

NIFEA Consultation

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI): Impacts on Global Inequality and Faith-rooted Responses

Theological Communique and Action Plan

Introduction

From 27 to 29 August 2025, we – 45 church leaders, theologians, academics and students coming from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America and Europe – met online and in-person at the Kwanglim Seminar House in Pocheon-si, South Korea to participate in the **New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) Consultation on “the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI): Impacts on Global Inequality and Faith-rooted Responses.”** [NIFEA](#) – which envisions an Economy of Life for all – is a joint initiative of the World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council, Council for World Mission and United Society Partners in the Gospel.

While recognising that technological progress has bettered people’s lives in multiple ways and brings benefits like advanced medical intervention, support for essential care work, and new learning tools, we are called as people of faith to examine the deeper societal and ecological impacts of the 4IR and AI through the lens of justice. By applying a justice-oriented perspective, we can identify how to mitigate harm as well as ensure equitable access and responsible development of these new technologies. We offer this theological communique as a collective deliberation and a “living document” to spark discussion, reflection, and action to direct the 4IR and AI toward building an Economy of Life for all.

Reading the signs of the times

In an already inequitable world, the 4IR – driven by AI, the Internet of Things, and an economy increasingly based on data – is deepening global inequalities in income, wealth, education, and health. As AI technologies rapidly expand across the world, industrialised nations and multinational corporations are racing to dominate this field, widening the gap between those who profit from AI and those who are exploited by it.

Emerging within the framework of global capitalism, where profit is the ultimate aim, new technologies are misused to reinforce – rather than challenge – the systems of power and inequality from which it arises. It is a myth that capitalism drives all technological innovation. In such a system, only those technologies which produce profit are developed while local and Indigenous knowledge and knowhow are de-valued.

Capitalism depends on a structural divide between workers and capitalists, a model that is ultimately unsustainable: workers cannot afford to consume the very products of their labour, while wealth continues to accumulate at the top. In the name of efficiency and cost-cutting, automation and other emerging



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technologies are projected to eliminate tens of millions of jobs even as it creates new roles such as data labellers, content moderators, and platform gig workers. These new jobs are precarious, poorly paid, and psychologically damaging. Many of these workers are exposed to disturbing content for hours on end, face no job security, and lack basic labour rights. AI applications have also fed the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children living in the Global South – a globalised, digitalised and immortalised victimisation of the most vulnerable.

At the same time, AI is transforming global finance, concentrating power in the hands of those who control financial data – banks, investment firms, pension funds, and stock brokers. As countries borrow heavily to build digital infrastructure, they become increasingly reliant on corporations from the Global North, which own the platforms, software, and expertise. AI-powered high-frequency trading is also making global financial markets more fragile and volatile, heightening systemic risk and the chance of financial crashes which hurt the poor the most.

Despite its digital appearance, the 4IR is deeply material. Every stage – from hardware manufacturing and labour to data centres, undersea cables, and global logistics – carries significant environmental costs. AI hardware requires minerals and metals like cobalt, lithium, nickel, and rare earth elements extracted through destructive and exploitative practices that pollute ecosystems, endanger workers including child labourers, and foment geopolitical conflicts and wars. AI training also consumes massive amounts of electricity, water, and land. Data centres demand constant cooling and energy, often in regions where communities still lack access to clean water, stable electricity, or arable land especially in the Global South.

Further, AI applications designed for military purposes pose heightened dangers. Digital tools used in warfare cannot always distinguish between combatants and civilians. More importantly, AI must not be used to make decisions as to who lives and who dies.

Technology is not neutral; it is a source of power. AI technologies are reshaping economies, social relations, and the distribution of resources. Currently, power over AI development, deployment, and governance is concentrated in the Global North, reinforcing their values and priorities.

At the heart of AI's influence is data. AI systems learn from historical data to make automated decisions, often resulting in biased outcomes that replicate and entrench existing anti-poor policies and gender and racial discrimination in hiring, lending, healthcare, and beyond. Efforts to detect, measure, and mitigate these effects are already underway and must be further amplified.

The 4IR is not just unfolding within an unequal global order; it is ushering a digital empire. It marks the continuation of colonialism, globalisation, and Global North empire-building in digital form. The consequences are already evident: increasing global migration as opportunities concentrate in wealthy nations; democratic erosion, populist backlash, and growing conflicts in many nations; as well as accelerating global climate breakdown – driven by a tech industry largely indifferent to its environmental impact.

Churches and faith communities can and must play their part to disrupt this trajectory.



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Theological reflection and response

We affirm that the challenge of 4IR and AI is not only economic or technological; it is also spiritual and theological. Scripture proclaims that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). This dignity is irreducible. It cannot be replaced by data, commodified by algorithms, or rendered disposable by automation. Whenever AI reduces people to consumers, gig workers, or raw data, it violates the *imago Dei* and denies the sacredness of life. At the same time, when AI is anthropomorphised, human dignity is reduced to calculative ability.

