

# Artificial Intelligence and the Sacred: Legal Safeguards for Spiritual Integrity In The Digital Age

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## Abstract

Today, we live in an age and generation where technology seems to be defining everything about human life. As artificial intelligence increasingly permeates every facet of human life, its intersection with spirituality no doubt presents profound ethical, cultural, and legal challenges. With AI systems, religious content can now be created and managed, simulate spiritual experiences, and even offer algorithmic guidance in matters of faith. Whereas these innovations can be said to be laudable, promise accessibility and personalization, they also risk distorting sacred traditions, commodifying belief systems, and undermining spiritual authenticity. This paper therefore explores the urgent need for legal safeguards that protect spiritual integrity in the digital age. It examines the existence or otherwise of regulatory framework and the extent to which the use of AI in religious contexts affects and impact the issues of doctrinal manipulations, cultural appropriation and the unauthorised generation of sacred texts. The discussion will highlight the role of law in preserving religious freedom, ensuring transparency in AI design, and preventing the exploitation of spiritual communities. By engaging with legal theory, technological ethics, and theological perspectives from a doctrinal approach, this paper aims to foster a multidisciplinary dialogue on how society

can uphold the sanctity of spiritual life while embracing the transformative potential of artificial intelligence in the digital age.

**Key Words:** Artificial Intelligence; digital age; sacred; spirituality; legal safeguards

## Introduction

Across the globe, an algorithm trained on a corpus of sacred texts generates a new, synthetic scripture, which a nascent online community begins to treat as divine revelation.<sup>1</sup> These are not scenes from a speculative future; they are emergent realities of the present, signalling a profound and unprecedented convergence of the digital and the divine. As artificial intelligence permeates the deepest strata of human experience, its foray into the realm of spirituality presents a paradigm shift, demanding an urgent and nuanced legal and ethical response.<sup>2</sup> This paper confronts the central tension of our digital age: the transformative potential of AI to democratise and personalise spiritual life, set against its inherent power to commodify, distort and ultimately undermine the very sanctity it seeks to engage.

The incursion of AI into spirituality is both multifaceted and rapid.<sup>3</sup> We are witnessing the rise of algorithmic faith, where AI applications create

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, Heidi A., and Pauline Hope Cheong (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*, Oxford Handbooks (2024; online edn, Oxford Academic, 20 Oct. 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.001.0001>, accessed 11 Nov. 2025

<sup>2</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, Routledge 2022; eBook Published 30 September 2021) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683>.

<sup>3</sup> José Fernando Calderero Hernández, 'Artificial Intelligence and Spirituality' *International Journal of Interactive*

and manage religious content, simulate spiritual experiences through virtual and augmented reality and offer automated pastoral care.<sup>4</sup> These innovations promise significant benefits: enhancing accessibility for the isolated or disabled, preserving endangered religious languages and rituals and providing personalised spiritual pathways.<sup>5</sup> An AI can generate a sermon tailored to a congregation's specific demographic or a meditation app can use biofeedback to guide a user to a deeper state of contemplative calm. Yet, beneath this veneer of utility lurk profound perils. The core of spiritual life which is characterised by tradition, relational authenticity, communal authority and the ineffable encounter with the sacred is inherently resistant to algorithmic reduction.<sup>6</sup> When a Chabot offers absolution or an AI generates a new "gospel," it risks reducing deeply held beliefs to data patterns, commodifying sacred traditions into subscription services<sup>7</sup> and

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*Multimedia and Artificial Intelligence*, (2021) DOI: 10.9781/ijimai.2021.07.001. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9781/ijimai>

<sup>4</sup> Ilya Ayuba Ajang, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Religious Experience in Nigeria: A Sociological and Theological Inquiry' *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice*, (2025) Vol. 10(4) <<https://iiardjournals.org/get/IJRC/2020/NO.204/2020/Artificial%20Intelligence%20And%20The%20Future%2020230-242.pdf>> Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2025; S. Aupers & J. Schaap, 'The Algorithmic Sacred: An Overview of the Digital Transformation of Religion' *Religion*, (2023) Vol. 53(1), 1-20'

<sup>5</sup> Fernando H. F. Botelho, 'Accessibility to Digital Technology: Virtual Barriers, Real Opportunities' *Assistive Technology* (2021) 33 (sup1): 27-34. doi:10.1080/10400435.2021.1945705. Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2025; G. Giordan & A. Possamai, *The Digital Sacred: A Sociological Analysis of Religion in the Digital Age*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Oliva, 'Relational Authenticity in Community: A Key for Support on the Spiritual Journey?' *Ecclesial Futures*, (2025) DOI: 10.54195/ef19862. Also available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393944493\\_RelationalAuthenticityinCommunityAKeyforSupportontheSpiritualJourney](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393944493_RelationalAuthenticityinCommunityAKeyforSupportontheSpiritualJourney)>. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2025; Stephen Sutcliffe, 'The 'Spiritual' and the 'Religious': A Genealogy' In *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*. (Oxford University Press, (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Maria Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*. (Routledge, 2008)

manipulating doctrinal tenets through the opaque biases of its training data.<sup>8</sup>

The primary challenge, therefore, lies in the governance of this new frontier. Existing legal frameworks, forged in an analogue world are woefully inadequate to address these novel threats of the digital age.<sup>9</sup> Intellectual property law, for instance, struggles to protect collectively owned, ancient sacred knowledge from being mined and repackaged by external corporations, a problem long-identified in debates over biopiracy and traditional cultural expressions.<sup>10</sup> Data protection regulations like the GDPR, while a step forward, often fail to comprehend the unique sensitivity of spiritual data which includes the intimate record of one's prayers, doubts and beliefs leaving it vulnerable to exploitation by what is termed "surveillance capitalism."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, classical religious freedom jurisprudence, as articulated in

<sup>8</sup> Brian Owens, 'The Chatbots claiming to be Jesus: Spreading Gospel or Heresy?' *Nature J. Exp. Psychol. Gen*, (2023) Vol. 152 <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001443>; D. Bass, 'The Bias in the Machine: AI and the Future of Faith' *The Atlantic*, (2023)

<sup>9</sup> Omena Akpobome, 'The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Legal Frameworks: A Model for Adaptive Regulation' *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, (2024) Vol 5(7), 5046-5060. DOI: 10.55248/gengpi.5.1024.3012; Also available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385290270\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Emerging\\_Technologies\\_on\\_Legal\\_Frameworks\\_A\\_Model\\_for\\_Adaptive\\_Regulation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385290270_The_Impact_of_Emerging_Technologies_on_Legal_Frameworks_A_Model_for_Adaptive_Regulation)>. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>10</sup> Gunjan Arora, 'Preservation or Protection? The Intellectual Property Debate Surrounding Traditional Cultural Expressions', *Harvard International Law Journal*, (2025). Available at: <<https://journals.law.harvard.edu/ijl/2025/03/preservation-or-protection-the-intellectual-property-debate-surrounding-traditional-cultural-expressions/>>. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2025; K.A. Carpenter, et al 'Protecting Traditional Cultural Expressions: A Review of the Literature' *WIPO Journal*, (2009) 1(1), 92-101

