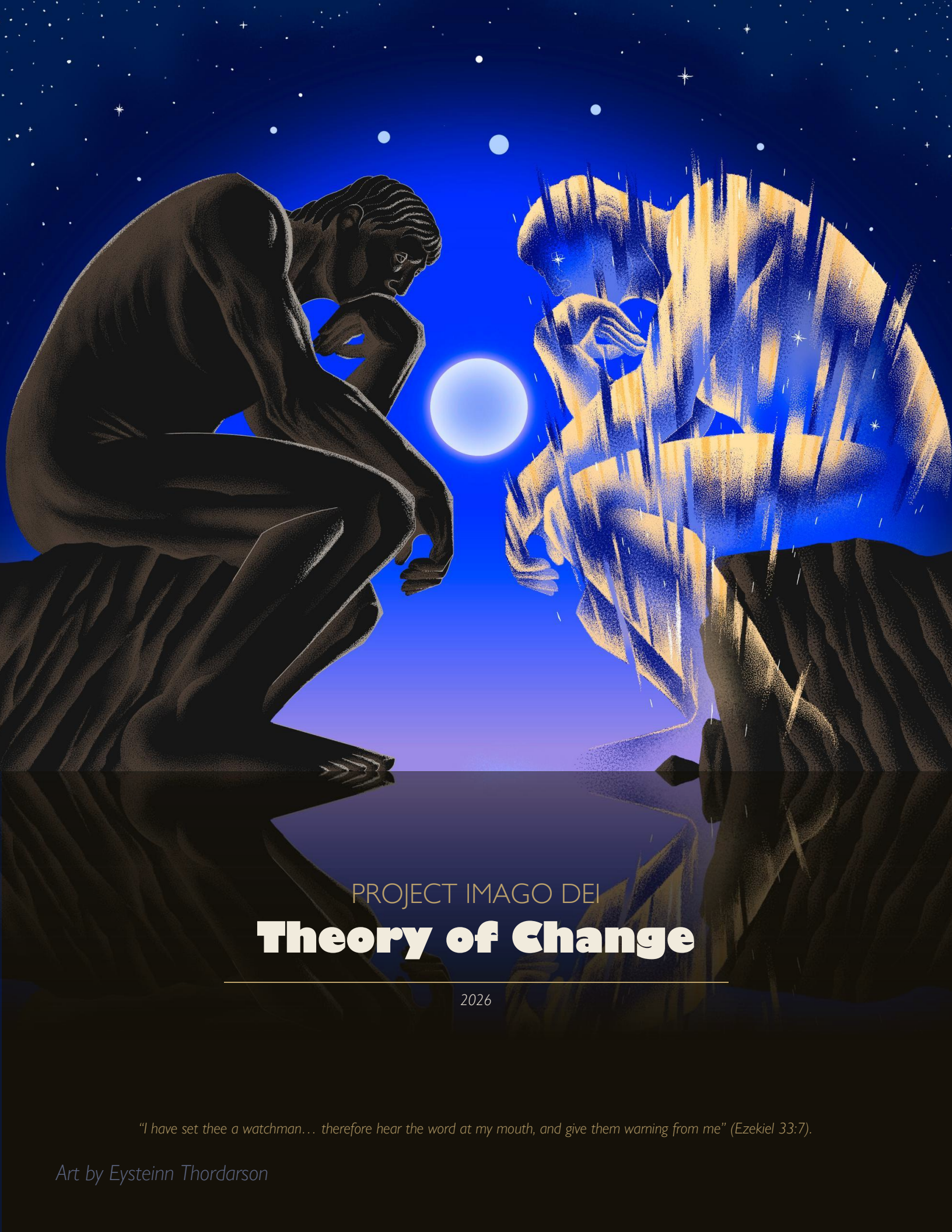




PROJECT IMAGO DEI

# Theory of Change

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2026

*"I have set thee a watchman... therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Ezekiel 33:7).*

*Art by Eysteinn Thordarson*

# Table of Contents

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Introduction and Background | 3 |
| Theories of Change          | 4 |
| The Culture Matrix          | 5 |
| The Culture Matrix in 2026  | 6 |
| How We Win                  | 7 |
| Appendix                    | 7 |





