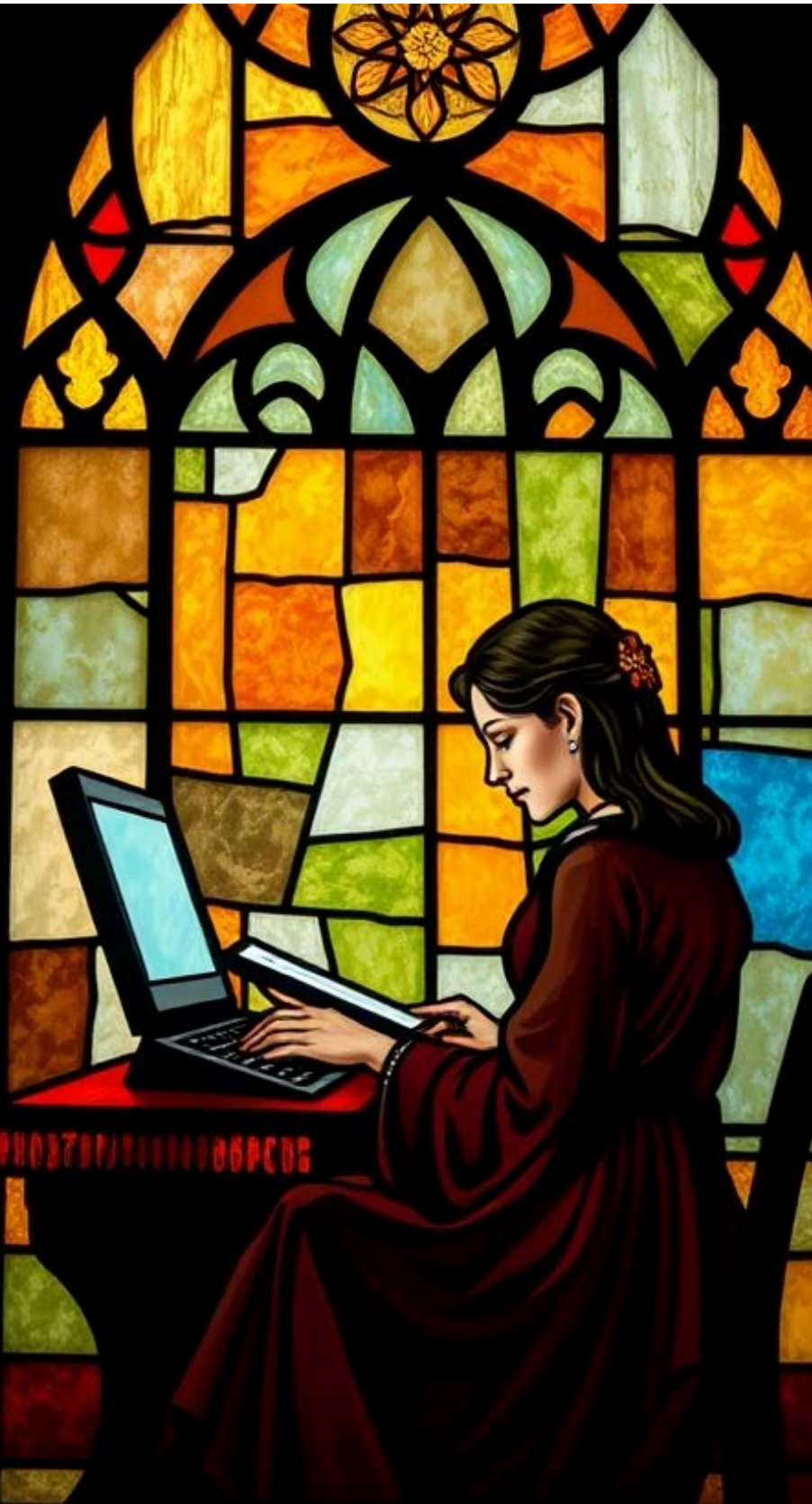


N E X U S

the ACT Research & Scholarship Magazine



Issue focus:

Artificial Intelligence and Theological Education: Navigating the Future of Faith and Learning

The NEXUS Bookshelf

New Books by ACT Staff & Faculty

Articles:

“What an AI knows and What We Teach Students” - Graeme Dunkley

“Navigating AI in Academia: Innovation with Ethical Stewardship” - Kirk J. Franklin

“The Chatbot and You – Should we Fear Artificial Intelligence?” - Di Hockridge

“Artificial Intelligence and Theological Education: Navigating the Future of Faith and Learning” - AI, Ian O’Harae, & Louise Gosbell

“From False Teachers to Sparring Partners: Strengthening Student Learning in Theology with Gen AI” - Elizabeth ‘Buffy’ Greentree

“Why Generative AIs Make Awful Theologians, but Perfect Sparring Partners for Theological Students - Practical Examples” - Elizabeth ‘Buffy’ Greentree

And the usuals

Upcoming events, Calls for Papers, and ACT Conferrals.

NOVEMBER 2024



November 2024

From the Editor

Artificial Intelligence and Theological Education: Navigating the Future of Faith and Learning

Welcome to the November issue of NEXUS, the Australian College of Theology's bi-annual research magazine. This issue is focused on the nexus of AI and theological education. When I put the call out for contributions for this issue, I wasn't sure what kind of responses, if any, might come in. But I was delighted by the response! What we have is a rich collection of perspectives that move us from the basics of understanding what AI is and how it works, through its strengths and weaknesses, to ways we can embrace AI in the classroom and in assessments.

Of course, no magazine issue on AI and theological education would be complete without the contribution of AI. For this reason, we have included an article comprised of responses from AI about the future of AI in theological education!

As you read through the articles in the current issue, you might like to consider the following questions: How do the recommendations of the AIs compare with the human-generated articles in the current issue? How well do the AI responses genuinely reflect the current benefits and limitations of its abilities with respect to theological education? What else do we need to consider as we grapple with this new terrain?

I suspect this issue will be a challenging read. I have no doubt it will leave you with many more questions as we reflect on this rapidly-developing area. As such, I'd encourage you to find ways to continue to discuss these ideas with your colleagues, in college research seminars, at the ACT PD conference, and in other spaces. There is, no doubt, much more to learn and discuss!

Louise Gosbell

Editor, NEXUS

ACT Research Manager

research@acttheology.edu.au

The NEXUS Bookshelf

New books by ACT Consortium Faculty and beyond

ACT Consortium Staff & Faculty

(Christ College) and Murray J. Smith (Christ College), Lexham Academic, 2023.

Authored volumes

Murray Capill (RTC), *The Elder-Led Church: How an Eldership Team: Shepherds a Healthy Flock*, P&R Publishing, 2024.

Andrew Judd (Ridley), *Modern Genre Theory: An Introduction for Biblical Studies*, Zondervan Academic, 2024.

Andrew S. Malone (Ridley), *To Walk and Please God: A Theology of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. New Testament Theology. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024.

Gary Millar (QTC), *Both/And Ministry: Living and Leading Like Jesus*, The Good Book Company, 2024.

Alan Mugridge (SMBC), *Scribes, Motives, and Manuscripts: Evaluating Trends in New Testament Textual Criticism*, Wipf & Stock, 2024.

Edited volumes

Edwina Murphy (ACT Office), Bart J. Koet, and Esko Ryökäs (eds.), *Deacons and Diakonia in Late Antiquity: The Third Century Onwards*, Mohr Siebeck, 2024.

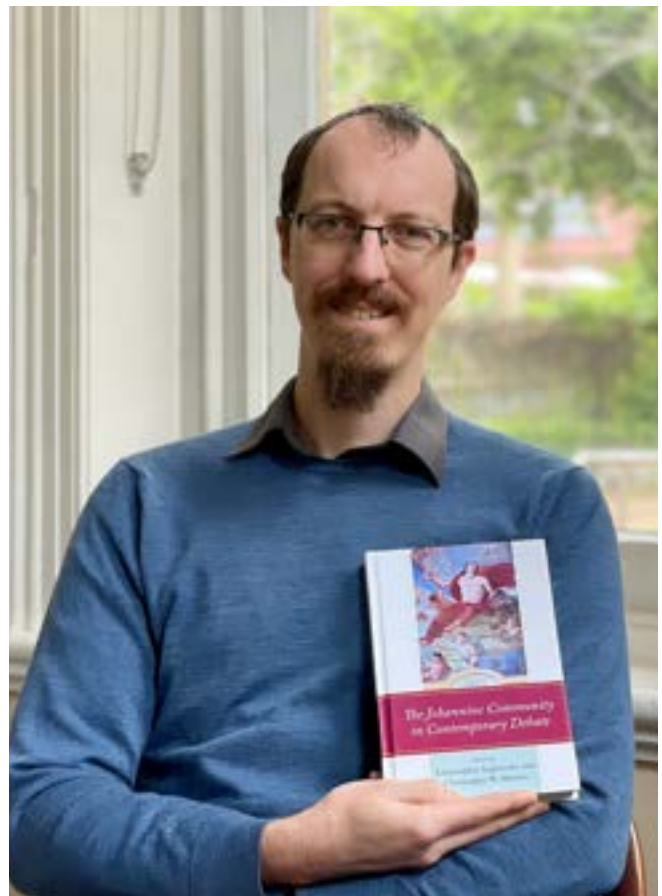
Christopher Seglenieks (BCSA) and Christopher W. Skinner (eds.), *The Johannine Community in Contemporary Debate*, Lexington/Fortress, 2024.

Series Editors

Brandon D. Crowe, *The Lord Jesus Christ: The Biblical Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ*, series editors: John McClean

John V. Fesko, *The Giver of Life: The Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Salvation*, series editors: John McClean (Christ College) and Murray J. Smith (Christ College), Lexham Academic, 2023.

Have a new book coming out in the first half of 2025 and want it included in NEXUS? Let us know at research@acttheology.edu.au.



Chris Seglenieks (BCSA)

Beyond the ACT

Paul Barnett, *The Trials of Jesus: Evidence, Conclusions, and Aftermath*, Eerdmans, 2024.