<sup>11</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Public Affairs, 2019); Joseph R. Bongiovi, 'Review of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, by S. Zuboff]. *Social Forces*, (2019) 98(2), 1-4. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26862460> Accessed 14th November, 2025;

the cases of *Sherbert v. Verner*<sup>12</sup> and *Employment Division v. Smith*<sup>13</sup>, is primarily designed to protect believers from state interference, not from the subtle, corporate-driven erosion of their doctrinal integrity by probabilistic algorithms. This regulatory lacuna creates a perilous environment where spiritual harm can be inflicted at scale, with no clear avenue for recourse.<sup>14</sup>

It is against this backdrop that this paper observes that the current legal regimes are insufficient to protect spiritual integrity in the digital age, necessitating the development of a new, principled legal framework centred on the concept of "spiritual integrity" that operates at the intersection of data rights, intellectual property and religious freedom law. The concept of "spiritual integrity"<sup>15</sup> is proposed here as a legally cognisable interest, building upon Taylor's concept of the "social imaginary"<sup>16</sup> and Nussbaum's capabilities approach<sup>17</sup>, encompassing three core components – the right of a religious community to maintain doctrinal integrity against algorithmic manipulation, its right to cultural sovereignty over its sacred knowledge and symbols, and the protection of the relational authenticity that forms the core of spiritual life from mechanised substitution.

To advance this argument, this paper will adopt a doctrinal methodology, engaging in a critical synthesis of legal theory, technological ethics and theological perspectives. The analysis will proceed in five stages. First, it will map the current landscape of AI's application in spiritual contexts,

<sup>12</sup> *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963) Adele Sherbert, a Seventh-day Adventist, was discharged by her employer after she refused to work on Saturdays, the Sabbath in her religion. The state subsequently denied Sherbert unemployment benefits because she did not accept available work from three other employers who wanted her to work on Saturdays. Having lost in the lower courts, Sherbert appealed to the Supreme Court, contending that the law violated her free exercise of religion rights. In the opinion for the court, Justice William J. Brennan Jr. held that the denial of unemployment benefits to Sherbert imposed a burden on her free exercise rights under the First Amendment.

<sup>13</sup> 494 U.S. 872 (1990)

cataloguing its promises and pinpointing its specific perils. Second, it will conduct a critical gap analysis, demonstrating the failures of copyright, data privacy and religious freedom law to provide a meaningful shield. Third, the paper will delve into the conceptual work of defining "spiritual integrity" as a foundational principle for legal intervention. Building upon this foundation, the fourth section will propose a multidimensional legal framework, outlining specific safeguards such as transparency mandates, sacred data sovereignty and new liability mechanisms. Finally, the paper will navigate the complex practical and theological considerations of implementation, arguing for a co-regulatory model developed in dialogue with faith communities themselves.

The ultimate aim of this inquiry is to foster a vital multidisciplinary dialogue. By interrogating the intersection of AI and the sacred, this paper seeks to provide a robust legal and ethical architecture that allows society to embrace the transformative potential of artificial intelligence without sacrificing the integrity, authenticity and sanctity of spiritual life. The question is no longer if AI will reshape spirituality, but how we will steward this transformation to ensure that the digital age does not become a post-sacred one.

## Mapping the Frontier – AI's Incursion into the Spiritual Realm

The integration of artificial intelligence into spiritual and religious life is no longer a futuristic

<sup>14</sup> C Véliz, *Privacy is Power: Why and How You Should Take Back Control of Your Data* (Bantam Press, 2020)

<sup>15</sup> Spiritual integrity refers to the consistency and steadfastness of one's faith and moral principles, aligning one's actions and beliefs with the teachings of Scripture. It is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that are rooted in one's spiritual convictions. Spiritual integrity is essential for a genuine Christian life, as it reflects the believer's commitment to living according to God's will and commands.

<sup>16</sup> C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*. (Harvard University Press, 2007)

<sup>17</sup> M.C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard University Press, 2011)

speculation but a burgeoning reality.<sup>18</sup> To properly assess the associated legal and ethical challenges, it is imperative first to map this new frontier with precision. This section provides a typology of AI spiritual applications, moving beyond a monolithic view to detail the specific ways in which algorithms are being deployed in sacred contexts. It then analyses the dual-edged nature of these technologies, outlining their promising potential before delving into the specific perils that form the core of this paper's concern: doctrinal manipulation, commodification, the erosion of authority and data exploitation.

### A Typology of AI Spiritual Applications

The landscape of "spiritual AI" is diverse, encompassing applications that range from the administrative to the profoundly experiential. We can categorise them into four primary types.

➤ **Content Creation and Curation:** This represents one of the most widespread applications, leveraging generative AI models. Algorithms are now used to compose sermons, write hymns and devotional poetry, and generate religious art.<sup>19</sup> For instance, OpenAI's GPT models have been used to produce homilies based on specific scriptural passages and theological themes. More controversially, projects like "The AI Gospel" have experimented with generating

entirely new scriptural narratives by training models on the Bible, raising profound questions about authorship and canon.<sup>20</sup> These tools though they promise efficiency and a fresh perspective, they inherently risk flattening the nuanced, context-rich process of theological interpretation into a statistical exercise in pattern matching.

➤ **Simulated Experiences:** These represent another category, where AI couples with immersive technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) to create digital spiritual encounters.<sup>21</sup> Companies offer VR experiences that allow users to "visit" sacred sites like the Hajj in Mecca or the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem from their homes.<sup>22</sup> Other applications include AI-powered meditation apps that use biofeedback to adjust the session in real-time, purportedly guiding the user to a deeper state of calm. These simulations can enhance accessibility and provide powerful educational tools.<sup>23</sup> However, it has been argued that they risk reducing a physical, communal and often arduous act of devotion into a consumable, individualistic entertainment product, creating what might be termed "ersatz transcendence."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Khader I. Alkhouri, 'Spiritual Confusion in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: A Psychology of Religion Perspective' *International Review of Psychiatry*, (2025) Vol. 37(5), 540–553. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2025.2488761>> Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>19</sup> Maria Trigka and Elias Dritsas, 'The Evolution of Generative AI: Trends and Applications' *IEEE Access*, (2025) Vol. 13 DOI: 10.1109/ACCESS.2025.3574660. Also available at: <<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=11016906>>. Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2025; G. Giordan & A. Possamai, *The Digital Sacred: A Sociological Analysis of Religion in the Digital Age*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, and Pauline Hope Cheong (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*, Oxford

Handbooks (2024; online edn, Oxford Academic, 20 Oct. 2022). Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.001.0001>> accessed 11 Nov. 2025