The early churches embodied *koinonia* (Acts 2:42–47) – a shared life of justice, solidarity, and care. Orthodox theology names this relationality as *perichoresis*, the interpenetrating love of the Trinity. Indigenous and African wisdom such as *buen vivir* and planetary *ubuntu* also affirm that life is woven together in a web of interdependence. Our Christian tradition reminds us that singularity is neither desired nor feared, rather what we find is the mutual enrichment of the life of the other through interconnectivity. Creation is bound together by mutuality and balance. By contrast, the ideologies of capitalism desire only the singularity of profit and the accumulation of capital and distort God’s order of interconnectedness in love into hierarchies of financial gain, competition, and domination.

Within the capitalist system, technology’s promise to free labour often turns into another cycle of exploitation. The Jubilee and Sabbath ethic requires that technology serves life; protects time for rest, relationships and reverence; and resists Mammon’s endless demands to produce more and more (Isaiah 58:1–12).

AI is not value-free; every algorithm encodes values, and every dataset carries the weight of history – often classism, sexism, racism and colonial bias. To bless AI uncritically is to sanctify these injustices. The vocation of churches is to unmask the idols of Mammon embedded in technology, resist systems that serve Empire, and call forth what may serve God’s Kingdom of justice and peace.

AI and 4IR, like many technologies, can be oriented toward healing and life, guided by justice, solidarity, and ecological consciousness. Used rightly, it has the potential to strengthen healthcare, expand education, monitor ecosystems, and support economies grounded in fairness and dignity. The question is not whether technology has a place in God’s world, but how to convert that which is being used for the death-dealing logic of Empire to the service of life abundant (John 10:10).

Therefore, our theological conviction is to call for conversion and discernment (1 John 4:1). We call for a conversion in relationships with technologies being misused to prop up a death-dealing Empire. And we call churches and governments to discernment so that the 4IR and AI may be applied toward the flourishing of humanity and all creation.

Call to churches

We call on churches to:



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Global and regional

- Create global and regional platforms exploring the impacts of digital technologies and the role of churches and faith-based communities, discerning digital ethics, and advocating for justice in a digital economy.
- Create global ecumenical networks that will build awareness, further dialogue and conversation, with a focus on listening to voices that are marginalised in the 4IR and AI development.
- Defend the ecological integrity of creation by naming and resisting the extractivism of AI development (mining, energy, and water use) and advocating for ecological and other safeguards.
- Collaborate and engage in partnerships with stakeholders including interfaith networks to leverage human, technical, financial and material resources for greater impact in terms of awareness and advocacy.

National

- Initiate platforms and conversations about digital technology for awareness of digital ethics and moral issues.
- Engage with governments and corporations in terms of policy advocacy for AI regulation.
- Encourage churches to adopt policies protecting children, women and the vulnerable.
- Produce teaching materials about advocacy regarding AI, economics and ecology.
- Recommend incorporating topics and curriculum about AI and economic and ecological justice in seminaries and theological schools.

Local churches and grassroots

- Empower people for meaningful use of digital means and AI (access, input, training) and work towards closing the digital divide.
- Produce sermon series, bible study materials and worship resources about 4IR and AI for an Economy of Life.
- Engage in conversations and collaborate with religious and faith-based organisations on these issues.
- Encourage churches to become places of sanctuary and digital rest.

Call to governments

We call on governments to:

- Promote ethical AI governance grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability, and responsibility and to uphold human rights including economic, social and cultural rights in the digital age.
- Ensure data sovereignty, inclusive access to information as a human right, as well as equitable and affordable access to digital tools and other technologies to mitigate deepening inequality within and among countries.
- Ensure a just transition, safeguard the rights of workers who are displaced by automation and other new technologies as well as the rights of those working in the new digital economy, and explore the role of universal basic income in the context of 4IR.
- Safeguard the rights of children, women and other vulnerable groups in the use and consumption of new technologies.



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- Develop and promote fair taxation and redistribution systems for profits from automation and AI (taxes on tech-based multinational corporations and digital oligarchs).
- Develop and promote ecological safeguards in the design and implementation of new technologies and ensure free, prior and informed consent of communities in mineral extraction and supply chains for such technologies.
- Promote public ownership and commons-based models for critical digital infrastructures.
- Regulate against monopolies and concentration of technological power by a few corporations to democratise AI benefits.
- Support and invest in technological innovation that serves the common good such as health, education and climate protection and resilience.

Call to the tech industry

We call on tech industry workers and leaders to:

- Develop AI and 4IR technologies for the common good.
- Include marginalised voices and diverse stakeholders in the design process to mitigate against unconscious biases and shortsightedness.
- Strive for a reduction of environmental harm by seeking energy efficient models of machine learning, better recycling e-waste, and fair trade.
- Build AI and 4IR systems that augment dignified human work and avoid employment models and tasks that inflict psychological, physical, and social harm.
- Cooperate with governments, religious groups and community leaders to ensure safe and ethical development and use of AI and 4IR technologies.
- Prioritise targeted just developments of AI rather than seeking profit and stock value over human well-being.
- Provide AI and 4IR technologies to the Global South for free or significantly reduced cost to bridge the wealth gaps between nations.