# Project Imago Dei: Our Theory of Change

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*A worldview document produced by Project Imago Dei, August 8 2026*

## Executive summary:

- The purpose of this document is to present the proprietary theory of change - that is, *impact* - adopted by Project Imago Dei.
- It reproduces a model - the Culture Matrix - introduced by James Davison Hunter in his 2010 book '[To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World](#)' in both its original, tabulated format, as well as an updated version of the Culture Matrix created by Project Imago Dei that adapts the original formula for the post-AI era as of 2026.
- The objective of this document is to express our own proprietary theory of change for Project Imago Dei that is coherent and convivial with the challenges of our modern age, that is applicable to distinct target audience segments, and that can be articulated in a single sentence by each and every member of the team where and when required.

## 1 Introduction and background: what think tanks are, and what they do

*"Social phenomena seem to obey laws which, while not as absolute as those governing natural phenomena, are sufficiently constant to cause social events to follow regular and well-defined patterns and sequences" - Ibn Khaldun*

While the world's oldest and most prestigious think tanks date back to the early 20th century (c.f. [Brookings Institute](#) in the US, or [Chatham House](#) in the UK) the institutional model of the modern think tank was crystallized after WW2, during the first decades of the Cold War. The fundamental ontology of think tanks, then and now, can be summarized as follows: to operate as hubs of expertise and professional excellence which would, through events, conferences, publications, books, and other public activities, influence opinions and policy priorities among the higher stratum of the bureaucratic, intellectual, and political elite. See Appendix 1 below for further elaboration on other types of institutions in this genre.

Explicitly Christian think tanks operate with some crucial differences from their secular counterparts. For Christian think tanks such as the [FRC](#) (US), the [Amrots Foundation](#) (Armenia), or [Cardus](#) (Canada) where the core mission is not merely the achievement of specific policy outcomes, but rather achieving target policy outcomes in tandem with spreading the Gospel and defending its righteousness nationwide (or indeed worldwide), the scope of activities is generally broader.

**Christian think tanks thus enjoy distinct advantages** unavailable to their secular counterparts; they can influence a plurality of socioeconomic and cognitive strata within society simultaneously. House and senate committees, elite members' clubs, university boards, episcopal synods, clerical communities, local churches, and fans of popular intellectual influencers **are all viable targets for Christian think tanks to work with**; for conventional think tanks, that is not the case.

Traditional think tanks often rely on connections with conventionally 'elite' universities, pulling human capital from high-reputation loci for elite production (i.e. Cambridge, Yale, Oxford, Berkeley) thereby purchasing qualified and accredited authority figures to push for the agendas set by the donors of said think tank (i.e. economists [Thomas Sowell](#), vis a vis the [Hoover Institution](#), or [Charles Murray](#), vis a vis the [American Enterprise Institute](#)). **Christian think tanks, by contrast, have a much broader scope of engagement.** Unlike traditional think tanks (which occupy themselves with policy as their singular focus) they fight to establish their presence in the elite universities, the tertiary universities, and more importantly, church networks - **a stratum largely ignored by their secular competitors.**

In our present era - the mid-2020s, amidst the socioeconomic overhaul of generative-AI and with social media playing a paramount role in popular opinion - **Christian think tanks are inherently better positioned to win influence** and accomplish objectives than traditional think tanks. Even granting that elite universities and policy centers (i.e. DC) may still provide the highest payoff in terms of influence per dollar invested, the customer acquisition cost in these saturated



‘markets’ is exceedingly high. The customer acquisition cost in rural Christian parishes, wherein somewhere between 1-5% of the population can be classified as elite human capital, is in relative terms trivially low. In other words, Christian think tanks operate with **a comparative advantage in investing in future elites** - an advantage that we can capitalize on for universal benefit.