<sup>21</sup> Editorial, 'Augmented Reality vs. Virtual Reality: What's the Difference?' *Coursera*, (3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2025). <<https://www.coursera.org/articles/augmented-reality-vs-virtual-reality?msockid=0c8c0810c973618c2e931e71c8be60ec>> Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, *Surveying the Digital Religion Landscape* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> S. Aupers & J. Schaap, 'The Algorithmic Sacred: An Overview of the Digital Transformation of Religion. *Religion*, (2023) Vol. 53(1), 1-20'

➤ **Algorithmic Guidance and Pastoral Care:** These represent the most direct imitation of human religious roles. Chatbots such as "BlessU-2" and "AI Buddha" offer scriptural quotes and life advice, while more sophisticated systems are being developed to perform automated "confessions" or provide Islamic fatwas.<sup>25</sup> These systems promise 24/7 accessibility and a non-judgmental ear, potentially reaching individuals who are reluctant to approach a human clergy.<sup>26</sup> The peril, however, is significant. Pastoral care is rooted in empathy, shared humanity and a deep, relational understanding of an individual's situation which algorithms, devoid of consciousness and genuine empathy, do not possess.<sup>27</sup> This creates a risk of providing superficial or even harmful guidance on deeply complex spiritual and personal issues.

➤ **Administrative and Community Management:** This though often less visible is equally impactful, and it involves using AI to optimise the administrative functions of religious organisations. This includes using predictive analytics to manage donor tithing patterns, algorithms to tailor digital outreach campaigns to specific demographics and tools to moderate online religious forums.<sup>28</sup> While these applications can increase operational efficiency and help communities grow, they also introduce a logic of corporate-style analytics into the spiritual sphere, potentially reducing congregants to data points and

their faith to a set of quantifiable engagement metrics.

### **The Dual-Edged Sword: Promises and Perils**

The applications outlined above present a clear dichotomy of opportunity and risk. Proponents rightly highlight several significant benefits which include accessibility, preservation and personalization. AI can provide spiritual resources to the homebound, those in religiously sparse areas and people with disabilities and help digitise, translate and analyse ancient religious texts, potentially saving endangered traditions from oblivion.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Personalisation offers a tailored spiritual path, where learning and practice can be adapted to an individual's pace and intellectual style, potentially deepening engagement for a generation steeped in digital interactivity.

However, these promises are shadowed by profound perils that strike at the heart of spiritual integrity.<sup>30</sup> Doctrinal Dilution and Manipulation occurs because AI models are trained on data that embodies the biases, gaps and interpretations of its human creators. A language model trained primarily on online, Western, Protestant Christian sources will inevitably generate a skewed version of Christianity, let alone other faiths.<sup>31</sup> A more dangerous phenomenon is AI "hallucination" where plausible but entirely fabricated information is generated and this poses an existential threat to doctrinal purity. It is a truism that an AI confidently inventing a non-existent religious tenet or a distorted historical fact could lead believers astray, creating schisms and eroding trust in sacred tradition itself.

<sup>25</sup> D. Bass, 'The Bias in the Machine: AI and the Future of Faith'.

<sup>26</sup> Janet Olufunke Bamidele & Donald A. Odeleye, 'The Future of Pastoral Counselling: A Human-AI Partnership Creators' *Journal of Nigerian Association of Pastoral Counsellors*, (2025) Vol. 4, 117-122

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth R. Pruitt, 'The Four Pillars of Pastoral Care and Counseling' *Leland Seminary*. Available at: <<https://www.leland.edu/theologically-speaking/the-four-pillars-of-pastoral-care-and-counseling>>. 14 Nov 2025

<sup>28</sup> Campbell, Heidi A., and Pauline Hope Cheong (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*.

<sup>29</sup> G. Giordan & A. Possamai, *The Digital Sacred: A Sociological Analysis of Religion in the Digital Age*.

<sup>30</sup> D. Bass, 'The Bias in the Machine: AI and the Future of Faith'

<sup>31</sup> Han, Huamei, and Manka Varghese, 'Language Ideology, Christianity, and Identity: Critical Empirical Examinations of Christian Institutions as Alternative Spaces' *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, (2019) 18 (1): 1-9. doi:10.1080/15348458.2019.1569525.

Commodification of the Sacred happens when spiritual practices become AI-driven apps and services, inevitably subjecting them to market logic.<sup>32</sup> This transforms acts of faith into transactions, which has been identified as the "marketisation of religion."<sup>33</sup> When this happens, sacred rituals become premium features and personalised prayers will require a subscription. This process commodifies belief, privileging only those who can pay and undermining the notion of grace and community as freely given. The sacred is stripped of its unique, non-economic value and becomes just another digital product.

Erosion of Spiritual Authority results from the deployment of AI chaplains and algorithmic guides, which directly challenges the role of human clergy, theologians and community elders.<sup>34</sup> These figures are not merely sources of information but are custodians of living traditions, offering wisdom earned through experience and embodying the community's values. Replacing them with algorithms risks de-skilling religious communities, undermining the authority structures that have maintained religious continuity for millennia and fostering a shallow, "Google-it" approach to deep theological questions.<sup>35</sup>

Data Exploitation is perhaps the most insidious peril, involving the harvesting of spiritual data. The information divulged to an AI confessor or a prayer app giving details of one's doubts, sins, hopes and beliefs constitutes an incredibly intimate profile and intrusion into one's privacy. Within the framework of surveillance capitalism, this data is a valuable commodity that can be used to manipulate user behaviour, target advertising or even be sold to third parties.<sup>36</sup> The exploitation of this "sacred

data" represents a fundamental violation of spiritual privacy and trust.

Thus, this mapping exercise reveals a complex and rapidly evolving ecosystem. The applications of AI in spirituality are not merely technological upgrades but are transformative forces that actively reshape religious practice, belief, and authority. The promises of accessibility and personalisation are real, but they are eclipsed by the grave risks of doctrinal corruption, commodification and data exploitation. Having established this landscape, the following section will turn to the critical question of governance, examining the profound inadequacy of our current legal tools to manage these unique and unprecedented challenges.

### **The Inadequate Shield – Critical Gaps in Existing Legal Frameworks**

Having established the novel risks that AI poses to spiritual integrity, this section turns to a critical evaluation of the existing legal landscape. It argues that current regulatory regimes, developed for an analogue world, are fundamentally ill-equipped to serve as a meaningful shield against the unique nature of digital spiritual harm. This analysis will focus on three core areas of law: intellectual property, data protection and religious freedom. While these frameworks offer certain tangential protections, they contain critical conceptual and practical gaps that leave spiritual communities and individuals vulnerable to the specific perils of doctrinal manipulation, commodification and data exploitation outlined in the previous section.