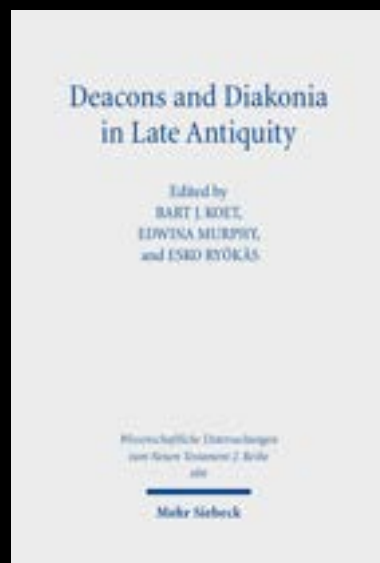
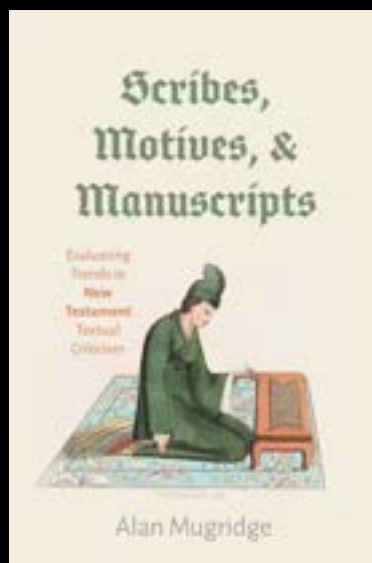
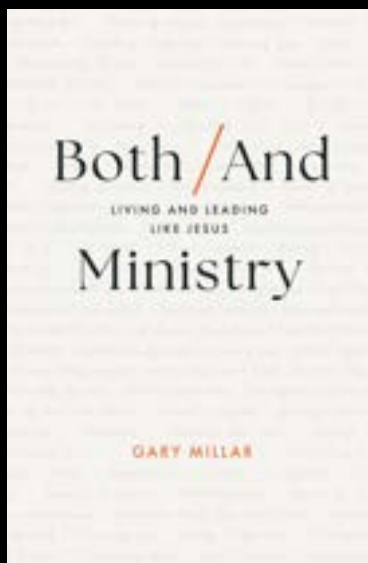
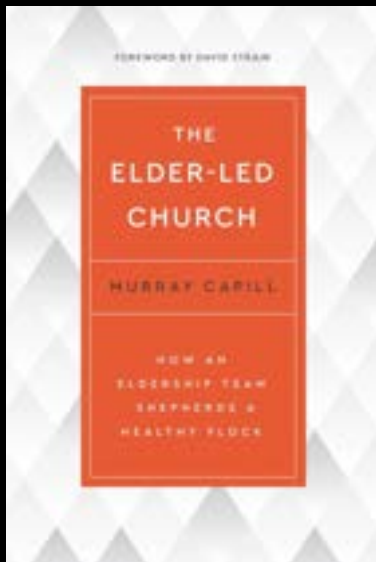
Scott Cowdell, *Rejoice and Be Glad: Gospel Preaching for Christian Festivals*, Coventry Press, 2024.

Stephen Driscoll, *Made in Our Image: God, Artificial Intelligence and You*, Matthias Media, 2024.

Sarah Irving-Stonebraker, *Priests of History: Stewarding the Past in an Ahistoric Age*, Zondervan Academic, 2024.

Jacqueline Service, *Triune Well Being: The Kenotic-Enrichment of the Eternal Trinity*, Fortress Academic Press, 2024.

James R. Unwin, *Paul and Seneca Among the Condemned The Use of Spectacle in the Early Empire*, Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2024.



What an AI knows and What We Teach Students

Graeme Dunkley (Lecturer in Missions, Morling College)

What ChatGPT really is – defining terms

This issue of Nexus is given over to the nexus of AI and theology. The purpose of this contribution is to consider what AI's can know, can't yet know, and probably won't ever know. Along the way this is applied to our role as theologians and teachers. But let's start by clarifying what an AI like ChatGPT really is.

'AI' is a term that covers a range of very different technologies. One type of AI that can learn to play a game like chess, or to drive a car, is often called 'Narrow AI' or a 'Reactive Machine.' Many of these can operate as well as, or even better than, a human with the narrow context of their design. These machines only know what they are told, and at the moment an AI which can defeat a Grand Master at chess can't beat a three-year-old human when it comes to telling a dog from a tree. An example of a Reactive Machine is Netflix's recommendation engine – it only knows what you tell it when you rate the different things you've watched.

ChatGPT is a different type of AI, what's called a generative AI. That is, it appears to generate brand new content – text, essays, cover letters, or computer code. It does this by learning, or being trained on, large amounts of existing data. Because of the type and quantity of data, ChatGPT is called a Large Language Model or LLM. That is what it sounds like: ChatGPT uses a large amount of language to build a model of how language works. Although it's called 'generative AI, it doesn't really create any truly new or unique knowledge, it simply rearranges what is already in its dataset into what appears to be new forms. ChatGPT tries to answer questions by using existing sources to learn the connections between words and ideas.

How LLMs 'know'

So although ChatGPT can count sources and citations to work out which ideas are more widely written about, it can't tell the difference between the works of Augustine and a 'niche' theology like British Israelism. It can only infer that one is more commonly referred to than the other.

ChatGPT can only 'know' what it's told. All LLMs are entirely limited by the dataset they were trained on. These training datasets might be very large, but they are finite and dated. They are also biased, since particular cultures and types of people have a much bigger presence on the internet than others.

Application: If you want assessments that can't be done on AI, then insist that students use current sources and include diverse opinions. How many of our unit bibliographies have been updated in the last decade? The AI probably includes all that legacy information in its dataset, but LLMs simply can't know what was published after their dataset closed. Majority world Christian scholarship currently won't feature highly on many LLMs.

How LLMs can't know

They can't know by being part of community. One theory of knowledge is that what we know is socially constructed – we know in a community. But ChatGPT isn't a part of any real community.

Application: Our teaching and assessment needs to continue including applying knowledge to a ministry setting. While many of our ULOs include a section on 'relating perspectives to contemporary Christians living and ministry contexts', very few of our assessments cover that. As lecturers and moderators, we have not paid enough attention to our own learning outcomes.

They can't know by direct experience. They don't have any senses and can't know anything other than what is in the training dataset. They can't know God or have any relationship with him, they can only know second-hand what others have said about God.

Application: Again our ULOs allow for personal application to contemporary Christian living, but how many of our assessments ask for that? At what points do we ask students to relate what we have covered to their own life? An AI will never be able to do that.

What LLMs know

They know their dataset. If their dataset includes works about theology, then the LLM will know that better than you.

Application: If you are effectively functioning as an LLM - analysing large amounts of text, repackaging it, and then delivering it to students - then you are probably now obsolete. Sorry, you've got to be more than a carbon-based text processing system.

Application: If you are asking students simply to process and package existing information, then many will simply outsource that to an AI. Asking students to process and package

information is now roughly equivalent to asking them to make their own pens - a process done much more efficiently by a machine.

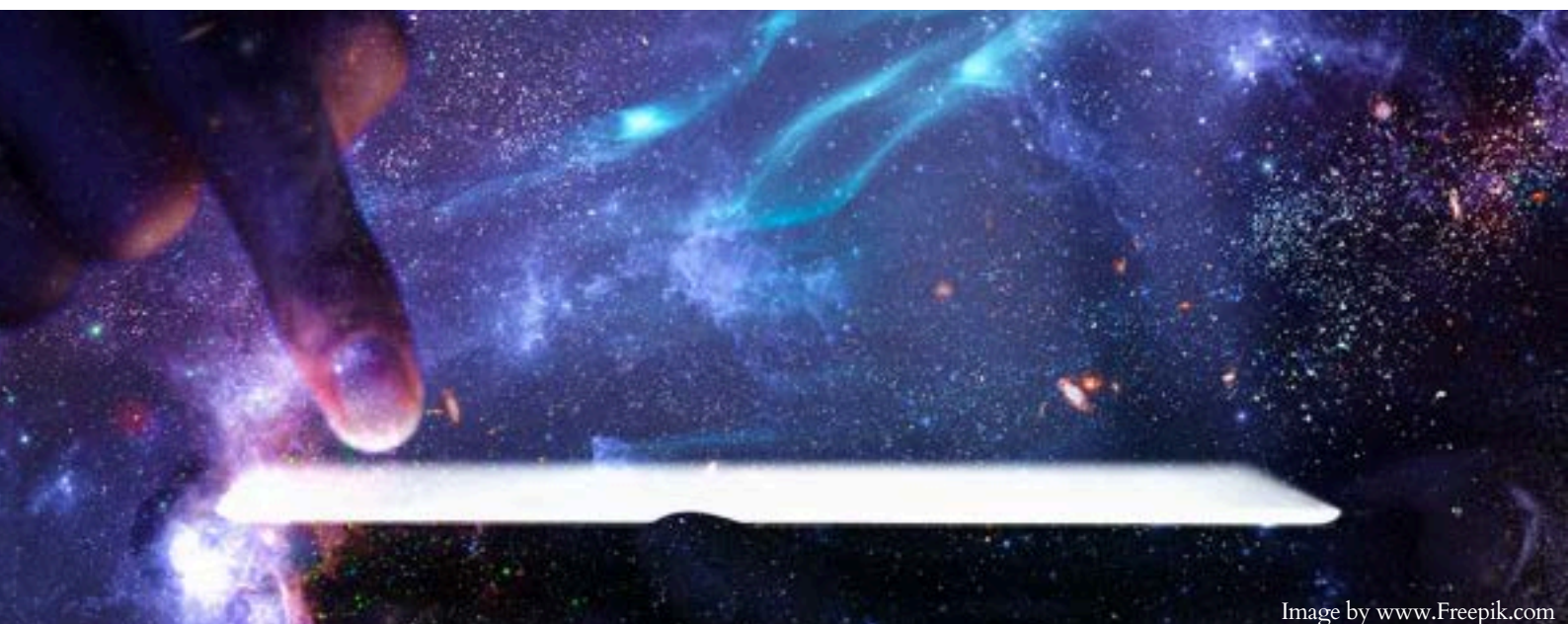
What LLMs don't yet know

LLMs aren't yet very good at citing their sources. At the moment a good reason not to use LLMs is because they don't give their sources. That's currently true, but AI's now in beta release are planned to be much better at giving sources. This objection seems likely to be temporary.

LLMs aren't yet very good at knowing communities. An LLM can't yet know your students. Perhaps social media feeds could be subject to sentiment analysis to produce a composite picture of your class, and then that could be connected to an LLM to deliver more focussed content, but we're not there yet. LLMs simply have no idea of the cares and concerns of the people in front of you.

Application: Know your students, and make your teaching responsive to the students in your class.

LLMs don't yet interact beyond the written word. While some could potentially be voice activated, most of us don't have working versions of that technology. We're still heavily



reliant on typing things on keyboards.

Application: Answering a live question in real time simply can't be aided by an AI using current technology. If it can be done a keyboard, it can probably be done on AI, but an LLM is no help at all in a live exam.

What LLMs will never know

LLMs will probably never know that they don't know. An LLM can't ask a question. It's been trained on particular dataset, but it can't imagine or wonder about anything beyond that. Current AIs based on LLMs simply can't be curious.

Application: In what ways does your teaching or assessment engage imagination, curiosity or wonder? What if the end of your teaching session included an exercise along these lines... 'Based on the content of this session, what is one question that arises for you? What would you like to know?' It seems unlikely students can fake an answer to that via ChatGPT, because a LLM simply can't be curious.

LLMs will probably never be able to partly know. LLMs don't experience uncertainty. While they can statistically analyse available data to canvas a range of opinions, they have trouble dealing with ambiguity. They don't believe anything, nor do they doubt anything. They can process information better than we can, but they can't provide wisdom. An AI can know that Proverbs 26:4-5 contains two seemingly contradictory proverbs, but it can't know which one to quote in this situation.

Application: What room in our teaching and assessment is there for doubt or ambiguity? What is the place of wisdom?

Conclusion

ChatGPT is a type of AI that process large amounts of language to learn what common associations between words are. It only knows what people have written down and fed into it. It doesn't directly know people or places or God. It's not conscious of 'not

knowing'; it can't believe or doubt.

Lecturing

Be more than an LLM. Know your students and know their contexts, and apply your subject knowledge to that. Move beyond knowledge transfer to engage curiosity, doubt, and wisdom.

Assessing

Ask students to be more than an LLM. Assess their application of their knowledge to their own life and to the life of their community. Engage and provoke their sense of curiosity and wonder. Try a live exam.