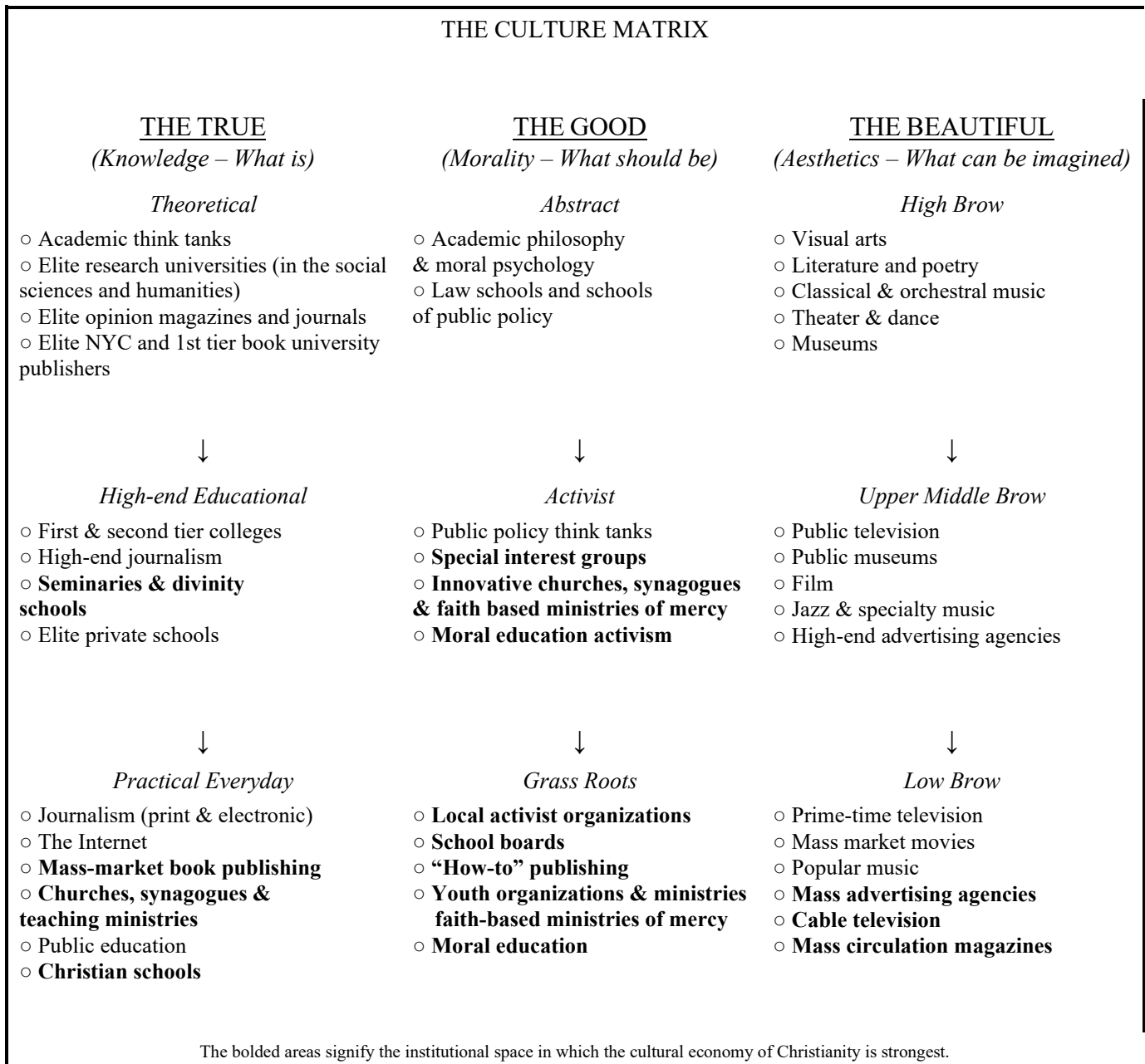
### 1.1 Theories of change: what are they, and why do they matter?

Implicit in this very ontology of what a think tank is, how it is organized, and what it does, is a theory of change that connects the activities of the organization to tangible real-world outcomes that are desired by its members. As Jordan Peterson argues in *Maps of Meaning*, agential actors (whether individual, institutional, governmental, or religious) engage in the world in ways that accord with pre-established frameworks of cause and effect (embedded in both proximate and ultimate levels of belief and faith). The ‘classical model’ of the post-WW2 Western think tank, characterized by selectively applying the pressure of expert opinion at focal points in government policy or administration, operates as such because it understands - *or theorizes* - that operating thus (i.e. as a social club for elite decision-makers and their retinues) will result in the desired change being implemented.