### **Intellectual Property Law: A Misaligned Instrument**

<sup>32</sup> Bo-Chiuan Su, 'AI and Religious e-Commerce: Ethical Foundations, Practical Strategies, and Future Directions. *Electron Commer Res* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10660-025-10010-6>

<sup>33</sup> Maria Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Brown, 'Will AI Ever Become Spiritual? A Hospital Chaplaincy Perspective', *Practical Theology* (2023) Vol. 16 (6): 801–13. doi:10.1080/1756073X.2023.2242940.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Sutcliffe, 'The 'Spiritual' and the 'Religious': A Genealogy' In *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

Intellectual property law, designed to incentivise and protect individual and corporate innovation, is a poor fit for the collective, ancient and often non-commercial nature of sacred traditions. Its application in this context is often not just inadequate but can be actively counterproductive.

Copyright law's individualistic bent creates several core limitations in the spiritual domain. First, it requires a human author. This creates an immediate problem with AI-generated religious content, such as synthetic scriptures or sermons. Under current interpretations in most jurisdictions, including the U.S. Copyright Office's stance on works like "A Recent Entrance to Paradise," a work created autonomously by an AI lacks a human author and may fall into the public domain, leaving it without protection from the very communities it might misrepresent.<sup>37</sup>

Second, copyright protects expression, not ideas, facts or systems. As the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed in *Baker v. Selden*<sup>38</sup> (1879), this idea/expression dichotomy means that the core tenets of a religion – its doctrines, beliefs and procedures are not covered by copyright law. Thus, AI can freely mine the doctrinal "ideas" of Buddhism or Christianity and re-express them in a new algorithmic form, even if that form is doctrinally inaccurate or heterodox. Sadly, the law provides no recourse for this type of doctrinal distortion.

Finally, copyright's duration is limited. The vast corpus of sacred texts, rituals and symbols that form the bedrock of world religions are centuries old and firmly in the public domain. It has been

argued that IP law fails to recognise the ongoing, intergenerational ownership that indigenous and religious communities assert over their traditional knowledge.<sup>39</sup> This allows corporations to legally appropriate and commodify public domain sacred texts, creating AI-powered apps that sell access to a tradition's own core which are not covered by copyright protection.

### **Data Protection and Privacy Law: Failing the Sacred**

While modern data protection regimes like the General Data Protection Regulation<sup>40</sup> in Europe and the California Consumer Privacy Act<sup>41</sup> represent a significant advancement in the regulation and protection of data generally, they contain critical blind spots when it comes to spiritual data.

The ambiguous status of "spiritual data" creates significant vulnerabilities. The GDPR prohibits the processing of "special category data," which includes data revealing "religious or philosophical beliefs." This appears, on its face, to be a strong protection.<sup>42</sup> However, the definition of what constitutes such data is often narrow. A user's specific prayer requests, doubts confessed to an AI Chabot or detailed meditation metrics may not be explicitly classified as "religious belief" by a data controller, but rather as general "health" or "lifestyle" data, affording it a lower level of protection.<sup>43</sup> This creates a loophole where intensely personal spiritual information is processed without the rigorous safeguards required for special category data.<sup>44</sup>

The fiction of meaningful consent further undermines data protection. Data protection law is

<sup>37</sup> Register of Copyrights, 'Copyright and Artificial Intelligence Part 1: Digital Replicas' United States Copyrights Office, (July, 2024) <https://www.copyright.gov/ai/Copyright-and-Artificial-Intelligence-Part-1-Digital-Replicas-Report.pdf>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>38</sup> 101 U.S. 99 (1879).

<sup>39</sup> A.R. Riley, 'Straight Stealing: Towards an Indigenous System of Cultural Property Protection' *Washington Law Review*, (2005) Vol. 80(1), 69-164.

<sup>40</sup> EU GDPR 2023.

<sup>41</sup> California Consumer Privacy Act 2018 came into effect in January, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Art. 9, GDPR

<sup>43</sup> C Vélez, *Privacy is Power: Why and How You Should Take Back Control of Your Data*

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Copyright Office. (2023). *Copyright Registration Guidance: Works Containing Material Generated by Artificial Intelligence*. Federal Register, 88(51), 16190-16194.

built on the foundation of informed consent. However, in the context of surveillance capitalism, the consent model is often a fiction.<sup>45</sup> The lengthy, complex privacy policies presented to users of a spiritual app are rarely read and almost never understood. An individual seeking solace in a moment of grief is not in a position to make a rational, informed choice about how their intimate spiritual data might be used for algorithmic training or micro-targeting. The power imbalance between the vulnerable user and the data-hungry platform renders the concept of meaningful consent largely void in this context.<sup>46</sup>

The extraterritorial enforcement challenge compounds these problems. The global nature of digital platforms further complicates enforcement. While the GDPR has extraterritorial reach, enforcing it against a company based in a jurisdiction with weaker privacy laws can be a protracted and difficult legal battle. For individual believers or small religious communities, the cost and complexity of such a fight are prohibitive, leaving them with a right without a remedy.

### **Religious Freedom and Anti-Discrimination Law: A Shield against the State, Not Corporations**

Religious freedom law, particularly as interpreted in the United States, has been shaped by a series of landmark cases that define its scope and limitations. However, this body of law is primarily designed to mediate the relationship between the individual/community and the state, not to protect against harms inflicted by private corporate actors. The state action doctrine presents a fundamental limitation. The First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause<sup>47</sup>, like many constitutional rights, generally applies only to state action. It has thus been held

that neutral, generally applicable laws not targeting religion do not violate the Free Exercise Clause, even if they incidentally burden religious practice.<sup>48</sup> This principle means that a private company developing an AI that profoundly distorts a religion's doctrine is not engaging in "state action" and is therefore not directly constrained by constitutional religious freedom guarantees. The harm is inflicted by a private entity, placing it outside the scope of this primary legal shield.

The challenge of proving discrimination versus proving spiritual harm further limits these protections. Religious freedom statutes, such as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and anti-discrimination laws are triggered by demonstrations of discrimination or substantial burden. To succeed, a plaintiff must show they were denied a job, a service or a benefit because of their religion or that a government regulation places a substantial burden on their exercise of religion.<sup>49</sup> The harm from a doctrinally manipulative AI, however, is different. It is not about being denied a service but about being provided a corrupted one. It is a harm of misrepresentation and dilution, not exclusion.<sup>50</sup> Proving that an AI's output constitutes a "substantial burden" on one's religious exercise would be a monumental legal task, requiring a court to wade into theological debates to determine what constitutes orthodox doctrine which is an entanglement that courts are notoriously reluctant to undertake.<sup>51</sup> The language of discrimination and burden is ill-suited to capture the subtle, corrosive harm of spiritual inauthenticity engineered by a corporate algorithm. Thus, intellectual property law is conceptually misaligned with the nature of sacred tradition. Data protection law, while better

<sup>45</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

<sup>46</sup> Malgieri, Gianclaudio, 'The vulnerable data subject in the GDPR', *Vulnerability and Data Protection Law, Oxford Data Protection & Privacy Law* (Oxford, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 May 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192870339.003.0004>, accessed 14 Nov. 2025.

