beings may participate in God's ongoing providential ordering of creation without sharing God's unique power to create *ex nihilo*.

Co-creation

In this essay, the derivative and participatory role of human beings in cultivating, shaping, healing, and ordering creation under God's sovereignty.

Creatio ex nihilo

The doctrine that God creates out of nothing, a mode of creation proper to God alone.

Functionalism

A view that defines persons or intelligence primarily by what they do rather than by their deeper ontological and moral reality.

Image of God (imago Dei)

The biblical teaching that human beings are created in God's image and therefore possess unique dignity, vocation, and responsibility.

Instrumental role of the machine

The idea that AI and other technologies may serve human vocation and the common good, but do not become moral persons or co-creators in the same sense as humans.

Moral agency

The capacity to deliberate, judge, choose, and bear responsibility in a genuinely ethical sense.

Stewardship

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

Technocratic paradigm

A way of seeing reality in which technical efficiency, control, and innovation are treated as sufficient guides to human flourishing.

Wisdom of the heart

Pope Francis's expression for a spiritual, integrative form of wisdom that unites knowledge with moral discernment, responsibility, and openness to God.

Work as vocation

The Christian view that work is not merely economic activity but part of human calling, service, and participation in the unfolding of creation.

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