American sociologist [James Davison Hunter](#) (1955-) published a book in 2010 entitled ‘[To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World](#)’. His book contains 10 propositions about the nature of cultural influence and societal change that are distilled in the model reproduced below (from P90 of the aforementioned book). This model is presented here for the purpose of consideration:



## 1.2 The Culture Matrix: graphically modeling a Christian sociological theory of change (circa 2010)



Source: James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 90.



### 1.3 The Culture Matrix in 2026: how we see it

In 2026, we at Project Imago Dei imagine this matrix of cultural change differently. Our revised version is as follows (yellow indicates AI dominance):

| THE CULTURE MATRIX       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                          | THE TRUE<br>(Knowledge – What is)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | THE GOOD<br>(Morality – What should be)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | THE BEAUTIFUL<br>(Aesthetics – What can be imagined)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| High moral authority     | <i>Theoretical</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Cutting-edge AI models</b></li><li>○ <b>Academic think tanks</b></li><li>○ <i>Elite research universities (in the social sciences and humanities)</i></li><li>○ Elite opinion magazines and journals</li><li>○ Elite 1st tier university book publishers</li><li>○ First &amp; second tier colleges</li></ul> | <i>Abstract</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Cutting-edge AI models</b></li><li>○ <i>Academic philosophy &amp; moral psychology</i></li><li>○ Law schools and schools of public policy</li><li>○ <b>Public policy think tanks</b></li></ul>                                                                                                                                               | <i>High Brow</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Visual arts</i></li><li>○ Literature and poetry</li><li>○ Classical &amp; orchestral music</li><li>○ Theater &amp; dance</li><li>○ <i>Speciality Museums</i></li><li>○ Film</li></ul>                                                                          |
| Moderate moral authority | <i>High-end Educational</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Online universities and non-degree-awarding courses</b></li><li>○ <i>High-end journalism</i></li><li>○ <b>Seminaries &amp; divinity schools</b></li><li>○ Elite private schools</li></ul>                                                                                                            | <i>Activist</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>YouTube debate sphere</b></li><li>○ Special interest groups</li><li>○ <b>Innovative churches, synagogues &amp; faith based ministries of mercy</b></li><li>○ <b>Moral education activism</b></li></ul>                                                                                                                                       | <i>Upper Middle Brow</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Cutting-edge AI models</b></li><li>○ <b>YouTube Video Essays</b></li><li>○ Public museums</li><li>○ <b>Traditional music and religious chants</b></li><li>○ <i>High-end advertising agencies</i></li></ul>                                             |
| Weak moral authority     | <i>Practical Everyday</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Mainstream journalism</li><li>○ <i>Reddit</i></li><li>○ Mass-market book publishing</li><li>○ <b>Churches, synagogues &amp; teaching ministries</b></li><li>○ Public education</li><li>○ <b>Christian schools</b></li><li>○ <b>AI assistants/companions</b></li></ul>                                     | <i>Grass Roots</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Christian lifestyle influencers</b></li><li>○ Local activist organizations</li><li>○ School boards</li><li>○ <i>Digital influencers</i></li><li>○ <b>Youth organizations &amp; ministries faith-based ministries of mercy</b></li><li>○ <b>Interest-based Facebook groups</b></li><li>○ <b>AI therapy/personal support bots</b></li></ul> | <i>Low Brow</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Instagram</i></li><li>○ <i>Netflix &amp; YouTube</i></li><li>○ Mass market movies</li><li>○ Popular music</li><li>○ <i>Mass advertising</i></li><li>○ <b>Subscription-based television (i.e. The Chosen)</b></li><li>○ <b>AI slop (memes and art)</b></li></ul> |

The bolded areas signify the institutional space in which the cultural economy of Christianity is strongest.  
The italicized & underlined areas signify the institutional space in which the cultural economy of Christianity is the weakest.  
Areas in which AI has come to occupy space in human cultural ecologies are highlighted in yellow.