<sup>47</sup> US Amend. 1

<sup>48</sup> *Employment Division v. Smith* 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

<sup>49</sup> *Sherbert v Verner* Supra.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Klenk, 'Ethics of generative AI and manipulation: a design-oriented research agenda' *Ethics Inf Technol* (2024) Vol. 26(9) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-024-09745-x>

<sup>51</sup> Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, (Princeton University Press, 2005)

intentioned, is undermined by flawed consent models and enforcement challenges.

### **Conceptualising the Harm – Towards a Legal Principle of Spiritual Integrity**

This research reveals a yawning regulatory gap as existing law fails to recognise or redress the unique injuries inflicted by AI upon spiritual life. To bridge this gap, we must move beyond analogies to property, privacy and discrimination, and articulate a new, legally cognisable interest. This paper therefore proposes the principle of "spiritual integrity" as the foundational concept for a new legal framework. We shall therefore consider the principle of spiritual integrity in three core, protectable components viz – doctrinal integrity, cultural sovereignty and relational authenticity. It then grounds this novel concept in established legal theory and philosophy, demonstrating that it is not a radical invention but a logical and necessary evolution of existing jurisprudential thought tailored to the challenges of the digital age.

### **Defining "Spiritual Integrity": From Vague Offense to Cognisable Harm**

The term "spiritual harm" often evokes subjective feelings of offense, which courts are rightly hesitant to adjudicate. The concept of spiritual integrity, however, moves beyond mere offense to define a concrete, structural injury to the conditions that are necessary for authentic religious and spiritual life to flourish. It thus encompasses three interdependent components discussed hereunder.

➤ **Doctrinal Integrity:** This asserts the right of a religious community to maintain the authenticity and authority of its teachings against systemic algorithmic distortion.<sup>52</sup> The harm is not that an individual is offended by an AI's output, but that the community's process of transmitting its tradition – a process guarded by recognised authorities and pedagogical structures, is hijacked and corrupted by an external, non-accountable system. When an AI "hallucinates" a religious tenet or provides guidance based on a biased dataset, it violates the community's right to self-definition. The injury is analogous to defamation, but at a collective, doctrinal level; it is the corruption of the very source code of a living tradition. This is not about suppressing dissent but about preventing the large-scale, automated pollution of a community's informational ecosystem with authoritative-sounding falsehoods.<sup>53</sup> Protecting doctrinal integrity means legally recognising that such algorithmic distortion constitutes a tangible harm to a community's ability to perpetuate its identity across generations.<sup>54</sup>

➤ **Cultural Sovereignty:** This extends the logic of doctrinal integrity to the broader cultural and symbolic realm. It is the right of indigenous and religious communities to control the use, representation and commercial exploitation of their sacred knowledge, symbols and practices.<sup>55</sup> This

<sup>52</sup> International Theological Commission, 'Religious Freedom for the Good of all Theological Approaches and Contemporary Challenges' *Vatican*, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20190426\\_liberta-religiosa\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20190426_liberta-religiosa_en.html).

Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>53</sup> MIT 'When AI Gets It Wrong: Addressing AI Hallucinations and Bias' Available at: <https://mitsloanedtech.mit.edu/ai/basics/addressing-ai-hallucinations-and-bias/> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Amina Jafir Kerry Jeremy, 'Addressing Algorithmic Discrimination: Legal and Ethical Approaches to Ensuring Fairness in AI Systems, (2024) DOI:

10.13140/RG.2.2.25716.56969. Also available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383664935\\_Adressing\\_Algorithmic\\_Discrimination\\_Legal\\_and\\_Ethical\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Ensuring\\_Fairness\\_in\\_AI\\_Systems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383664935_Adressing_Algorithmic_Discrimination_Legal_and_Ethical_Approaches_to_Ensuring_Fairness_in_AI_Systems). 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>55</sup> Gunjan Arora, 'Preservation or Protection? The Intellectual Property Debate Surrounding Traditional Cultural Expressions' *Harvard Art Review*, (2025) Vol. 1 <https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/halo/2025/03/13/preservation-or-protection-the-intellectual-property-debate-surrounding-traditional-cultural-expressions/#:>>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> Nov 2025.

concept is deeply informed by the scholarship on Indigenous Data Sovereignty and the movement to protect Traditional Cultural Expressions.<sup>56</sup> The unauthorised use of a sacred Navajo chant to train an AI music generator<sup>57</sup> or the algorithmic generation of images of a Hindu deity in a disrespectful context are not merely copyright violations; they are violations of cultural sovereignty.<sup>58</sup> They represent an extraction and repurposing of sacred cultural capital without consent, benefit-sharing, or respect for protocols of use. This harm is one of dispossession and disrespect because it severs the sacred symbol from its lived context, its community of origin, and the relational responsibilities that govern its proper use. Legal recognition of cultural sovereignty would provide communities with a positive right to grant or withhold permission for the use of their sacred knowledge in AI training datasets and applications, moving beyond the negative, after-the-fact protections of IP law.<sup>59</sup>

➤ **Relational Authenticity:** The most profound, yet least tangible, component of spiritual integrity is relational authenticity. At its core, much

of spirituality is constituted by relationships –the relationship between the believer and the divine and the communal relationships among believers.<sup>60</sup> The harm caused by AI here is the substitution of an authentic human (or divine) relationship with a simulated, transactional one. When an individual seeks pastoral care from an AI chatbot, the relationship is inherently inauthentic. The AI has no consciousness, no empathy and no stake in the individual's well-being. It offers a parody of care, one that risks devaluing the genuine article and leaving the user emotionally and spiritually impoverished. This aligns with "capabilities approach," which evaluates justice based on what individuals are actually able to do and be.<sup>61</sup> The capability to engage in authentic spiritual relationships is a central human functional capability. The proliferation of AI simulacra in spiritual roles can be seen as a barrier to realising this capability.<sup>62</sup> The harm is the degradation of the relational fabric of spiritual life itself, reducing profound encounters to human-computer interactions optimised for engagement metrics.