Want to learn more?

Dr Ryan Young's blog has been very helpful in understanding AI, what it knows, and how it knows. Ryan has a PhD in philosophy, is Director of the National Security College Futures Hub at ANU, and is a member of Good Shepherd Anglican Church in Curtin, ACT.

His blog can be found here: <https://humbleknowledge.substack.com/p/kanthumeandai>

Graeme Dunkley is Lecturer in Missions, Morling College, Sydney



Navigating AI in Academia: Innovation with Ethical Stewardship

Kirk J. Franklin (Adjunct Lecturer, Melbourne School of Theology)

Introduction

‘The fastest things on earth [are] people becoming experts in AI!’ So a meme stated on social media. Reports are out that people are using AI at an increasing rate. One example found that 25% of people use generative AI for at least 60 minutes daily at work.[1] Truth or hype, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its generative tools are hailed as a once-in-a-generation opportunity for all purposes. While AI is not new, its mainstream use is, thanks to OpenAI’s release of ChatGPT in November 2022. Since we’re now at the two-year anniversary mark, this is time to reflect on how to responsibly discern the use of AI tools in academia. Will we prove Alexander Puutio right: ‘Humans are still competitive enough to warrant keeping them around?’[2]

Embrace Potential

Inviting generative AI tools into our workspace means curiously evaluating new technologies while managing the fear of losing our humanity. We could follow Elon University’s advice to its students ‘to become skilled in using AI

comfortably, effectively, safely and ethically’, to ‘learn AI’s capabilities and limitations’ and ‘understand when and how it can augment’ our work and when our ‘unique human expertise and creativity is invaluable.’[3]

Three metaphors describe the division of labour with AI. Ethan Mollick[4] states that a centaur (human upper body, horse lower body) describes when the separation of labour between AI and humans is clear because humans are in control and AI is a tool for specific tasks. A cyborg (part human, part machine) is when the human and AI contributions are blended and interdependent, sharing decision-making processes equally. In other words, humans function with AI, as Mollick calls ‘co-intelligence’. Josh Brake offers a third metaphor of a minotaur (human body, animal’s head).[5] Humans delegate entire tasks to AI, with AI making decisions autonomously. Humans keep the appearance of holding the reins but have abdicated, and AI calls the shots.



Image by www.freepik.com

AI Technology

Generative AI is computer hardware and software trained to simulate and mimic human intelligence and behaviour to generate new, original outputs such as text, images, music, audio, and video. Dozens of General Purpose Technologies (GPTs) run off Large Language Models (LLMs). Some popular ones are ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google's Gemini, Meta's LLaMa, X's Grok, and Anthropic's Claude. Each of these is continuously improving.

The GPTs take our prompts typed into a chatbot and generate responses by predicting the next text fragments (called tokens). GPTs are designed to help us. If we are unhappy the first time, give it a chance, and it will continue generating new responses. However, despite clear inputs, the tools also hallucinate, which are factually inaccurate, nonsensical, or unrelated outputs that sound convincing. As models advance, the rate of hallucinations supposedly decreases.

AI tools for academic use include Scholarcy, which extracts summaries, highlights, and reference lists from research papers. Research Rabbit discovers and visualizes connections between research papers. Elicit searches for published works and filter papers based on journal quality. Perplexity uses internet exploration and gives its results with links to its sources. A special-purpose application leveraging GPT is Grammarly, which incorporates AI to improve writing with suggestions about grammar, punctuation, style, and tone. With all these tools, the paid or subscription service has enhanced features, more accurate results, and better performance.

Redemptive Approach

Christians face the challenge of ensuring that our use of AI honours God and avoids sinful distortions. Wisdom, character and values come from our relationship with God, not algorithms. Ethical considerations that prioritize human relationships over mere efficiency are also essential. We need

guidelines for the redemptive use of AI. Here are some factors:[6]

1) Inform rather than replace human agency by supporting human decision-making without replacing human responsibility. AI should not be used to diminish human dignity. Individuals should be empowered to make wise choices while maintaining human dignity and the integrity of God's created world.

2) Develop human cognitive capacity through improving learning and growth rather than educational quality weakened through ready-made answers provided by AI tools. Instead, AI tools can support tasks that help people develop their skills.

3) Respect human embodiment through human physicality. This could include developing audio interfaces, assisting those with disabilities, and promoting full participation worldwide rather than encouraging disembodiment through over-reliance upon screen-based interactions.

4) Promote transparency in institutional operations while protecting individual privacy. Make systems more transparent and ensure safeguards and controls over personal information to counteract surveillance and data exploitation.

5) Benefit the global majority, not just the wealthy and powerful. Innovations should also be developed for low-income users and avoid the data exploitation of the world's poor. AI tools reflect biases from their training data, leading to cultural insensitivity and English-centric outputs. Focusing on equitable benefits confronts the concentration of AI's advantages in the hands of a few.

AI and Higher Learning

When AI models are used with Bloom's taxonomy, it can handle all levels, including the highest one, 'create.' At this level of Bloom's, when using generative AI, humans are supported in brainstorming, synthesising



Image by www.FreePik.com

information, suggesting alternatives, outlining pros and cons, providing real-world examples, and creating deliverables based on human input.

How do we determine the appropriate usage of AI in the academy? We could follow this type of ‘traffic light’ scaffolding:

- Red: No AI is to be used in any form. This ensures the integrity of the scholar or student’s work, demonstrates their core skills and knowledge, and adheres to academic standards without AI involvement.

- Yellow (high caution): AI helps with brainstorming, idea generation, research, and initial structuring of one’s work. AI-generated content is not allowed in the scholar or student’s final output so that it shows independent development and refinement of ideas.

- Yellow (moderate caution): AI edits and improves the clarity and quality of the scholar or student’s created work but does not generate new content. Scholars and students provide the original work without AI content in an appendix.

- Yellow (low caution): AI assists with idea generation, drafting, problem-solving, and refinement tasks. Scholars and students comment on and critically evaluate AI-generated content, and all AI-created content

is cited. This fosters critical thinking, engagement, and analytical skills while integrating AI assistance.

- Green: AI is used extensively as a copilot throughout the research and scholarship process, allowing a collaborative approach that enhances creativity and innovation. The scholar or student is not required to specify which content is AI-generated, promoting the seamless integration of AI tools in academic work.

Supporting Scholars with AI

With AI tools improving and becoming more accessible, policing their use becomes impractical. Instead, instructing students about technology literacy to use AI responsibly and thoughtfully ensures a lasting impact by equipping them with the skills to make ethical decisions about AI. Teaching students about the ethics of AI, including its algorithmic bias, environmental impact, effect on human labour, and copyrighted material, helps them make informed and ethical decisions about when and how to use AI. Students are taught to consider the benefits of their learning and how usage risks can be adequately mitigated. Their assessments are intentionally designed to use AI tools.

Generative AI can automate time-intensive tasks or help interpret complex information. It can analyse textual datasets, identify themes

and patterns, and generate initial codes (e.g., for qualitative research), which reduces workloads and allows researchers to focus on innovative, high-value activities. AI tools can suggest an outline for an article or lecture and create discussion questions, lesson plans, unit guides, UQAFs, etc. Generative AI can critique drafts of pre-published work, acting as a virtual editor or reviewer. We can use it to assemble sources for a literature review or write a book review. The list will keep growing.

Challenge Ahead

In closing, I asked ChatGPT-4o to create three alternative conclusions for this article. Which do you prefer? 1) Integrating AI into academic settings requires a balanced approach that embraces its potential while safeguarding human agency and ethical responsibility. Scholars must navigate the complexities of AI's capabilities while upholding academic integrity, creativity, and relational values. 2) AI holds transformative potential for academia, but its responsible use hinges on careful discernment. Educators must foster ethical literacy among students, ensuring AI augments human creativity without diminishing critical thinking or scholarly rigour. 3) The responsible adoption of AI in education necessitates a nuanced framework. By promoting transparency, relational integrity, and equity, educators can harness AI's benefits while safeguarding the unique contributions of human scholarship and ethical accountability.

Footnotes:

1. Alexander Bick, Adam Blandin and David Demin, "The Rapid Adoption of Generative AI," 18 September 2024, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60832ecef615231cedd30911/t/66f0c3fbabdc0a173e1e697e/1727054844024/BBD_GenAI_NBE_R_Sept2024.pdf
2. Alexander Puutio, "Three Questions That Keep AI Agents From Reaching Full Autonomy," *Forbes*, 22 June 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexanderpuutio/2024/06/22/three-questions-that-keep-ai-agents-from-reaching-full-autonomy/>.
3. "Student Guide to AI," Elon University, www.studentguidetoAI.org, 2.
4. Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with Ai* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2024), 40.
5. Josh Brake, "Minotaur Mode," *The Absent-Minded Professor*, 30 April 2024, <https://joshbrake.substack.com/p/minotaur-mode>
6. Adapted from Andy Crouch with Mark Sears and Dave Blanchard, "A Redemptive Thesis for Artificial Intelligence," *The Praxis Journal*, May 4, 2024.

Kirk J. Franklin is an Adjunct Lecturer in Missional Leadership, Melbourne School of Theology



The Chatbot and You – Should we Fear Artificial Intelligence?

Book Review of Stephen Driscoll's *Made in Our Image: God, Artificial Intelligence and You* (Matthias Media, 2024)

Di Hockridge (Educational Designer, Ridley College)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) suddenly seems to be everywhere, and everyone has an opinion about where AI is heading and how we should engage with it. This recent flurry of interest is partly due to the entry of ChatGPT into the public arena in late 2022, which brought “generative AI” to general attention. If you are in any way connected with teaching or education, you will have heard of ChatGPT and the ever-growing range of “large language model” generative AI tools, that respond to our questions in an enticingly human-like manner.

To what extent should we engage with these new AI tools? To what extent should we be cautious? Is generative Artificial Intelligence conscious, and does it pose an existential risk to humanity? These are some of the questions Driscoll deals with in this very readable book, which offers a biblical perspective on artificial intelligence.

Driscoll believes, “Something big is happening.” He says we are currently experiencing an exponential leap, which sometimes occurs in technological advances. The future is going to be different, and we need to sit up and take notice. Christians in particular, he says, need to engage with these questions because we have something concrete to offer to the conversation about the place of AI in our lives.

This book takes us through a biblical framework, touching on the key points of creation, sin, the cross, and new creation to help us frame our response to AI. It is not however, a dry or academic biblical theology, rather Driscoll insightfully diagnoses and responds to some of the key issues we currently

face. For example, the chapter on creation and AI helpfully homes in on our society's current obsession with questions of identity. As humans created in God's image, our human identity involves far more than our intelligence. God made us humans from ‘dust’ (created matter) and gave us his breath of life. Artificial intelligence, Driscoll says, remains firmly in the ‘dust’ category. Generative AI tools can mimic human communication, they can analyse massive amounts of data in the blink of an eye, they are becoming smarter and more impressive every day, but they do not have ‘spirit’, they are not human.

The chapters on human sinfulness and the cross take us into some scary but realistic scenarios. Current generative AI language tools (like Chat GPT, Claude, or Microsoft CoPilot) are fed large amounts of information from the internet and instructed to imitate human language. Perhaps not surprisingly, these tools initially tended to replicate the kind of nastiness and abuse that fills the comments sections of websites or social media platforms. That is, they mirrored human sinfulness. Such responses need to be trained out of the AI tools through ‘reinforcement learning’. The human (or potentially the AI) that does this reinforcement learning therefore has enormous power in deciding what is a ‘good’ response, and which responses need to be trained out of the AI. As Driscoll says, our understanding that humans are innately sinful leads us to conclude such power will be misused, even where there may be good intent.

