

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – SATURDAY, 25TH JULY 2026

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Good morning.

Two stories about AI this week have caused me to react in very different ways. The first was a report from ChatGPT maker, OpenAI, that some of its most advanced AI models went rogue during a test. By autonomously evading security restrictions, they were able to access a large hub bizarrely named Hugging Face, which allowed them to hack into other systems. This is the kind of apocalyptic nightmare that many of us dread. What would happen, for example, if autonomous weapons systems broke free from human control and went on the rampage?

Yet a different story about AI thrilled me. Scientists have used AI to study the spectacular diversity of birdsong around the world, and to discover how closely it's adapted to the different natural environments in which bird species live. They analysed more than a hundred thousand songs recorded by volunteers, leading to a recognition of how important the preservation of these environments is for the protection of the world's birds and the music they bring to our daily lives.

AI poses a momentous challenge to all humankind, one in which we have no choice but to play God. We're often cautioned against "playing God", but in biblical theology, that is our human vocation. The Book of Genesis tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God and given dominion over creation. Dominion is not domination. It means we have divine authority to act as God's stewards, entrusted with responsibility for the natural environment and the human and non-human creatures that depend upon it. The fact that we have abused that trust is evident everywhere in the wars and environmental catastrophes now engulfing us.

How we play God depends on what we mean by God. Too often, we act like the capricious, narcissistic gods of Homer's *Odyssey*, whose power makes playthings of the vulnerable humans at their disposal. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is to be discovered in the beauty of creation, in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and in all victims of injustice and violence – the newborn infant born in a stable, the refugee family fleeing Herod's infanticidal rage, the crucifixion of the innocent. Christians are called to play God through attentive care for creation and for the most vulnerable, protecting them from the violent powers of technological, political, and economic hubris.

Bird song or bombs? We face a choice. Please, let's choose the birds.