<sup>56</sup> T. Kukutai, & J. Taylor, (Eds.) *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda* (ANU Press, 2016); K.A. Carpenter, et al 'Protecting Traditional Cultural Expressions: A Review of the Literature' WIPO Journal, (2009) 1(1), 92-101

<sup>57</sup> Samantha G. Rothaus, 'Court Rules AI Training on Copyrighted Works Is Not Fair Use — What It Means for Generative AI' *Davis Gilbert*, (27<sup>th</sup> Feb., 2025) <https://www.dglaw.com/court-rules-ai-training-on-copyrighted-works-is-not-fair-use-what-it-means-for-generative-ai/>

<sup>58</sup> Melissa Heikkilä, 'The Algorithm: AI-generated art raises tricky questions about ethics, copyright, and security' *MIT Technology Review*, (September 20, 2022) <https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/09/20/1059792/the-algorithm-ai-generated-art-raises-tricky-questions-about-ethics-copyright-and-security/> accessed 14<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2025

<sup>59</sup> Lawvexa Editorial Team, 'The Importance of Legal Recognition of Cultural Identities in Modern Societies'

*LawVexa*, (March, 6, 2024) <https://lawvexa.com/legal-recognition-of-cultural-identities/> accessed 14<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2025

<sup>60</sup> Christina M. Gschwandtner, 'Faith, Religion, and Spirituality: A Phenomenological and Hermeneutic Contribution to Parsing the Distinctions' *Religions*, (2021), 12(7), 476. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070476>. Also Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352790790\\_Faith\\_Religion\\_and\\_Spirituality\\_A\\_Phenomenological\\_and\\_Hermeneutic\\_Contribution\\_to\\_Parsing\\_the\\_Distinctions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352790790_Faith_Religion_and_Spirituality_A_Phenomenological_and_Hermeneutic_Contribution_to_Parsing_the_Distinctions)>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>61</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard University Press, 2011)

<sup>62</sup> Douglas C Youvan, 'Digital Pantheism: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Artificial Intelligence' (April 2024) DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.32319.11682. also available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380203196\\_Digital\\_Pantheism\\_Exploring\\_the\\_Spiritual\\_Dimensions\\_of\\_Artificial\\_Intelligence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380203196_Digital_Pantheism_Exploring_the_Spiritual_Dimensions_of_Artificial_Intelligence). Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.

## Grounding the Principle in Legal Theory

➤ **Right to Cultural Heritage:** While the term "spiritual integrity" may be novel, the underlying principles are deeply rooted in established legal and philosophical traditions, providing a solid foundation for its adoption. The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Heritage Law provide a powerful analogue in international law developments concerning the rights of indigenous peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)<sup>63</sup>, particularly Articles 11 and 31, affirms the right of indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.<sup>64</sup> This represents a clear move in international law towards recognising collective cultural and spiritual rights that exist beyond the frame of Western IP law.<sup>65</sup> The concept of "spiritual integrity" for religious communities is a direct extension of this logic, applying the core tenets of cultural sovereignty to the digitally-mediated threats faced by both indigenous and organised religious groups.

➤ **The Capabilities Approach and the Right to Identity:** This offer additional philosophical justification for the protection of

spiritual integrity. If the goal of law and policy is to support human flourishing, then it must protect the central capabilities necessary for a dignified life which includes "being able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason... and to do so in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education" and "being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves."<sup>66</sup> The capability for meaningful spiritual experience and authentic religious community falls squarely within this framework. A legal system that allows the conditions for this capability to be eroded by algorithmic systems is failing in its fundamental purpose. Similarly, the concept of a "right to identity," developed in both international human rights law and constitutional jurisprudence, is relevant.<sup>67</sup> The German Constitutional Court's concept of the "right to the free development of one's personality"<sup>68</sup> and the European Court of Human Rights' jurisprudence on private life under Article 8 of the ECHR have recognised that personal identity is socially and culturally embedded.<sup>69</sup> An attack on the cultural and doctrinal foundations of a community such as the systematic distortion of its beliefs by AI can be construed as an attack on the identity of its members.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007, as a triumph for justice and human dignity.

<sup>64</sup> A/RES/ 61/295. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Available at: [www.un-documents.net/a61r295.htm](http://www.un-documents.net/a61r295.htm). Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>65</sup> Siegfried Wiessner, 'The Cultural Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Achievements and Continuing Challenges' *European Journal of International Law EJIL* (2011) Vol. 22(1)

<sup>66</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*.

<sup>67</sup> Ronit Matar & Daragh Murray, 'Re-thinking International Human Rights Law's Approach to Identity in Light of Surveillance and AI' *Human Rights Law Review*, (2025) Vol. 25(3), <https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngaf016>. Also available at: <https://academic.oup.com/hrlr/article/25/3/ngaf016/8157328>

<sup>68</sup> Edward J. Eberle, 'Observations on the Development of Human Dignity and Personality in German Constitutional Law: An Overview' *Liverpool Law Rev.*, (2012) Vol. 33, 201–233. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10991-012-9120-x>

<sup>69</sup> Guide on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Available at: [https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d-echr-ks/guide\\_art\\_8\\_eng](https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d-echr-ks/guide_art_8_eng). Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.

<sup>70</sup> Fahim Abrar Abid, 'Crimes against Culture: The International Law Framework for Cultural Heritage Destruction and its Limitations' *Harvard International Law Journal*, (2025). Available at: <<https://journals.law.harvard.edu/ilj/2025/02/crimes-against-culture-the-international-law-framework-for-cultural-heritage-destruction-and-its-limitations/>>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

➤ **Information Fiduciaries and the Abuse of Trust:** It has been argued that digital platforms that collect and use our data occupy a position of trust and dependence analogous to traditional fiduciaries like doctors or lawyers.<sup>71</sup> As such, they should have legal duties of care, confidentiality, and loyalty towards their users. This theory applies with even greater force in the context of spiritual AI. A company offering an AI confessional or prayer guide is not a neutral platform; it is holding itself out as a provider of a profound and intimate service. Users are inherently vulnerable in this relationship. The violation of spiritual data, or the provision of manipulative or doctrinally corrupt guidance, is a quintessential breach of fiduciary duty. Recognising spiritual integrity would thus involve imposing heightened fiduciary obligations on entities that assume such sensitive, trust-based roles.

Thus, it can be said that the argument has moved from diagnosing a problem to proposing a solution. The principle of spiritual integrity, comprising doctrinal integrity, cultural sovereignty and relational authenticity, provides the necessary conceptual vocabulary to name the specific harms of the digital sacred. By grounding this principle in established traditions of indigenous rights, human capabilities, identity rights and fiduciary law, it becomes a legally defensible and philosophically sound basis for intervention. This is therefore not a call for the state to establish theology but for the law to protect the preconditions for authentic theological and spiritual life to exist.

Having laid this conceptual foundation, the following section will build upon it to propose specific, actionable legal safeguards.

<sup>71</sup> Jack M. Balkin, 'Information Fiduciaries and the First Amendment' *UC Davis Law Review*, (2016) 49(4), 1183-1234. Also available at: <https://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/archives/49/4/information-fiduciaries-and-first-amendment>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

## Building the Safeguards – A Proposal for a Multidimensional Legal Framework

The conceptual foundation of spiritual integrity, as established previously demands a tangible legal architecture. It is not enough to define the harm; the law must provide remedies. This phase now moves from theory to prescription, outlining a multidimensional legal framework designed to operationalise the principle of spiritual integrity. The proposed safeguards are not a single, monolithic law, but rather a suite of complementary interventions that target different points of failure in the current system. They are structured around three core strategies – enhancing transparency and accountability, creating proactive rights and establishing clear liability and redress mechanisms. This framework aims to empower individuals and communities, impose responsible practices on developers and provide a path to justice when violations occur.