Source: Proprietary (Project Imago Dei), all rights owned by Shon Pan



## 2 How We Win: changing culture, saving souls, and what it all means

By comparing this concise yet precise model of cultural change from the time of its formulation (2010) by James Davison Hunter, to the present day (2026), we immediately notice some stark changes:

- **Cutting-edge AI models have overtaken high-performing humans as moral authorities for truth, goodness, and beauty** (though to a lesser extent in the latter case, due to the intrinsic human distaste for artificially generated art).
- Areas in which the cultural economy of Christianity is strongest have shrunk from **15** in Hunter's 2010 mapping, to **13** in our 2026 mapping; a domain-wise loss in Christian cultural dominance.
- **Institutional spaces in which the cultural economy of Christianity is weak or practically nonexistent have grown.** We have taken the trouble to map out these domains which were not explicitly indicated in Hunter's original matrix.
  - **At the highest level of moral authority, domains in which Christianity is weak or absent outnumber domains in which Christianity is strong or present.**
- At the middle level of cultural production, however - **online education, YouTube religious debates, theology courses, video essays** - Christian culture is **thriving**. The **cultural energy** behind these developments, however, is not directly connected to policy outcomes, because there are no organizations or institutions that collect audiences from YouTube influencers (i.e. Trent Horn, Gavin Ortland) and connect them to policy campaigns or voting groups.
  - Clearly, institutions acting as the **facilitator** between **policy agenda** and **popular audiences/true believers** are indeed viable, as demonstrated by the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) who have [successfully channeled fans and subscribers of social media influencers](#) into [street protests](#) and voting campaigns.
  - **An empty gap therefore exists for an explicitly Christian institution, endorsed by a plurality of denominations and adhering to an ecumenical agenda, to do the same.**
- Christian think tanks can do what no other institution can do in 2026: they can reach the **high and moderate levels of moral authority**, across **all three dimensions - the true, the good, and the beautiful** - resulting in a human impact that includes both **leaders and elites, pastors and presbyters**, as well as **the common man and married families**.
- We at Project Imago Dei understand our role in changing culture by countering the influence of cutting-edge AI models where they are at. We **produce knowledge** (truth) and **apply Christian ethics and anthropology** (morality) to counter AI-generated problems. Finally, we endorse anthropocentric aesthetics (the beautiful) because we view these works as connected to mankind's divine soul and earthly mission to be an image-bearer of God's perfect goodness.

### Appendix:

#### Appendix 1

Today, the think tank coexists with another species of institution: that of the 'special interest group' which in practice operates mostly under the label of the NGO or of the think tank (which often occasions confusion). Special interest groups that masquerade as think tanks include the FDD (the [Foundation for Defense of Democracies](#)) whose activities are devoted not strictly toward **'the best' solutions**, but rather toward that **subset of possible solutions which align with their organizational agenda** (in the FDD's case, Neoconservatism, pro-military intervention in the MENA region, etc.). These organizations can also be described as **lobbying groups**, since their output and products do not change over time; the 'expert solution' remains the same over time, but its articulation may change as global circumstances require.

A final category of entity worthy of mentioning is the 'grassroots organization' or 'grassroots NGO'. These organizations are (or claim to be) established not by a select council of experts to share wisdom with key decision-makers in policy or in other leadership fields, but rather **'by the people, for the people'**. Invariably, self-described grassroots NGOs cannot exist or operate without elite backing, nor without elite involvement. To prove the point, the OFA (Organizing for America, a 'grassroots' organization established in 2009 by then-president Barack Obama for community organizing) received millions of dollars in individual small donations, but has now been wrapped up entirely into the infrastructure of the



Democratic National Convention and its satellites; [on the OFA's wikipedia page](#), the link for 'Official Website' now leads directly to [barackobama.com](http://barackobama.com).

To paraphrase Director Shon Pan: any grassroots movement invariably must receive elite support and endorsement in order to operate as a coherent institution; the anarchist and communist terrorist networks in Czarist Russia would not have been able to snowball into what they became without covert support from financial donors, businessmen with financial power over printing presses and newspapers, or other such means for accelerating the movement that would be inaccessible to virtually 100% of those truly belonging to the 'grassroots' level.