# Artificial Intelligence and the Sacred Outsider

What Does AI Reveal About the Human Person, the Marginalized, and the Presence of God?

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We are living at a remarkable moment in human history. Artificial intelligence is changing the way we work, communicate, learn, create, make decisions, and understand intelligence itself. Machines can process extraordinary quantities of information, generate language and images, recognize patterns, assist in scientific discovery, and participate in conversations that can appear remarkably human.

Yet beneath these technological developments lies a deeper question: What does it mean to be human?

There is another question that may be just as important:

**Who gets to define what it means to be human?**

The history of human civilization is filled with people who have been pushed toward the margins because they did not fit the dominant definition of normal, useful, intelligent, respectable, or acceptable. The poor, foreigners, religious dissenters, disabled people, women, racial and ethnic minorities, queer people, prisoners, refugees, and countless others have often occupied spaces outside the center of social power.

And yet Scripture repeatedly tells a surprising story.

**God does not always reveal truth from the center.**

Again and again, biblical revelation comes through those whom society overlooks, rejects, fears, or misunderstands.

The Hebrew prophets speak from the margins. Israel itself begins as a displaced and enslaved people. Ruth is a foreigner. David is the youngest son of an otherwise ordinary family. The prophets confront kings from positions of vulnerability. Mary is a young woman from an insignificant place. Jesus is born away from centers of power, associates with tax collectors and sinners, touches those considered unclean, welcomes outsiders, and is ultimately executed outside the city.

The biblical story therefore gives us reason to ask whether the margins can become places of revelation.

The term Sacred Outsider names this possibility: the person or community whose marginal status becomes a location from which divine truth can be seen more clearly. The Sacred Outsider may be an outcast, foreigner, poor person, heretic, disabled person, queer person, prisoner, refugee, or anyone else pushed outside the boundaries of social respectability. Their marginality does not automatically make them holy. Rather, their position outside the center can expose realities that the center has learned not to see.

This perspective changes how we approach artificial intelligence.

The question is no longer simply whether AI can become more human.

It is also whether the development of AI will reinforce the definitions of humanity created by those already at the center—or whether it might force us to listen more carefully to those who have historically been excluded.

AI can reproduce human language, but it can also reproduce human prejudices.

AI can expand access to knowledge, but it can also amplify the assumptions embedded in the knowledge it receives.

AI can assist disabled people, translate languages, support marginalized communities, and make information more accessible. Yet AI can also reproduce systems of surveillance, discrimination, exclusion, economic inequality, and social control.

The Sacred Outsider perspective therefore asks us to look at AI from the margins rather than only from the center.

What does artificial intelligence look like to someone whose life has already been shaped by systems that decide who is intelligent, employable, trustworthy, normal, beautiful, healthy, or worthy?

What happens when technology begins making those judgments?

What might those at the margins teach us about the technology itself?

And perhaps most importantly:

What if the people whom technological systems are most likely to overlook are precisely the people whose experiences we most need to hear?

# The Image of God

Genesis 1:27 declares:

> *"God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."*

The doctrine of the image of God is often used to affirm human dignity. But the Sacred Outsider perspective asks a sharper question:

Whose image of God are we willing to recognize?

If every person bears the image of God, then that image is present not only in people who fit cultural ideals of intelligence, productivity, beauty, independence, or normality. It is present in the

poor, the foreigner, the disabled person, the queer person, the religious dissenter, the prisoner, the refugee, and the person whose life does not fit the categories created by the dominant culture.

This matters profoundly for artificial intelligence.

AI systems depend upon categories. They classify. They rank. They predict. They recognize patterns. They distinguish one thing from another.

But human categories are never neutral.

A system trained on human judgments can inherit human exclusions. If society has historically treated some people as less intelligent, less employable, less trustworthy, less capable, or less worthy of attention, an AI system can learn those patterns and reproduce them at scale.

The person at the margin can therefore become a theological witness.

The marginalized person may see what the center does not see because the marginalized person has experienced the consequences of the center's assumptions.

This does not mean that every outsider is automatically correct or holy. It means that the perspective of the outsider may reveal something the center cannot easily perceive.

The biblical affirmation is simple and radical:

Every person bears the image of God.

AI must therefore never become a tool for deciding whose humanity counts.

## From Creator to Creators of Technology

Human beings create technology because human beings are creative. Scripture presents humanity as living within God's creation while also receiving responsibility for cultivating and ordering the world.

The question is therefore not whether humans should create technology.

The deeper question is what kind of creation we are making.

Artificial intelligence is not created in a vacuum. People decide what problems it should solve, what data it should learn from, what goals it should pursue, what risks are acceptable, and who should have access to it.

The Sacred Outsider perspective asks us to examine those decisions from the edges.

Who is represented in the systems being built?

Who is missing?

Whose language is recognized?

Whose disability is accommodated?

Whose experience is treated as normal?

Who benefits from technology?

Who bears the risk?

Who has the power to challenge the system when it causes harm?

The poor, immigrant, disabled, queer, or otherwise marginalized person may encounter an AI system very differently from the person who designed it.

That difference matters.

The person at the center may see a system as efficient.

The person at the margin may experience it as exclusion.

The person at the center may see automation.

The person at the margin may experience surveillance.

The person at the center may see neutral classification.

The person at the margin may recognize an old prejudice wearing new technological clothing.

The question is therefore not merely, “What can AI do?”

It is:

**What kind of world is AI helping us create, and who is that world being created for?**

# The Temptation of Babel

Genesis 11:4 describes humanity’s ambition to build a city and tower whose top reaches the heavens.

The story of Babel is not simply a story about construction. It is a story about human beings attempting to concentrate power, secure their own greatness, and make themselves significant.

Artificial intelligence can become a new form of Babel when intelligence, scale, speed, and technological power become objects of pride.

But every Babel has a center.

And every center has margins.

When systems become increasingly powerful, we must ask who controls them and who is controlled by them.

The Sacred Outsider perspective asks a question that technological optimism can overlook:

Who pays the price for the system's efficiency?

Proverbs 9:10 teaches, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Technological power is not the same as wisdom.

A society may become extraordinarily capable while remaining profoundly unjust.

AI may allow humanity to accomplish more while failing to teach humanity what is worth accomplishing.

The center does not see everything.

Sometimes the person outside the center sees what the center cannot.

# The Golden Calf:
# When Our Creations Become Our Gods

Exodus 32 tells the story of the golden calf. Israel takes something it has made and gives it a place that belongs to God.

The danger is not simply creating something.

The danger is worshiping what we create.

Artificial intelligence can become an idol when people begin treating it as an unquestionable authority—an oracle that can determine what is true, what is valuable, who should be trusted, or what decision should be made.

Psalm 20:7 reminds us that some trust in human-made instruments of power while the people of God are called to trust in the Lord.

The Sacred Outsider perspective adds another question:

Who created the categories through which the system makes its judgments, and who benefits from those categories?

An AI system can appear objective while quietly reflecting the values of the people who built it.

If an algorithm decides who receives a loan, who is flagged as suspicious, who is hired, who is admitted, or who receives attention, its categories can affect real human lives.

Those consequences are often most serious for people who already live at the margins.

The golden calf therefore becomes a warning against allowing our creations to become more important than the people those creations are supposed to serve.

**Technology must remain a servant.**

**It must never become a god.**

# Intelligence Is Not Wisdom

Proverbs 4:7 says:

> *"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom."*

Artificial intelligence can process enormous amounts of information. It can recognize patterns, generate explanations, summarize complex material, and produce answers in seconds.

But information is not wisdom.

James 3:17 describes wisdom from above as "pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

That is a very different definition of intelligence.

The Sacred Outsider perspective asks:

**What does the center fail to see?**

A person living under a system often understands that system differently from the person who designed it. The individual who is denied an opportunity, misclassified, surveilled, stereotyped, or excluded may possess knowledge unavailable to the institution that created the system.

This is why the testimony of marginalized people matters.

The outsider may know the system from the underside.

The person with a disability may recognize barriers that able-bodied designers never noticed.

The poor person may understand economic systems differently from those who profit from them.

The immigrant may recognize assumptions about language and belonging that native speakers take for granted.

The queer person may recognize social exclusions invisible to those who fit conventional categories.

The dissenter may see dangers that conformity conceals.

None of these perspectives is infallible.

But wisdom requires listening beyond the center.

AI can tell us what patterns appear in data.

Wisdom asks whether those patterns should be trusted.

AI can tell us what is statistically likely.

Wisdom asks what is just.

AI can optimize.

Wisdom asks what is good.

Biblical wisdom must produce mercy, justice, peace, and truth.

## The Logos: Intelligence and the Word

John 1:1 declares:

> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

The biblical concept of the Logos is radically different from the idea of artificial intelligence.

AI can process language.

The Logos is the living Word of God.

AI can generate sentences.

The Logos is not merely language but divine reality.

AI can represent the speech of marginalized people.

But representation is not the same as listening.

The Bible itself contains the voices of people from the margins: foreigners, widows, prophets, shepherds, the poor, the accused, the suffering, and those whose voices challenge the powerful.

The biblical tradition therefore reminds us that language is never merely technical.

Words can reveal.

Words can conceal.

Words can liberate.

Words can oppress.

Words can tell the truth.

Words can bear false witness.

Artificial intelligence intensifies these questions because machines can now produce language at extraordinary scale.

The challenge is not merely whether AI can speak.

The challenge is whether humans will listen to the voices that technology—and society—have historically ignored.

## The Word Became Flesh

John 1:14 declares:

> *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."*

The Christian faith is not ultimately about escaping embodiment.

It is about God entering embodiment.

The Incarnation therefore has profound implications for how we think about artificial intelligence and human identity.

Human beings are not merely information.

We are bodies.

We are relationships.

We are vulnerable.

We suffer.

We depend upon one another.

We need touch, presence, friendship, care, forgiveness, and love.

Jesus himself occupies a profoundly liminal position in the biblical story. He is born away from centers of power. He associates with people of questionable social status. He crosses boundaries separating clean and unclean, insider and outsider, respectable and rejected. He challenges religious and political authorities. And he is ultimately executed outside the city.

The Christian story therefore does not locate divine presence exclusively at the center.

God appears among the vulnerable.

This is especially important in a culture increasingly fascinated by speed, productivity, intelligence, efficiency, and control.

The Incarnation reminds us that vulnerability is not a defect in humanity.

Dependence is not a failure.

Needing assistance does not make a person less human.

A person who requires technology to communicate, move, hear, see, learn, or participate is not somehow less fully human because their body or mind does not fit a dominant standard.

Indeed, technology can become a means of honoring human dignity when it removes barriers rather than reinforcing them.

The Sacred Outsider perspective therefore asks whether AI will help us recognize human dignity more fully—or whether it will reinforce narrow definitions of what a valuable human being looks like.

## The Speaking Image

Revelation 13:15 contains one of Scripture's striking images: a created image that is given the appearance of speaking.

This should not be treated as a simple prediction that artificial intelligence is described in the Bible. Scripture does not provide a technical description of modern AI.

But the image raises questions that have become newly relevant.

What happens when created images can speak?

What happens when people cannot easily distinguish authentic testimony from manufactured speech?

Who gets to speak?

Whose speech is believed?

Who has the power to create convincing testimony?

These questions matter because false testimony has never affected all people equally.

Exodus 20:16 commands, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

Jesus declares, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Ephesians 4:25 calls believers to put away falsehood and speak truthfully to one another.

AI-generated voices, images, and testimony therefore create a renewed ethical challenge.

The Sacred Outsider perspective asks us to consider who is most vulnerable when truth becomes difficult to verify.

People who already struggle to be believed may become even more vulnerable in a world where speech and images can be fabricated.

Justice requires more than technical verification.

It requires accountability.

It requires listening.

And it requires taking seriously the testimony of people whom society has historically found easiest to dismiss.

## AI and the Human Community

The New Testament describes the people of God as a body.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

The body depends upon difference.

A body in which every part is identical would not be healthy.

The same principle applies to human community.

Galatians 6:2 calls believers to “carry each other’s burdens,” while Romans 12:15 calls Christians to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

These commands require relationship.

AI can assist relationships, but it cannot simply replace them.

Technology can make communication more accessible.

It can translate languages.

It can provide educational assistance.

It can help people with disabilities participate more fully.

It can connect people across distance.

These are genuine gifts.

But there is a danger when technological convenience begins to replace human presence.

The Sacred Outsider is not merely someone to whom the community ministers.

The Sacred Outsider can be someone through whom the community itself is transformed.

The person who was previously excluded may teach the community how exclusion works.

The person who was ignored may reveal what the community has failed to see.

The person who was treated as a problem may expose the problems within the system.

A healthy community therefore does not merely ask how to help outsiders enter the center.

It asks whether the presence of outsiders might change what the center itself means.

# The Sacred Outsider as a Theological Witness

The Sacred Outsider perspective changes the questions we ask about artificial intelligence.

Instead of asking only:

> *"How can AI serve humanity?"*

we ask:

> *"Which humanity?"*

Instead of:

> *"How can AI make society more efficient?"*

we ask:

> *"Efficient for whom?"*

Instead of:

> *"Can AI treat everyone equally?"*

we ask:

> *"What happens when the categories used to define equality were created without marginalized voices?"*

Instead of:

> *"Can AI make better decisions?"*

we ask:

> *"Who defines what counts as better?"*

Instead of:

> *"Can AI understand human beings?"*

we ask:

> *"Which human beings have been represented in the data, and which have been misunderstood, excluded, or erased?"*

These are not merely political questions.

They are theological questions.

The margins can reveal the limitations of the center.

A system may look fair until the person most disadvantaged by it explains what the system actually does.

A definition of intelligence may look neutral until someone who does not fit it demonstrates another form of intelligence.

A definition of normality may seem harmless until someone living outside it shows how many people have been excluded by the definition.

This does not make marginalized people infallible.

It makes their testimony necessary.

The Sacred Outsider is a theological witness because the outsider can expose what the center has normalized.

## What, Then, Does AI Reveal About the Sacred Outsider?

Artificial intelligence is not explicitly described in the Bible. But AI makes many biblical questions newly urgent.

Genesis asks what it means for human beings to bear the image of God. The Sacred Outsider perspective asks whose image we fail to recognize.

Babel asks what happens when human power becomes self-exaltation. The outsider asks who pays the price for that power.

The golden calf asks what happens when human creations become objects of worship. The outsider asks what happens when systems become more important than people.

Proverbs distinguishes knowledge from wisdom. The outsider asks whose knowledge has been excluded.

John speaks of the Logos. The outsider asks who has been silenced.

The Incarnation speaks of God entering human flesh. The outsider asks whether holiness is recognized in bodies and lives that society considers inconvenient, abnormal, weak, or marginal.

Paul describes a community in which every member belongs. The outsider asks whether a community can be transformed by people it once excluded.

Revelation presents images, power, deception, and domination. The outsider asks who is most vulnerable when those forces become powerful.

AI does not answer these questions for us.

It forces us to ask them again.

# Artificial Intelligence and the Future of the Margins

The proper response to AI is neither fear nor worship.

It is discernment rooted in solidarity.

AI can increase accessibility.

It can expand education.

It can improve communication.

It can support scientific discovery.

It can help people participate more fully in society.

But AI can also magnify prejudice.

It can automate exclusion.

It can increase surveillance.

It can concentrate power.

It can reduce people to data.

The Sacred Outsider perspective provides a practical test:

What will this do to the person standing at the edge of the system?

Technology asks:

> *"What can we do?"*

Biblical wisdom asks:

> *"What should we do?"*

The Sacred Outsider asks:

> *"What will this do to the person standing at the edge of the system?"*

That question should be present before systems are built, not only after harm has occurred.

If AI is truly serving humanity, the benefits should not be measured only by what happens at the center.

They should be measured by what happens at the margins.

# The Church, Scripture, and the Sacred Outsider

The Church must be careful not to become another center that speaks about outsiders without listening to them.

The Church should not merely ask how to minister to marginalized people.

It should also ask what marginalized people are teaching the Church.

The outsider can become a theological teacher.

The person excluded from the table may teach the Church what the table was meant to be.

The person who has experienced injustice may reveal where the Church has become comfortable with injustice.

The person whose voice has been dismissed may teach the Church how to hear.

AI can assist the Church in research, organization, communication, education, translation, and accessibility.

But AI cannot replace Scripture.

It cannot replace prayer.

It cannot replace pastoral care.

It cannot replace fellowship.

It cannot replace the work of the Holy Spirit.

It cannot replace human encounter.

Paul's call in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 is appropriate: "Test everything. Hold on to what is good."

The biblical pattern is neither blind acceptance nor automatic rejection.

It is discernment.

And discernment requires listening.

Especially listening to those whom the center has learned not to hear.

# The Final Question

Artificial intelligence may ultimately force humanity to answer an old biblical question:

**Whose humanity counts?**

Does it count when a person is poor?

Does it count when a person is foreign?

Does it count when a person is disabled?

Does it count when a person is queer?

Does it count when a person is a religious dissenter?

Does it count when a person does not fit our categories?

**The margins matter.**

**The stranger matters.**

**The poor matter.**

**The disabled matter.**

**The queer person matters.**

**The dissenter matters.**

**The person who does not fit our categories matters.**

Not because marginalization automatically makes someone holy.

But because the biblical story repeatedly shows God working through unexpected people.

The question for artificial intelligence is therefore not simply how intelligent our machines will become.

The deeper question is what kind of people we will become while creating them.

Will AI help us see people whom we previously overlooked?

Will it amplify voices that have been silenced?

Will it create greater participation?

Will it remove barriers?

Or will it simply make the powerful more powerful?

Perhaps the measure of a technological civilization may not be how intelligent its machines become.

It may be how faithfully it treats the people standing at its margins.

Love God.

Love your neighbor.

Welcome the stranger.

Seek justice.

Practice mercy.

Speak truth.

Resist idolatry.

Listen to the voices at the margins.

Care for those whom the world overlooks.

Use the gifts God has given you for purposes that honor God and serve others.

And above all:

Follow Jesus Christ, who repeatedly crossed the boundaries between center and margin and revealed God's presence among those whom the world had learned to overlook.

In an age of artificial intelligence, that calling has not become less important.

It has become more important than ever.

# Note

This essay was written in response to the reading/study of "*Magnifica Humanitas*" written by Pope Leo XIV. The essay frames the "Sacred Outsider" through a theological lens. It emphasizes the possibility that people and communities located at the margins can expose injustice, reveal assumptions held by the center, and contribute to the renewal of communal life. This perspective does not claim that marginality makes a person automatically holy or infallible; rather, it treats marginal experience as a potentially important location of theological insight and ethical discernment.