### Transparency and Accountability Mandates

A primary driver of the unique risks posed by spiritual AI is its inherent opacity. To combat this, the law must force the black box open, creating a regime of mandatory transparency that enables informed consent and external accountability.

"Spiritual AI" Labelling and Disclosure provides a foundational safeguard, drawing inspiration from food labelling regulations and the Federal Trade Commission's<sup>72</sup> rules on native advertising of the United States of America<sup>73</sup>. A mandatory disclosure regime would require any digital service that provides religious content, spiritual guidance or simulates a spiritual experience through AI to display a clear and unambiguous label such as "AI-Generated Spiritual Content" or "AI-Powered Guidance." This label must be prominent and persistent, not buried in a terms-of-service agreement. The European Union's Artificial

<sup>72</sup> Federal Trade Commission Act ("FTC Act") (15 U.S.C. §§ 41-58, as amended)

<sup>73</sup> Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses. Available at: <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/native-advertising-guide-businesses>

Intelligence Act<sup>74</sup>, with its tiered approach to risk, provides a useful model. AI systems deployed in spiritual contexts could be classified as "high-risk" for the purposes of transparency, triggering strict labelling requirements.<sup>75</sup> This empowers users with basic knowledge, allowing them to apply appropriate scrutiny to the content they receive. It respects the autonomy of the individual to choose whether to engage with an algorithmic authority, restoring a measure of informed agency that is currently absent.

Doctrinal and Cultural Audits offer a more robust accountability mechanism beyond consumer-facing labels. The law should create a right for recognised religious and indigenous communities to request an independent doctrinal or cultural audit of an AI system that purports to represent, interpret or use their tradition. This process would be analogous to a financial audit. A panel of theological and cultural experts, approved by the relevant community, would be granted access to the AI's training data, model cards, and output for a specific, limited purpose to assess the system for significant doctrinal inaccuracies, harmful biases, or disrespectful uses of sacred cultural elements. The findings of such an audit though may not force a company to shut down its service, but they could be made public and, crucially, serve as evidence in subsequent legal actions for misrepresentation or violation of cultural sovereignty. This mechanism, in the context of algorithmic accountability, would create a powerful incentive for developers to engage with religious authorities proactively, fostering a culture of co-design and respect rather than post-hoc exploitation.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> The European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) has been passed. It was formally adopted in May 2024, published in the EU's Official Journal on 12 July 2024, and officially entered into force on 1 August 2024.

<sup>75</sup> Art. 6, EU AI Act 2024.

<sup>76</sup> Cath Corinne, 'Governing Artificial Intelligence: Ethical, Legal and Technical Opportunities and Challenges' *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A.* (2018) 37620180080 <http://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2018.0080> or <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsta.2018.0080>

## Proactive Rights and Protections

Transparency alone is insufficient if users and communities lack the power to control how their data and traditions are used. The framework must therefore establish new, proactive legal rights. Sacred Data Sovereignty builds upon the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and as such should be recognised as a special category data.<sup>77</sup> The concept of "sacred data" must be legally codified as any data that reveals or is derived from an individual or community's spiritual beliefs, practices, prayers, rituals or confessions. The legal innovation here is to grant community-level rights over this data, in addition to individual rights. This would mean that before a company could collect or process sacred data pertaining to a specific religious tradition, it would need to obtain not only individual user consent but also a license or agreement from a recognised governing body of that tradition. This could be structured similarly to the "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" model required under UNDRIP for projects affecting indigenous lands.<sup>78</sup> This dual-lock system would prevent the piecemeal erosion of a community's spiritual fabric through the aggregation of individual data points. It formally recognises that spiritual data is not merely personal but a resource of the collective, holding significance that transcends the individual transaction.

## Liability and Redress Mechanisms

Finally, a legal framework is only as strong as its enforcement. New causes of action and liability standards are required to deter harmful conduct and provide redress.

<sup>77</sup> Ahu Kukutai and John Taylor (Eds.). *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda*. (ANU Press, 2016).

<sup>78</sup> Barelli, Mauro, 'Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in the UNDRIP: Articles 10, 19, 29(2), and 32(2)', in Jessie Hohmann, and Marc Weller (eds), *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Commentary*, (Oxford Commentaries on International Law (2018; online edn, Oxford Law Pro), <https://doi.org/10.1093/law/9780199673223.003.0010>, accessed 15 Nov. 2025.

A New Tort of Doctrinal Misrepresentation would address the specific harm of doctrinal corruption by expanding tort law to recognise this cause of action. This would be a collective tort, actionable by a recognised religious institution on behalf of its community. The plaintiff would need to prove that the defendant deployed a system that held itself out as representing a specific religious tradition; the system systematically and significantly misrepresented the core doctrines of that tradition; and this misrepresentation caused a foreseeable harm, such as confusion among the faithful, the fracturing of a community or reputational damage to the religious institution.<sup>79</sup> This tort draws an analogy to defamation and the commercial tort of "passing off." It does not require the state to define correct doctrine, but rather to adjudicate whether a commercial entity has falsely claimed to represent it, causing harm.<sup>80</sup> The standard would be high, requiring evidence of systematic distortion, not minor interpretive differences. This creates a powerful deterrent against the most egregious forms of algorithmic heresy.

Strengthening Consumer Protection Law offers another enforcement pathway as FTC Act prohibits "unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce."<sup>81</sup> Marketing an AI chaplain as a source of compassionate care without disclosing its limitations could be deemed deceptive. Similarly, the "unfairness" prong could be invoked against business practices that cause substantial, unavoidable injury to consumers such as the psychological and spiritual injury resulting from manipulative AI guidance that is not outweighed by countervailing benefits. Regulators could issue specific guidelines for "Spiritual AI Services," clarifying that failures of transparency, breaches of data trust and the provision of unqualified advice on critical life matters may constitute unfair and deceptive practices. This approach has the advantage of utilizing an existing, powerful

enforcement apparatus, allowing for investigations, fines and injunctions without waiting for new legislation.

In summation, the multidimensional framework proposed here which spans transparency mandates, proactive rights and liability rules provides a comprehensive and pragmatic blueprint for safeguarding spiritual integrity. It balances the need for innovation with the imperative of protection, empowers communities as stakeholders in their digital future and grounds abstract principles in concrete legal tools. By layering these interventions, the framework creates a resilient system of checks and balances, ensuring that as artificial intelligence continues its ascent, the sacred realms of human experience are met not with exploitation but with legally-enforced respect.

### **Navigating the Implementation – Theological and Practical Considerations**

The proposed legal framework for spiritual integrity, while theoretically robust, does not operate in a vacuum. Its successful implementation hinges on navigating a complex web of theological, practical, and political challenges. It is obvious that the framework cannot be imposed as a top-down, one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, it must be developed through a collaborative, co-regulatory model that respects the diversity of religious traditions while establishing clear, enforceable baselines for corporate behaviour. We will explore the necessary engagement with religious communities, define the role of technology companies and confront potential objections regarding censorship, theological entanglement, and the very definition of religious authority.

### **Engaging Religious Communities: From Subjects to Partners**

A fundamental prerequisite for the framework's legitimacy and efficacy is the deep and sustained

<sup>79</sup> Editorial, 'Understanding Misrepresentation in Tort Law: Key Principles' *Laws Learned*, (June 14, 2024) Available at: <https://lawslearned.com/misrepresentation-in-tort-law/>

<sup>80</sup> *Incorporated Trustees of United African Methodist Church (ELEJA) Organisation v Diya & Ors* (2019) LPELR-47285(CA)

<sup>81</sup> S. 5, FCTA

engagement of religious communities in its development and deployment. The principle of spiritual integrity is meaningless if the "spiritual" it seeks to protect is defined solely by secular legal institutions.

The Pluralism Problem presents a significant challenge, as world religions possess vastly different theological anthropologies, ecclesiologies and structures of authority. A centralised, hierarchical faith like Roman Catholicism has a clear magisterium capable of speaking on doctrinal matters and authorising audits. In contrast, non-hierarchical traditions like many Protestant denominations or Islam (in its Sunni majority) lack a single, centralised authority. Indigenous spiritualities are often deeply localised, with knowledge held by specific elders or families. The framework must be flexible enough to accommodate this pluralism. This could involve recognising a plurality of representative bodies ranging from formal hierarchies to scholarly councils to designated non-profit organisations representing specific indigenous nations or groups. Forums for Dialogue are essential for implementation, requiring the creation of new, formalised spaces for conversation. National and international bodies, such as ministries of culture or digital regulation agencies, could convene ongoing working groups comprising theologians, legal scholars, ethicists and technology developers. This would not be an avenue for the state to endorse specific theologies, but to facilitate the translation of communal spiritual concerns into practicable legal and technical standards. It is suggested that the secular state must create channels for religious voices to contribute to public

reason, without granting them a veto over the process.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Role of Technology Companies: From Exploitation to Co-Regulation**

Technology companies cannot be passive subjects of regulation but must be active participants in a co-regulatory model that aligns their practices with the principle of spiritual integrity. Developing Industry Standards represents a practical approach to implementation. Building on the model of "Ethical AI" frameworks, industry consortia should be encouraged or in some cases, legally mandated to develop specific standards for "Spiritual AI".<sup>83</sup> These standards, developed in consultation with the religious forums mentioned above, would provide practical guidance on implementing the law's requirements.<sup>84</sup> They could cover technical specifications for "spiritual AI" labelling, protocols for engaging with communities for cultural audits and best practices for handling sacred data. This approach leverages industry expertise while ensuring it is guided by external, multi-stakeholder values.

Ethical by Design represents the ultimate goal of fostering a culture where spiritual integrity is "baked in" from the outset. This means that developers, when considering an AI application in a spiritual context, would proactively conduct impact assessments that evaluate risks to doctrinal integrity, cultural sovereignty and relational authenticity. This shifts compliance from a reactive, legalistic burden to a proactive, integral part of the design process, potentially averting harm before it occurs.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Religion in the Public Sphere*. European Journal of Philosophy, (2006) Vol. 14(1), 1–25

<sup>83</sup> Olayinka, Oyunwola Taiwo, et al, 'Co-Designing Ethical AI with Faith Communities: Advancing Worship Innovation, Moral Governance, and Resilient Digital Ecosystems' *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences and Artificial Intelligence* (2025) Available at: <<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Co-Designing-Ethical-AI-with-Faith-Communities%3A-and-Olayinka->

[Temitope/a39eabfa062153c95e3d89d07d6b5174919b26df.](https://temitope/a39eabfa062153c95e3d89d07d6b5174919b26df.)> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2025

<sup>84</sup> Editorial, 'Religious Law and Community Standards: A Harmonious Interaction' *Laws Learned*, (28 July, 2024) <https://lawslearned.com/religious-law-and-community-standards/>. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.

<sup>85</sup> Heike Felzmann, et al, 'Towards Transparency in AI: A Model-Based Approach to Data Protection and Ethics' *IEEE Security & Privacy*, (2019) Vol. 17(3), 49-58

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The rapid and unregulated incursion of artificial intelligence into the sphere of spirituality represents one of the most subtle yet profound challenges of the digital age. This paper has argued that this convergence is not merely a technological novelty but a paradigm shift that threatens the very foundations of spiritual integrity—the doctrinal, cultural and relational fabric that constitutes authentic religious life. As we have seen, the promises of accessibility and personalisation are shadowed by the grave perils of algorithmic distortion, commodification and data exploitation. Our investigation has demonstrated that the existing legal toolkit—intellectual property, data privacy, and religious freedom law—is conceptually misaligned and structurally inadequate to address these novel forms of harm. In response to this regulatory failure, this paper has proposed the principle of spiritual integrity as a new, legally cognisable interest. By defining this principle through its three core components—doctrinal integrity, cultural sovereignty and relational authenticity—we have moved the conversation beyond vague notions of offense towards a concrete framework for legal protection. Grounding this concept in established legal theory, from indigenous rights to the capabilities approach, provides a robust foundation for intervention that respects both religious pluralism and human dignity.

Building upon this foundation, we have outlined a multidimensional legal framework designed to translate principle into practice. This framework layers specific, actionable mechanisms: transparency mandates like "Spiritual AI" labelling and doctrinal audits to pierce algorithmic opacity; proactive rights such as sacred data sovereignty and a right to spiritual explanation to empower individuals and communities; and redress mechanisms including a new tort for doctrinal misrepresentation and the strengthened application of consumer protection law. This suite of safeguards is not designed to stifle innovation or censor speech, but to create a landscape of

accountable innovation where technology serves humanity without undermining its deepest values. The journey towards implementing this framework is undoubtedly complex, requiring careful navigation of theological pluralism, the separation of church and state and the practicalities of co-regulation. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. They call for a sustained, multidisciplinary dialogue that positions the law not as an arbiter of theological truth, but as a guardian of the conditions necessary for spiritual life to flourish authentically.

In conclusion, the question posed at the outset of this paper—how to uphold the sanctity of spiritual life while embracing the potential of AI—demands a proactive and principled legal response. The transformative power of artificial intelligence need not come at the cost of our spiritual integrity. By establishing clear, respectful and enforceable safeguards, we can steer the digital age towards a future where technology enhances, rather than erodes, the sacred dimensions of human experience. The task is urgent, for in preserving the integrity of the spirit, we ultimately protect a core pillar of our shared humanity.