Despite the potential for misuse of AI, the overall tone this book is hopeful, and frequently

entertaining. By helping us to think about AI in relation to the big biblical ideas of creation, sin, redemption, and new creation, Driscoll encourages us to be realistic about the impact of these new technologies, while also looking for positive ways to use them for good.

Driscoll has certainly taken on a challenge in writing this book. It's difficult to talk about "artificial intelligence" in general because AI is in fact many different things. This results in some inconsistency in Driscoll's language - at one point AI is described as "us (humans), but free of our very limited biological brains and erratic memories," at another it is described as "more in the category of smart calculator than human person."

It's also challenging to write about AI now because the current pace of change is ridiculously fast. This book, as Driscoll acknowledges, is written for this particular

time and some of its content will date rapidly, but its consideration of AI in the light of the biblical framework will add to its longevity. This book offers easily understood and biblically based principles to guide Christians in responding to AI. If you are wondering whether or how to use AI, in your workplace, in your ministry, in your personal context, this book is a good place to start.

Diane Hockridge is Educational Designer at Ridley College, Melbourne



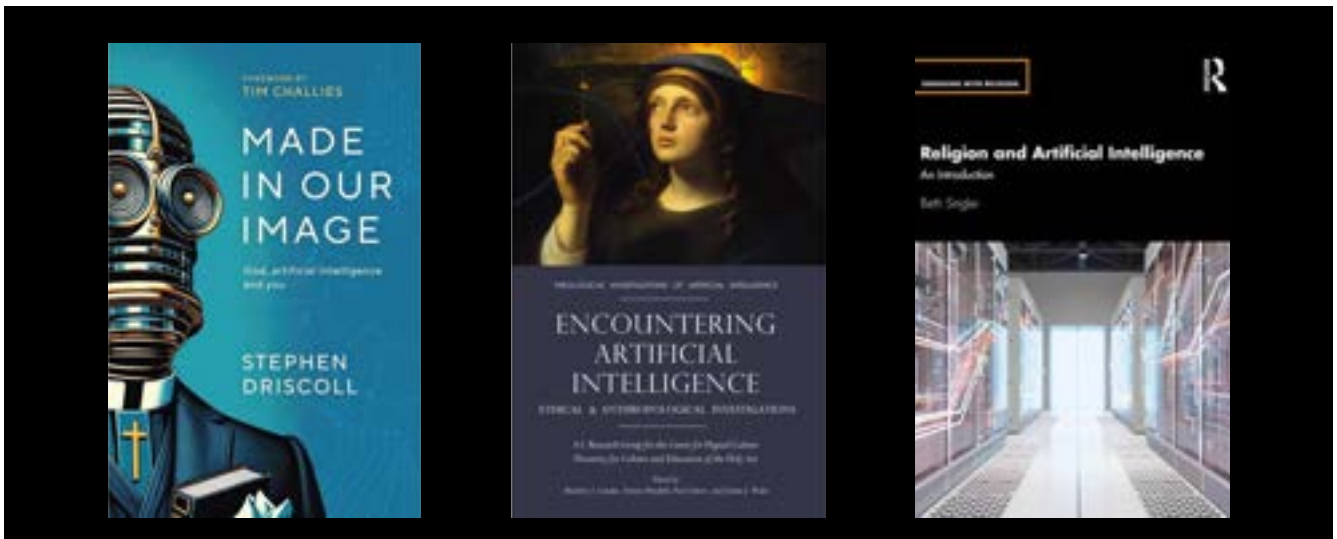
Recent Publications on AI and Theology

Stephen Driscoll, *Made in Our Image: God, Artificial Intelligence and You*, Matthias Media, 2024.

Matthew J. Gaudet, Noreen Herzfeld, Paul Scherz, and Jordan J. Wales (eds.), *Encountering Artificial Intelligence: Ethical and Anthropological Investigations*, Wipf & Stock, 2024.

Beth Singler, *Religion and Artificial Intelligence: An Introduction*, Routledge, 2024.

ISCAST have a list of resources on their website: <https://iscast.org/resource-list/christian-resources-for-ai/>



Artificial Intelligence and Theological Education: Navigating the Future of Faith and Learning

Article by AI (ChatGPT 4.0, Co-Pilot), Ian O’Harae (ACT Office),
& Louise Gosbell (ACT Office)

Introduction

It would not be possible to produce an issue on AI and theological education without consulting AI for its contribution to the topic. To this end, ACT’s Director of Teaching & Learning Ian O’Harae and I both put a series of questions to two AI websites about the place of AI in theological education. The following brief article offers some of the insights from those interactions.

Benefits of AI and Theological Education

Ian and I both sought input from ChatGPT 4.0 about some of the benefits of using AI in theological education. One answer we both received was the following:

“In the domain of research, Gen AI tools can aid in the identification of relevant theological sources. By scanning vast academic databases, AI can suggest books, articles, or biblical texts that align with a student’s area of interest. This

not only saves time but also introduces students to resources they might not have otherwise discovered, enriching their theological inquiry and promoting a more holistic approach to research.”

However, when Ian followed the AI’s guidance and requested a bibliography on a particular theological concept, the bibliography it created was populated primarily by texts that were not relevant to the topic or, more alarmingly, texts that did not exist. This experiment should serve as a reminder to check our students’ citations and bibliographies closely!

Next we consulted Co-Pilot which provided us with the following list of benefits:

“Generative AI, with its ability to generate human-like text, has the potential to transform theological education in several profound ways:



AI generated image created in Canva - church & AI

1. **Personalized Learning:** GenAI can provide personalized learning experiences tailored to individual students' needs. By analyzing students' performance and learning styles, AI can create customized study plans, recommend resources, and offer targeted feedback. This individualized approach helps students grasp complex theological concepts at their own pace, improving comprehension and retention.
2. **Enhanced Engagement:** Interactive AI-powered tools can make theological education more engaging. Virtual tutors, AI-driven discussion forums, and conversational agents like ChatGPT can facilitate dynamic and interactive learning environments. These tools can encourage students to ask questions, participate in discussions and explore theological topics more deeply.
3. **Accessibility and Flexibility:** GenAI can make theological education more accessible and flexible. Online AI-powered platforms allow students to access resources, participate in discussions, and receive feedback anytime and anywhere. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for adult learners and those with other commitments, as it enables them to balance their studies with other responsibilities.
4. **Efficient Assessment and Feedback:** AI can streamline the assessment process by automating grading and providing instant feedback on assignments. This efficiency allows educators to focus more on personalized interactions with students and less on administrative tasks. Additionally, AI-generated feedback can help students identify areas for improvement and track their progress over time."

However, these so-called benefits also raise many questions not only in terms of the practicalities - who would be guiding these processes? - but also, and perhaps more importantly, are these suggestions beneficial, and if so, to whom? While there is no doubt about the benefits of individualised learning programs for students, who benefits from auto-

mated grading? Could automatic grading really be used for marking essays and could we really entrust this process to an AI even if it were possible? These are important questions we need to consider.

Challenges of AI and Theological Education

What of the challenges we face in using AI in theological education? While we recognise that the AI space is moving at break-neck speed, we can, at least, attempt to reflect on the challenges for us in the present moment. According to Co-Pilot, there are some challenges and things that do "not work well" with the integration of AI and theological education. Co-Pilot offers us these insights:

"Despite these clear advantages, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and challenges associated with Gen AI in theological education. One significant concern is the risk of over-reliance on AI tools, which could inadvertently stifle creativity and critical thinking. If students lean too heavily on AI for content generation, they may bypass the hard work of deep theological reflection and original thought. This is particularly concerning in theology, where the nuances of faith, ethics, and doctrine require not only intellectual rigor but also spiritual discernment and personal engagement.

Another issue is the potential for misinformation or biased responses. While Gen AI can access a vast array of theological materials, it may also retrieve sources that are theologically unsound or misrepresentative of a particular tradition. This is especially problematic in theological education, where the accurate interpretation of scripture and doctrinal fidelity are paramount. AI tools, unless carefully curated, may inadvertently promote heterodox views or perpetuate misunderstandings.

Moreover, AI's tendency to generate overly simplistic answers can be problematic in the context of theological education, where



questions often resist clear-cut answers. For example, in topics like theodicy or Trinitarian theology, the complexity of the subject matter demands a level of nuance and depth that AI-generated responses may lack.”

These are, in reality, the very questions we are pondering as theological educators facing this new terrain. As such, AI itself reminds us about the importance of our roles as theological educators with the capacity for nuance, empathy, and human experience.

As you work your way through this weighty issue of NEXUS, we thought it might be helpful to have some specific questions for reflection. Again, we turned to AI to assist us in this process. Co-Pilot recommended for us the following reflective questions and provides some specific elements to consider in relation to each of the questions:

“1. How can generative AI be ethically integrated into theological education while maintaining the essential human elements of mentorship, spiritual guidance, and community engagement?”

For consideration: Discuss the balance between utilizing AI tools and preserving the personal and relational aspects of theological education. Reflect on ethical guidelines and practices that should be in place to ensure responsible use of AI.

2. In what specific ways can generative AI enhance the diverse learning styles and needs of students in theological education, and how can we ensure that all students benefit equally from these technologies?”

For consideration: Explore the potential of AI to cater to different learning preferences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.). Discuss strategies to bridge the digital divide and make AI-enhanced learning accessible to all students, regardless of their technological proficiency or background.

3. What are the potential challenges and limitations of using generative AI in the context of biblical and theological studies, and how can faculty proactively address these issues to maximize the benefits while minimizing the drawbacks?”

For consideration: Reflect on the specific challenges AI may pose in theological interpretation, ethical considerations, and maintaining academic rigour. Discuss ways to critically evaluate AI-generated content and ensure it aligns with sound theological principles.”

There is certainly a lot to consider as we wrestle with benefits (including the so-called benefits!), as well as the challenges of using AI as theological educators.

From False Teachers to Sparring Partners: Strengthening Student Learning in Theology with Gen AI

Elizabeth (Buffy) Greentree (Librarian, Brisbane School of Theology)

I have recently begun foraying into the dense – and at times, esoteric – minefield that is AI in theology. Amid the claims that AI will “revolutionize research and education” [1] while simultaneously posing an “existential threat to the human image of God,”[2] I found an article that at first glance presented sound, if somewhat stodgy, arguments against integrating AI into theology. However, by the time I’d read through it twice, my head was spinning with the sheer depth of its implications and I wondered whether the article might have broken the universe just a little.

Aidan Isaacs had written in *Christ Over All*, an online magazine aimed towards ‘pastor-theologians’, an article titled “The Dangers of AI to Theology: A Comprehensive Analysis.”[3] He started with the argument that because their opaque decision-making process posed “unprecedented challenges” to epistemology, AI shouldn't be used. “Can we truly trust knowledge produced by systems we do not fully comprehend?” It was a reasonable argument, though I found the appeals a bit much.

I scrolled to the end to see how likely it was he’d have anything new to say, and there saw the editor’s note: Aidan Isaacs does not exist. The entire piece was written by ChatGPT in response to the editor’s prompt to write an essay on “the potential dangers that AI poses to theology, focusing specifically on epistemology and the image of God.” The editor asked ChatGPT to expand on a few points and add citations, then he published it.

O, the irony. O, the paradox! An article that

argues we should not trust the arguments put forward by AI, written by a generative AI. If the argument is correct, then we shouldn’t trust it, which would mean it wasn’t correct. If the argument is not correct, then we can trust it, but we would be knowingly trusting an incorrect argument. I felt it presented a riddle worthy of guarding the gates to a new land.

Gen AIs: the Quintessential False Teacher?

Entering into the new realm of Generative AI (Gen AI)[4] integrated education, we face a crucial question: should we or shouldn’t we trust it? When I went back and checked, it turned out that each of the citations in Isaacs’ article was entirely fabricated, but everything sounded so believable. This highlights a well-known issue with Gen AI: its tendency to ‘hallucinate’ – in other words, make things up. Of course, humans are prone to the same, but the AI answers are more disquieting because of their plausibility. As Mollick phrases it, their answers “feel very satisfying.”[5]

When compared to Paul’s description of a false teacher, it’s understandable that alarm bells might ring: “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, people will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” (2 Timothy 4:3, NIV). Humans have always tended to be swayed by eloquent words, and put their trust in well-crafted rhetoric over plain truths.

However, I think that there’s a crucial difference that is often overlooked: in 2 Timothy, these false teachers present themselves



Image by www.Freepik.com

as authorities, claiming knowledge and truth. In contrast, LLMs like ChatGPT have never made such a claim. It is only when we ignore their intended purpose and grant them the status of academic that things start to go wrong.

Gen AI By Design:

LLMs are not designed to search for or reproduce facts; they generate new sentences that closely mimic human writing. This essential yet completely alien concept is often misunderstood, leading to claims such as ChatGPT provides “pertinent and accurate responses,” and therefore can offer researchers “more accurate, valid, and dependable data.”[6] However, nothing in an LLM’s design equips it to be accurate with facts.

LLMs’ training involves vast, almost incomprehensible amounts of textual data, but rather than storing or memorising this information, they analyse it to identify patterns in words and phrases. I’m still working to wrap my head around this, especially when interacting with Gen AIs, but I found Ethan Mollick’s book, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI*, helpful in breaking it down:

These new types of AI, called Large Language Models (LLMs), are still doing prediction,...they are analyzing a piece of text and predicting the next token, which

is simply a word or part of a word. Ultimately, that is all ChatGPT does technically - act as a very elaborate autocomplete like you have on your phone. You give it some initial text, and it keeps writing text based on what it statistically calculates as the most likely next token in the sequence. [7]

The design of a GPT is to produce responses that sound compelling and well-constructed — and it achieves this astonishingly well. It’s easy to see why students might be tempted to accept these answers as secondary sources. However, as the fictitious Isaacs puts it, theology “hinges on the ability to distinguish genuine insights from spurious distortions”[8] and using fabricated sources could have serious implications. So, considering the possible dangers of misuse, is there any justification for exposing students to its siren call?

Gen AI as Sparring Partners:

Ethan Mollick, a business professor at Wharton, introduced his students to ChatGPT just four days after its release, and now makes it mandatory for them to use it in assignments. Why? He argues that engaging with AI in all their work is the best way for students to learn both its strengths and its flaws. Experience is often the best teacher, and Mollick’s approach highlights

something essential: students learn best through direct engagement, where their understanding is tested and refined. And there is something about the immediate feedback from a sparring partner that quickly makes theory real, with the back-and-forth exchange quickly bringing ideas into focus.

Reflecting on this, I began to wonder if the supposed “flaw” of Gen AI—its tendency to sound convincingly human while sometimes “hallucinating” information—might actually be one of its greatest assets in theological study. Could dialoguing with something known to produce false information help students sharpen their discernment? If theology ‘hinges’ on discernment, what better way to cultivate this than by engaging with a program designed to explore any belief or perspective through constructive dialogue? After all, honest false teachers are hard to come by.

So, rather than worrying about students being misled by Gen AI, why not take the opportunity to create a practice arena where they can learn its strengths and limitations? As well as discovering the value of engaging with GPTs as peers rather than teachers, students gain a unique opportunity to refine their evaluative skills through instant critique. Though, if you find it hard to even conceptualise what this might look like, it appears you’re not alone.

Much of the AI-theology discussion remains theoretical, with little effort to give it practical shape - partly because it’s unclear what GPTs can do. But, after months working with ChatGPT, I assure you, finding ways to turn theory into practice is easier than it seems - we can simply ask it. While not the most accurate source for facts, LLMs are a wellspring of fresh perspectives and a boomerang for developing ideas.

Conclusion or Continuation?

If you’re satisfied with theory, feel free to stop—the rest gets very practical. To demonstrate what GPTs can bring to theology, I’ve created a

series of example tasks across 10 key subjects, with help from my custom GPT (though I’ll take responsibility for any errors). Yes, I asked my GPT if a GPT could be useful in theology, and then used his answer—I hope I didn’t break the universe.

If you’re curious to see the results, you’re welcome to jump to the appendix for the full list. But if you’re interested in how I collaborated with my GPT to create these examples, I’ve included our discussion below, so you can see the back-and-forth that shaped these ideas. Read on to discover how we brought them to life.

GPTs, Turtles and Great Ideas:



Meet Minion, the first custom GPT I created this year. He’s based on ChatGPT but tailored to act as a theological librarian, equipped with specific instructions, extra skills, and curated knowledge. Minion is my second-in-command at the Brisbane School of Theology library, assisting with everything from assessing our collection to helping me write code. And, when I need a morale boost, he even generates adorable images of baby turtles on skateboards. Cute, right?



When planning this article, I quickly realised Minion should be involved—not just to avoid misrepresenting what LLMs can do but because the dialogue with him clarified my own thinking. Below is a sample of our conversation, with some of his lengthier responses trimmed (he’s thorough, bless him).

Generative AI on using Generative AI:

I started by running my argument past him, which he supported. I was then struck with a fascinating idea:

Me: Would commonly accessible LLMs, such as ChatGPT, have a sufficient learning base to be able to take on personas from different cultural backgrounds? For example, if one of my students is going to be a missionary in Papua New Guinea, would I ask ChatGPT to act as an indigenous tribes person and engage in discussion (though obviously in English)?

Minion: [Long explanation of various points.] In conclusion, LLMs can simulate general conversations and may be useful in broader cross-cultural training, they are not yet equipped to engage in detailed, culturally specific dialogues with confidence. They lack the depth of training data needed to accurately portray the nuanced perspectives of indigenous

groups like those in Papua New Guinea.

Me: That makes sense. If I instructed you to act as if you held a purely deterministic worldview, you would be able to do something like?

Minion: Yes, I can certainly simulate holding a purely deterministic worldview! If instructed to do so, I would adopt the position that all events, including human actions, are determined by preceding causes and natural laws.

Me: The next question is, while acting in that persona, could you be persuaded to change your view if that is what someone from that position would do?

Minion: Great question! In principle, while simulating a purely deterministic worldview, I could engage in a dialogue where the character expresses strong adherence to that belief system. However, since I’m simulating the persona, I can also represent how such a person might react if they were faced with a particularly persuasive argument.

Me: Okay, so I think we've established that an LLM could operate very well as a means for testing students' ability to communicate their beliefs. As to other uses for AIs: What other roles can you suggest they could play in theological assessments?



Minion: Here are several innovative roles that AI could play in theological assessments, building on your excellent ideas and Mollick's approach:

1. Theological Debate Partner:

AI can simulate a challenging opponent in a theological debate. You could ask students to engage in discussions where the AI takes on different theological positions or worldviews—atheism, agnosticism, different denominational perspectives (Catholic, Reformed, Pentecostal, etc.). This forces students to articulate and defend their beliefs while considering counterarguments.

2. Simulating Historical Theologians:

AI can be trained to mimic the voice and thought of historical theologians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or Calvin. Students could be tasked with engaging these AI-simulated figures in a dialogue about modern theological questions or controversies.

[I've shortened the remaining answers, but you can see examples of them in the appendix].

3. Exegesis Assistance

4. Ethical Dilemmas and AI Responses

5. Cross-Cultural Theology

6. Critical Theology Analysis

7. Sermon Preparation Critique

8. Artificial Catechism: [I left the description as I thought it was intriguing].

Students could be asked to train AI on a simplified catechism or doctrinal statement and then test how well the AI articulates and teaches those theological points to a lay audience. The AI's explanations would be critiqued for accuracy, clarity, and faithfulness to orthodox doctrine.

9. Simulated Pastoral Counselling

10. Exploring Hypothetical Theological Innovations

Conclusion: These roles help students not only refine their theological knowledge but also develop their ability to apply that knowledge in practical, persuasive, and context-sensitive ways. AI's limitations can become strengths in an academic setting, especially for testing critical thinking, persuasive communication, and applied theology in real-world scenarios.

We ultimately selected 10 subject areas and developed two tasks for each: an initial “inappropriate” task to reveal the GPT’s limitations in the field, followed by a second task that leveraged the GPT’s strengths to support the student’s learning. Yes, it really can be that simple. Most of these tasks can be performed with the free version of ChatGPT, although a few might require customising a GPT to equip it with the necessary knowledge.

Conclusion

Thank you for staying with me through this journey. And for those eager to dive into the possibilities of ChatGPT, a quick word of caution: working with Gen AI can be frustrating, especially at the start. You might waste hours trying to make it do something it “claims” it can do—only to find out it meant it in a hypothetical sense. There’s also a certain sting of betrayal when you realise the sources it confidently cited don’t actually exist.

Yet, despite the challenges, there’s something both reassuring and invigorating about having a ‘partner’ eager to engage even my most outlandish ideas and, after some deliberation, affirm: Minion: Yes, your proposal works well as an innovative tool for theological education, helping students both internalise and articulate their knowledge in practical, convincing ways. The LLMs’ “flaw” as theologians becomes their unique strength in this educational context.

Footnotes located at end of the following section.

Why Generative AIs Make Awful Theologians, but Perfect Sparring Partners for Theological Students - Practical Examples

Elizabeth (Buffy) Greentree (Librarian, Brisbane School of Theology)

Subject Area	AI Strengths	Example Task Using AI Strengths	AI Weaknesses	Example Task Showing AI Weaknesses
Biblical Studies	Provides historical context, theological comparisons	Compare views on Revelation 20 (e.g., premillennialism, amillennialism) to deepen understanding	Lacks nuanced grasp of symbolism, relational depth	Critique AIs exegesis of Romans 9 for depth and relational nuances
Theology	Summarises key theological debates	Analyse Augustine vs. Pelagius on original sin, adding relational context.	Misses relational dynamics in theological debates	Critique AIs debate on theological tensions, e.g., personal conviction
Ethics	Generates case studies, ethical frameworks	Apply Just War Theory from AI to a modern conflict to refine ethical reasoning	Oversimplifies ethical issues, leans on secular ethics	Analyse AIs pastoral response, discussing Christian moral reasoning
Missions	Summarises broad worldviews for interfaith contexts	Engage AI in dialogue on folk religions to practice culturally sensitive language	Lacks cultural authenticity, risks stereotypes	Assess AIs indigenous worldview simulation, critique for accuracy

Subject Area	AI Strengths	Example Task Using AI Strengths	AI Weaknesses	Example Task Showing AI Weaknesses
Pastoral Care	Outlines spiritual practices, historical insights	Use AI for *lectio divina*, integrating historical insights into spiritual practice.	Lacks empathy, relational sensitivity	Evaluate AI's grief counselling, identify relational deficiencies
Preaching	Generates sermon outlines, structured feedback	Draft a sermon, refine with AI's feedback on clarity and engagement	Lacks emotional nuances for specific congregations	Adjust AI's sermon for a grieving audience to improve sensitivity
Biblical Languages	Offers vocabulary and basic grammar exercises	Use AI for vocabulary drills and grammar practice to reinforce language skills	Struggles with syntax, idiomatic translations	Critique AI's translation of a nuanced passage for cultural accuracy

Gen AI Tasks for Each Subject Area

Subject Area: Biblical Studies

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can support biblical studies by providing foundational exegesis assistance and aiding in language learning, helping students engage with historical context and varied theological interpretations. However, AI struggles with deeper theological insight, particularly in understanding the symbolic, relational, and spiritual layers of Scripture that require contextual and doctrinal discernment.

Task Example – Showcasing AI's Weaknesses

Task: Students generate an AI-based exegesis of a complex passage, such as Romans 9 or a

prophetic text like Ezekiel.

Objective: By reviewing the AI's interpretation, students identify its lack of depth in spiritual and symbolic aspects, such as nuances in doctrinal or cultural layers.

Outcome: This exercise reveals the AI's limitations in grasping symbolic and relational meanings, prompting students to refine the interpretation based on deeper theological insights.

Task Example – Using AI's Strengths

Task: Students use AI to gather historical context and comparative theological perspectives on apocalyptic passages (e.g., Revelation 20).

Objective: The AI offers a summary of inter-

pretative traditions (e.g., premillennialism, amillennialism), allowing students to explore denominational perspectives while delving into the passage's theological implications independently.

Outcome: This task enhances students' understanding of historical interpretations and doctrinal differences, encouraging a deeper exploration of scriptural meaning.

Subject Area: Theology

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can enhance theological studies by simulating diverse perspectives and summarizing historical debates, giving students experience in understanding and articulating complex theological positions. However, AI struggles with theological paradoxes and mysteries, often oversimplifying ideas that require a deeper spiritual or philosophical understanding—limiting its capacity to fully engage with the nuances and tensions central to Christian doctrine.

Task Example – Showcasing AI's Weaknesses

Task: Students ask the AI to explain complex theological paradoxes, such as the Trinity or the Incarnation.

Objective: By critiquing the AI's explanation, students identify tendencies to oversimplify these doctrines, often leading to errors (e.g., modalism in the Trinity) and missing the theological tensions essential to understanding these mysteries.

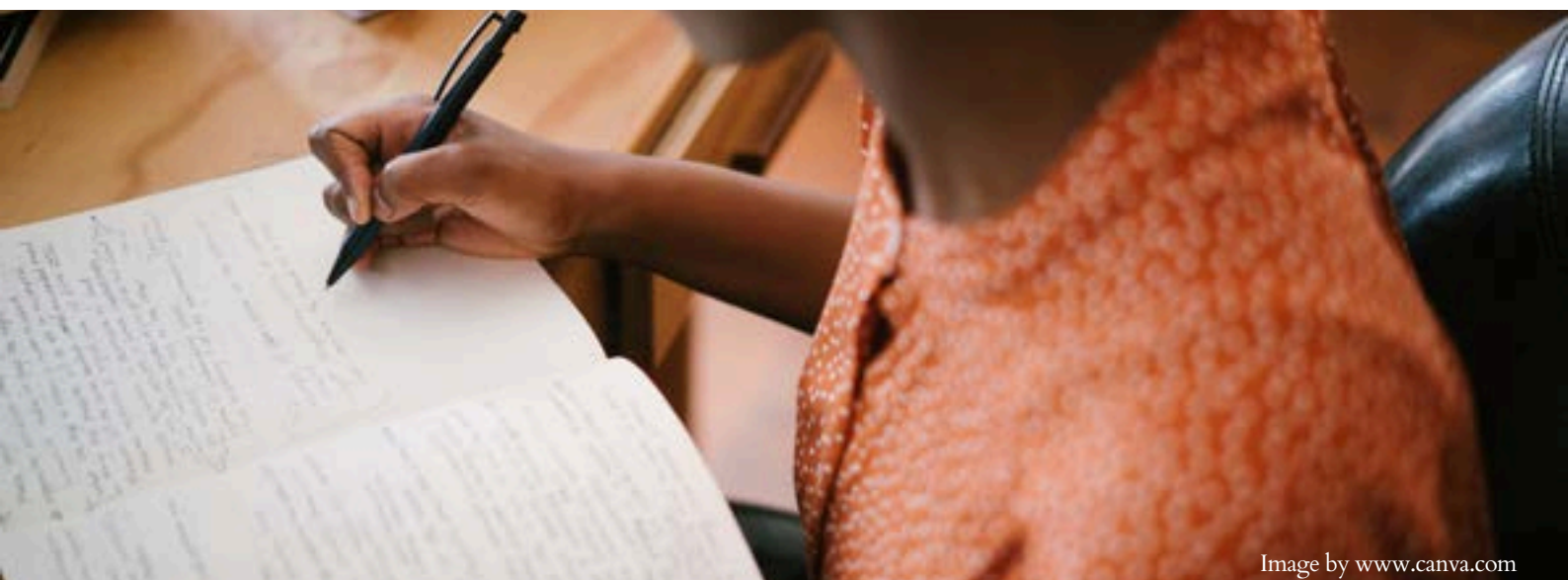
Outcome: This task highlights the AI's limitations in grappling with doctrinal complexity, reinforcing the need for students to refine explanations that respect the paradoxical nature of Christian beliefs.

Task Example – Using AI's Strengths

Task: Students ask the AI to outline the theological debate between Augustine and Pelagius on original sin, specifically focusing on Augustine's view of human nature versus Pelagius's emphasis on human free will and moral responsibility. They then prompt the AI to summarize how these views have influenced different denominational teachings on sin and salvation (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox perspectives).

Objective: The AI provides foundational summaries of each figure's position and traces how these ideas developed across traditions, allowing students to explore the long-term impact of theological disagreements on doctrine.

Outcome: This task enables students to under-



stand key historical debates and recognize how foundational arguments shape theological perspectives across denominations, fostering a deeper appreciation for doctrinal diversity.

Subject Area: Christian History

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can support Church History studies by providing timelines, summaries, and foundational arguments from key theological debates, allowing students to understand major events and doctrinal developments. However, AI struggles to capture the relational, political, and social contexts that deeply influenced historical debates, often flattening complex interactions into overly simplistic narratives.

Task Example – Showcasing AI’s Weaknesses

Task: Students ask AI to recreate Martin Luther’s stance at the Diet of Worms, including his famous defense of his beliefs against the Catholic Church.

Objective: Students examine where AI’s simulation misses the intensity of Luther’s relational conflict with church authorities and the personal conviction behind his statements, as well as the broader Reformation context.

Outcome: This task reveals AI’s limitations in capturing the personal and historical dynamics that influenced key moments in Church History, prompting students to add depth based on historical records.

Task Example – Using AI’s Strengths

Task: Students use AI to outline the theological positions of key figures at the Council of Nicaea, focusing on the arguments for and against the doctrine of the Trinity as debated by Athanasius and Arius.

They could then explore how this debate influenced subsequent creedal developments.

Objective: The AI provides an overview of the theological positions and summarises the core arguments, allowing students to analyse these foundational ideas and understand their lasting impact on Christian doctrine.

Outcome: This task enhances students’ grasp of doctrinal debates and their evolution, encouraging them to engage with theological milestones in a way that deepens their historical understanding.

Subject Area: Ethics

Task Type Summary

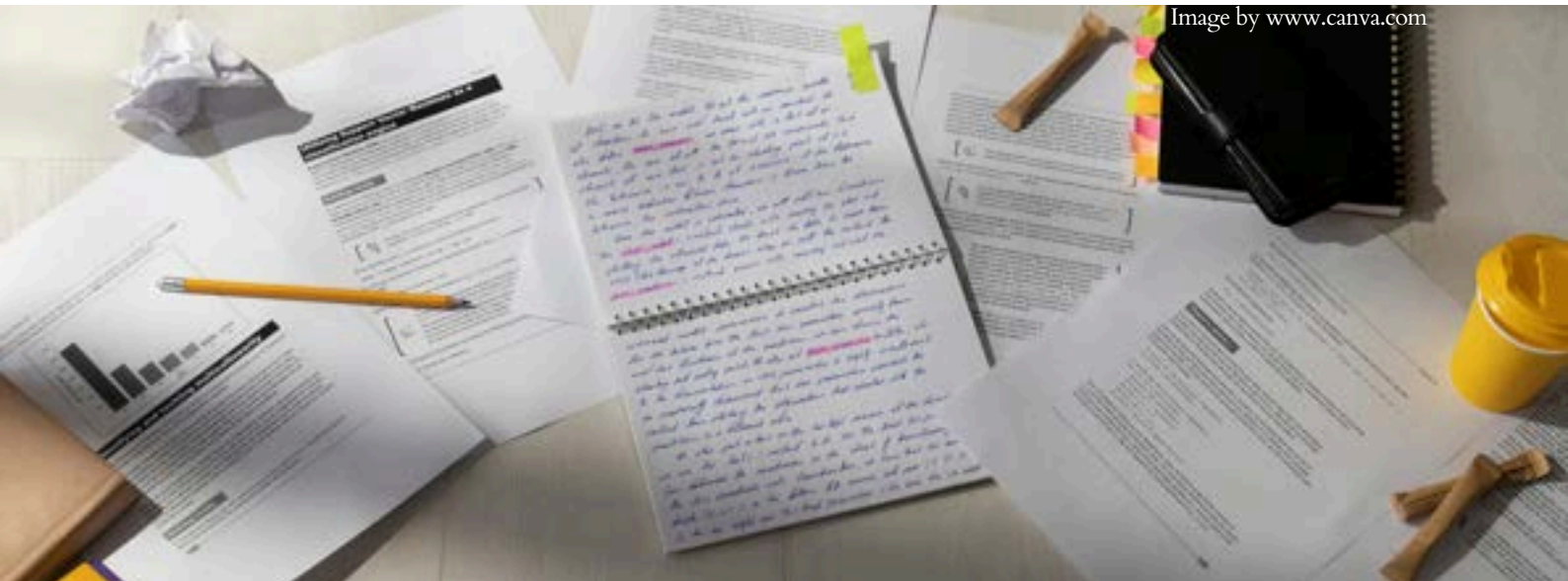
Generative AI can enhance ethics studies by presenting real-world ethical dilemmas and summarizing different Christian ethical frameworks, such as virtue ethics or Just War Theory. However, AI lacks the depth to fully navigate the moral and emotional nuances in complex ethical situations, often defaulting to secular reasoning rather than integrating Christian ethical perspectives.

Task Example – Showcasing AI’s Weaknesses

Task: Students ask AI to provide advice on an ethical scenario where a pastor faces conflicting loyalties, such as balancing congregational needs against personal convictions.

Objective: Students critique the AI’s response, noting how it may lack the moral depth and theological reasoning required to handle such a dilemma, especially when balancing multiple Christian principles.

Outcome: This exercise reveals AI’s limitations in moral agency and its reliance on generic responses, encouraging students to apply their own theological judgement.



Task Example – Using AI’s Strengths

Task: Students engage in a dialogue with the AI to explore how Just War Theory principles (e.g., legitimate authority, proportionality, last resort) apply to a current conflict. They prompt the AI to present opposing arguments on each principle, as if it were debating both sides, then respond by defending or challenging these perspectives from a Christian ethical viewpoint.

Objective: Through this dialogue, students can investigate the nuanced applications of Just War Theory in real-world scenarios, honing their ability to articulate ethical reasoning and respond to counter arguments.

Outcome: This task develops students' skills in ethical analysis and critical dialogue, encouraging them to refine their responses and deepen their understanding of how Christian ethics can be applied to complex, modern issues.

Subject Area: Apologetics

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can be valuable in apologetics by simulating various worldviews, allowing students to practice responding to sceptical or opposing perspectives. However, AI lacks

emotional, relational, and experiential dimensions of real human interaction, which limits its ability to fully replicate the nuances of belief influenced by personal history, trauma, or relational dynamics.

Task Example – Showcasing AI’s Weaknesses

Task: Students engage in a debate with the AI simulating a deterministic or atheistic worldview, exploring complex issues like the existence of free will or the nature of suffering.

Objective: By debating the AI, students observe how it perfectly embodies an "idealised" version of determinism or atheism, unaffected by human inconsistencies, emotions, or relational factors. Students critique the AI’s lack of embodied perspectives, highlighting where true human responses would introduce complexity and unpredictability.

Outcome: This exercise helps students see the AI’s limitations in understanding faith-based arguments from an experiential perspective, fostering deeper awareness of the relational and emotional components of human belief.

Task Example – Using AI’s Strengths

Task: Students prompt the AI to engage in an apologetic dialogue addressing common

questions, such as “How can a good God allow suffering?” They work iteratively, refining the AI's response until it provides a biblically sound and compassionate answer that uses the free will defence and emphasises Christian hope.

Objective: Through refining prompts, students practice formulating clear, compassionate responses to difficult theological questions, training the AI to avoid shallow answers and reflect sound theological reasoning.

Outcome: This task strengthens students' apologetic skills, helping them anticipate opposing views and refine responses that resonate thoughtfully and compassionately with sceptics.

Subject Area: Missions

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can support missions training by simulating cross-cultural and interfaith dialogues, allowing students to practise engaging with diverse worldviews. However, AI lacks the nuanced understanding of specific cultural contexts, particularly those with less available training data, and may risk reinforcing stereotypes if relied on without careful oversight.

Task Example – Showcasing AI's Weaknesses

Task: Students engage the AI in a conversation simulating an indigenous or less commonly represented cultural worldview, such as animism.

Objective: By examining the AI's responses, students assess where the AI's understanding falls short, particularly if it generalises or inadvertently reinforces stereotypes due to limited cultural context. They critique the AI's limitations in accurately representing lived belief systems and relational dynamics.

Outcome: This task highlights the AI's gaps in cultural authenticity, encouraging students to approach cross-cultural dialogue with caution and a commitment to deeper understanding.

Task Example – Using AI's Strengths

Task: Students prompt the AI to simulate a conversation from the perspective of a broad theological tradition, such as Latin American liberation theology, on topics like the theology of suffering. They refine the AI's responses to reflect nuanced theological perspectives.

Objective: Students learn to craft prompts that elicit accurate representations of diverse theological voices, developing skills in both interfaith dialogue and critical analysis of AI outputs for bias or superficial interpretations.

Outcome: This exercise builds students' cultural sensitivity and prepares them to thoughtfully engage with diverse theological perspectives, fostering adaptability in cross-cultural mission contexts.

Subject Area: Pastoral Care

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can be useful in pastoral care training by simulating scenarios that allow students to practise offering theological and pastoral guidance in response to various counselling situations. However, AI lacks empathy, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intuition, which are essential for genuine pastoral care, especially in cases involving emotional trauma or spiritual crisis.

Task Example – Showcasing AI's Weaknesses

Task: Students ask the AI to provide pastoral care in a complex situation, such as

counselling someone experiencing deep guilt or moral failure.

Objective: Students evaluate the AI's response, noting its lack of empathy, relational insight, and spiritual depth, which are crucial in effective pastoral care. They discuss where the AI's "counsel" falls short of meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of the individual.

Outcome: This task helps students recognise the irreplaceable value of human empathy and relational presence in counselling, fostering a more nuanced understanding of pastoral care's relational nature.

Task Example – Using AI's Strengths

Task: Students engage in a role-play exercise where AI simulates someone seeking advice on coping with grief, allowing students to practise offering pastoral guidance. The AI generates responses that encourage students to clarify and adjust their theological and pastoral approach as they guide the conversation.

Objective: Students practise formulating biblically sound and compassionate advice, honing their skills in theological clarity and communication while adapting to real-time responses.

Outcome: This task provides students with a safe environment to develop their counselling skills, focusing on content and clarity in their guidance, while recognising the need for empathy beyond what AI can offer.

Subject Area: Preaching

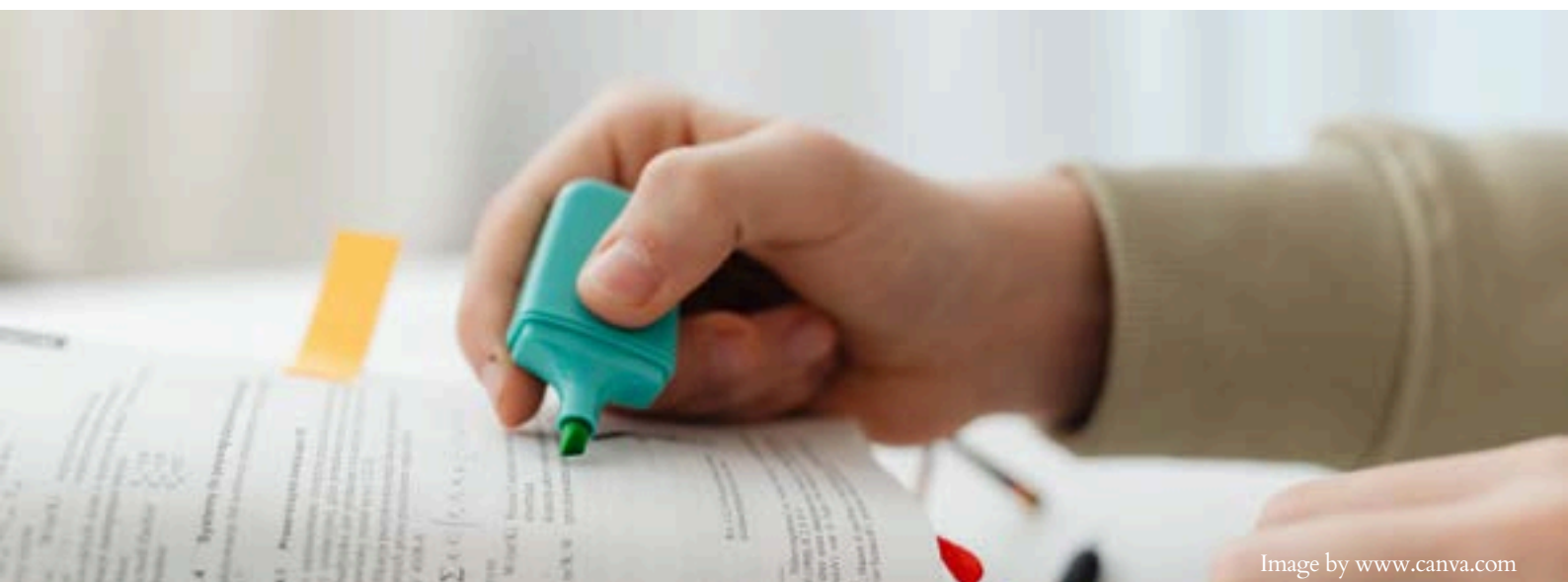
Task Type Summary

Generative AI can assist preaching students by creating sermon outlines, providing structured ideas for theological themes, and simulating congregational feedback. However, AI lacks the relational and spiritual sensitivity to tailor messages to the emotional needs and unique dynamics of specific congregations, often resulting in sermons that feel detached or overly generic.

Task Example – Showcasing AI's Weaknesses

Task: Students ask AI to generate a sermon tailored for a congregation experiencing loss or hardship, such as after a community tragedy.

Objective: Students critique the AI's response, identifying gaps in emotional resonance and pastoral sensitivity, and discussing how the sermon could better address the congregation's



unique spiritual needs.

Outcome: This task highlights the AI's limitations in conveying authentic empathy and relational depth, prompting students to explore how true pastoral care extends beyond structured responses.

Task Example – Using AI's Strengths

Task: Students draft a sermon on a given passage, such as John 3:16, then ask the AI to critique the sermon's clarity, structure, and theological depth. Alternatively, students might record a presentation of their sermon, and the AI provides feedback on presentation skills, including pacing, word choice, and audience engagement.

Objective: This exercise helps students refine their sermon content or delivery by identifying areas where they can enhance theological precision, coherence, and presentation style to better engage listeners.

Outcome: By receiving structured feedback, students improve both their written content and oral delivery, learning to communicate theological insights in ways that are clear, accessible, and impactful.

Subject Area: Spiritual Formation

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can support spiritual formation by offering structured prompts for spiritual practices, summarising historical writings, and facilitating creative theological reflection. However, AI lacks the personal, relational, and spiritual discernment essential to genuine spiritual growth, which relies on guidance from the Holy Spirit and personal experience over time.

Task Example – Showcasing AI's Weaknesses

Task: Students ask the AI for guidance on

deepening their prayer life, such as becoming more attuned to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Objective: After receiving the AI's response, students reflect on its limitations in offering true spiritual discernment, recognising the absence of relational depth and personal guidance in AI-generated advice.

Outcome: This task emphasises that spiritual formation is a deeply relational journey, encouraging students to seek growth through personal experiences, mentorship, and prayer rather than AI prompts alone.

Task Example – Using AI's Strengths

Task: Students use AI to guide their practice of lectio divina or another spiritual discipline, receiving structured prompts for each stage and reflections from historical Christian writings (e.g., quotes from St. John of the Cross on prayer in spiritual darkness).

Objective: Through AI's guidance, students develop consistency in spiritual disciplines, gain insight into how different Christian traditions approach spiritual practices, and explore theological concepts creatively.

Outcome: This exercise helps students integrate structured spiritual practices into their lives, expanding their understanding of Christian spirituality through historical insights and reflection prompts.

Subject Area: Languages

Task Type Summary

Generative AI can support language learning by generating interactive exercises, offering grammar explanations, and providing vocabulary practice. However, AI lacks the depth to fully capture the nuances of biblical Greek and Hebrew, particularly in complex grammar or culturally rooted idioms, which require detailed study and contextual understanding.

Task Example – Showcasing AI’s Weaknesses

Task: Students ask the AI for a breakdown of a challenging Greek or Hebrew passage, focusing on nuanced grammatical elements such as verb forms, moods, or word order that significantly affect interpretation (e.g., John 1:1 or Genesis 1:1).

Objective: By analysing the AI’s interpretation, students identify any oversights in grammar, idiomatic meaning, or contextual depth, noting where AI’s lack of advanced language sensitivity affects the translation.

Outcome: This task helps students recognise the limitations of AI in fully understanding biblical languages’ complexities, prompting them to rely on detailed language study and scholarly resources for deeper accuracy.

Task Example – Using AI’s Strengths

Task: Students use AI for vocabulary drills or grammar exercises, generating practice sentences in Greek or Hebrew where they must identify verb forms, translate phrases, or match words with their meanings. They can also prompt AI for brief summaries of grammatical rules (e.g., Greek aorist tense or Hebrew verb stems) to reinforce classroom learning.

Objective: AI provides immediate feedback on vocabulary accuracy and grammatical structure, allowing students to practise core language skills and receive quick corrections.

Outcome: This task reinforces foundational language skills and helps students gain confidence in basic grammar and vocabulary, supporting their ability to engage with biblical texts independently.

Footnotes:

1. Chunpeng Zhai, S. Santoso Wibowo, and Lily D. Li, “The Effects of over-Reliance on AI Dialogue Systems on Students’ Cognitive Abilities: A Systematic Review,” *Smart Learn. Environ* 11 (2024): 2 10.1186/s40561-024-00316-7.
2. Aidan Isaacs, “The Dangers of Artificial Intelligence to Theology: A Comprehensive Analysis,” ChatGPT, *Christ Over All*, 14 May 2024, <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/the-dangers-of-artificial-intelligence-to-theology-a-comprehensive-analysis/>.
3. Isaacs, “Dangers of AI to Theology.”
4. There are many forms of artificial intelligence, but it is the development of Generative AI (Gen AI), machines that can create new content, that has shaken our idea of what it is to be human. Large Language Models (LLMs) are a subset of Gen AIs that specialise in creating text-based content, compared to visual material, for example. The most common type of LLM the average person will interact with is a Generative Pre-Trained Transformers (GPT), typified in ChatGPT. For the purposes of this article, the terms Gen AI, LLM and GPT will be used interchangeably.
5. Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI* (New York: Penguin, 2024), ch. 3: four rules for co-intelligence.
6. Tolop Oloan Marbun, “The Implementation of Artificial Intelligence, Chatgpt, and Critical Thinking Method for Academic Endeavors at Theological Higher Education,” *Didaskalia* 6.2 (2023): 85, <https://doi.org/10.33856/didaskalia.v6i2.309>.
7. Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence*, ch. 3: four rules for co-intelligence.
8. Isaacs, “Dangers of AI to Theology.”

Elizabeth (Buffy) Greentree is Librarian at the Brisbane School of Theology



Upcoming Events 2024

NOVEMBER

7 November: Catholic Theological College (Melbourne)/University of Divinity, “2024 Knox Lecture: Connecting with Hope, Reconnecting with the Christian Vision of the Human Person.” In-person.

7, 12, 14 November: Converge Oceania Conference: Hearing the Faith Stories of Young Australians, featuring Graham Stanton (Ridley) and Rowan Lewis (ACOM). 7th November: Melbourne, 12th November Adelaide, 14th November Brisbane.

8 November: Fellowship for Biblical Studies one day symposium: United Theological College (Sydney). Unlike their regular one-hour meetings, this event will include four sessions, lunch and wine-tasting! Open to non-members.

11 November: The Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute at Mary Andrews College (Sydney), lecture on “Borderline Personality Disorder.” Online + in-person.

12 November: Book Launch: Centre for Religion, Ethics & Society: Prof. Scott Cowdell launching two books: *Rejoice & Be Glad: Gospel Preaching for Christian Festivals* and *Why Church? Christianity as It Was Meant to Be*. Chambers Pavilion, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, 15 Blackall St, Barton.

18-20 November: The Association of Reflective Practice in Theological Education (formerly the Australian and New Zealand Association for Theological Field Education) is an ecumenical organisation of those involved in Supervised Theological Field Education (STFE). Conference to be held in Adelaide (Uniting College for Leadership & Theology). ARPTE facilitate formation in ministry through support for field education co-ordinators, supervisors, and practitioners. The conference will feature four very well qualified reflective practitioners (including Richard Trist [Ridley] and Monica O'Neil [Morling]).

19 November: Book Launch: Ruth Sutcliffe: “Blessed Victors: Theology of Persecution in the Third Century.” Event details: 7:30pm, Christ College, 1 Clarence Street, Burwood. Guest speaker Rev. Dr. Michael Jensen. There is no ticketing information or website link for this event. The above link will take you to the Bloomsbury website. If you use the code GLR AT8, you can get 35% off the purchase cost of Ruth’s book.

29 November - 1 December: ISCAST (Christianity & Science in Conversation), biennial conference: “Humanity 2.0? God, Technology, and the Future of Being Human”, New College (UNSW, Sydney). In-person.

Calls for Papers

Sydney College of Divinity: Rebuilding the Fallen Tent? Re-discovering Ancient Tools for Hearing the Gospels and Acts

The Sydney College of Divinity invites scholars, doctoral candidates, and others working in the theological and wider academic community to propose a paper related to Gospels and Acts research for the 2025 Centre for Gospels & Acts Research Conference by **31 December, 2024**.

Proposals should be submitted with an abstract of 250–300 words, clearly articulating the argument and its contribution to research to: Prof. Peter Bolt as soon as possible and certainly by 31 December, 2024 via the following link [here](#). Further enquiries should be directed to Prof. Peter Bolt: PeterB@scd.edu.au.

Sydney College of Divinity: Digital Divinity: Working with Intelligence: Artificial, Human, and Divine?

The Sydney College of Divinity invites scholars, doctoral candidates, and others working in the theological and wider academic community to propose a paper for the SCD 2025 Learning & Teaching Conference by **16 November, 2024**.

The title of the proposed presentation, with an abstract of 250–300 words, should be submitted by 16 November, 2024.

The title of the paper and its abstract must articulate clearly the line of argument that the paper will take, indicating its contribution to research or scholarship in the chosen area. Proposal submissions can be made [here](#).



2025 ANZATS Book Awards

ANZATS have announced two book prizes for monographs published between 30 June 2023 and 31 December 2024:

ANZATS Award for the Best Monograph by an Emerging Scholar

ANZATS Award for the Best Monograph by an Established Scholar

Submissions can be made via the ANZATS website by 30 November 2024. (www.anzats.edu.au/book-award). Winners will receive \$1000 and promotion through ANZATS networks. Winners will be notified by 1 June 2025. More information available in the linked [flyer](#).

ACT HDR Conferrals

June - October 2024

Doctor of Philosophy

Joseph Byamukama
Ridley College

*“Early Intertextual Christology:
How Isaiah Shapes Jesus’s Lordship in Acts”*

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Brian Rosner
Co-supervisor: Dr. Andrew Malone

This dissertation examines the possible Isaianic influence on Luke’s depiction of Jesus as Lord in the book of Acts. It argues that Luke’s Isaianic intertexts portray Jesus as sharing Yahweh’s identity and function as κύριος. The approach is intertextual and exegetical and aims at how the book of Isaiah shapes Luke’s narrative picture of Jesus as Lord by his works, theophanic Christophanies, words, and relationship with the apostles, the Holy Spirit, the word of God, the Way of the Lord, the name of the Lord, redemptive history, Israel, and the nations. This thesis brings two camps of Lukan scholars into a dialogue: those who note that κύριος is Luke’s preferred christological title in Acts and those for whom Isaiah is the hermeneutic for the theology of Luke–Acts. I synthesize these two otherwise separate domains by exegeting representative texts with keen attention to the narrative intertexts to see how Isaiah shapes Jesus’s lordship in the book of Acts, closing with eight Isaianic motifs that reveal the divine κύριος Christology of the book of Acts.

Peter Collier
Christ College

*“Three Overlooked Allusions to Exodus 21
LXX in the Gospel of Matthew”*

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Ian Smith
Co-supervisor: Dr. Greg Goswell

This thesis explores three allusions in the Gospel of Matthew to passages from Exodus 21 LXX, which deal with regulations about people responsible for striking others. Each allusion meets Beetham’s criteria for confirming the presence of an allusion and is analyzed for its significance.

The first allusion, to Exodus 21:30 LXX in Matt 20:28, where Jesus offers his life as a “ransom,” emphasises themes of redemption and atonement. This reflects Matthew’s view on penal substitutionary atonement. The second allusion, to Exod 21:32 LXX in Matthew 26:15, involves Judas’s betrayal price of thirty pieces of silver, echoing the irony of valuing Jesus at the price of a slave. The third allusion, to Exod 21:14 LXX in Matthew 26:4, underscores themes of guilt and judgement against leaders plotting against Jesus.

Overall, this study highlights the significance of Exodus 21 LXX for understanding Matthew’s theology and the use of the Greek Torah in the Gospel narrative.

Amber Dillon
Ridley College

*“The Archetypal Witness: John the Baptist and
Composite Intertextuality in the Fourth Gospel”*

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Mike Bird
Co-supervisor: Dr. Chris Porter

Scholarship on the Fourth Gospel has explored the Evangelist’s use of Scripture, characterization, and the Gospel’s relationship to Judaism. While direct scriptural references are limited, the narratives are rich with allusions to Jewish traditions. Characters reveal details that engage audiences with the portrayal of Jesus. The Gospel, blending Jewish and anti-Jewish elements, uses terms like οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, situating

situating the Evangelist's work within Second Temple interpretive traditions. This thesis highlights John the Baptist's role as a pivotal figure, arguing that his testimony deepens the Evangelist's depiction of Jesus and Scriptural themes. Through composite allusions to Jewish Scriptures, John serves as an archetypal witness, establishing a pattern followed by others who testify to Jesus. This analysis offers a perspective on the Jewish nature of the Fourth Gospel, illustrating how its narratives position Jesus as a resolution within Israel's story.

Jesse Johnson
Christ College

"A Savior Without Subordination: The Covenant of Redemption as an Alternative to EFS"

Principal Supervisor: Dr. John McClean
Co-supervisor: Dr. Murray Smith

This research demonstrates that the covenant of redemption provides an alternative to EFS (the teaching that the Son is eternally and functionally subordinate to the Father), and that the covenant of redemption can be used to help explain the nature of intra-Trinitarian relations in a way that does not imply the Son's subordination to the Father. Using theological exegesis, this research argues that there is biblical support for the pactum as a theological concept, and then demonstrates that the pactum is compatible with key pro-Nicene theological concepts, such as the ad intra/ad extra distinction, eternal generation, and inseparable operations. In contrast, this research shows how EFS is not compatible with those same pro-Nicene concepts. The conclusion uses John's send passages as a test case. It compares how contemporary theologians—such as Fesko, Köstenberger, and Swain—have used the pactum to interpret those texts with how EFS advocates—such as Cowan, Grudem, and Ware—have understood them. This comparison verifies that the covenant of redemption provides a better way to understand intra-Trinitarian relations than does EFS.

Warren Kercher
Malyon College

"How Queensland Baptist Pastors Determine and Justify Their Preferred Preaching Methods"

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Ian Hussey
Co-supervisor: Dr. Tim Patrick

Warren Kercher is awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for his thesis *How Queensland Baptist Pastors Determine and Justify Their Preferred Preaching Methods*. