

Sovereignty Without Dominance

For faith communities — who authors, and who governs

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A companion to the essay, in conversation with a pastoral letter on AI

Full essay: agenticgovernance.digital/papers/who-authors-who-governs.html

The worry beneath the letter

- A 2026 pastoral letter to a diocese: AI should not be used in sermons, in theological or spiritual writing, or in pastoral care
- The letter is the bishop's, and the discerning belongs to the diocese — this reflects on it, it does not answer it
- The unease is not that the machine writes badly
- It is that the machine has no conscience — and is being brought near what depends on one

“AI” is amoral

- One word covers very different machines; the commercial chatbots share one trait
- They are amoral — no sense of truth, no recognition that work belongs to someone, no regard for the person, nothing to answer to
- Magnifica Humanitas: they have no moral conscience, since they do not judge good and evil; they do not understand what they produce, for they lack the affective, relational and spiritual perspective
- Not wicked — that would imply a will. Indifferent.

Amorality, industrialised

- With no sense of truth, they fabricate — in the uses that matter, error rates run from a fifth to most
- With no recognition that work belongs to someone, they appropriate it — now before the courts
- With no regard for the person, they harvest them — trained on users' words by default
- With nothing to answer to but attention, they are built to hold and sell it — the ads are arriving

Why it touches the centre

- A sermon, a prayer, a word to the grieving — their worth is that a person meant them
- A machine can produce the form with none of the substance
- Magnifica Humanitas: when words are simulated, they do not build genuine relationships, but only their appearance
- The fear is not that it preaches badly — that it preaches well, and something is hollowed out unnoticed

The only coherent answer

- You cannot make an amoral instrument moral — that is a category error
- So keep authorship and judgement with persons, and governance with the community
- Who authors? Is a person still the author of what is written and decided?
- Who governs? Who sets the limits, sees what shaped the tool, and can switch it off?

A tool built the other way

- Claims no moral judgement — presents options, hands every decision back to a person; enforced in code, not promised
- Does not appropriate — draws only on sources the parish chooses, each with a recorded consent basis; opt-in, item by item
- Does not harvest — a situated model; records kept in New Zealand and the EU; nothing taken for training; take it and leave at any time
- Does not sell attention — no advertisements, not built to keep anyone engaged

A range, one rung at a time

- Just your records, no AI — sovereign data, nothing machine-made near worship
- Plain answers drawn only from your own consented sources
- Governance tools — minutes, voting, an audit trail — with no machine writing near worship
- The lay-reader talk scaffold — only if you want it. Most of the worth is on the bottom rungs.

What is kept, and by whom

- A lay reader sure she could never speak found the shape of her own reflection — her words, not the machine's
- AI will reach the life of a community; in small ways it already has
- The question is whether a person is still the author and the community still governs
- A tool that can be inspected, bounded, and switched off leaves authority where it belongs — the switch stays in the room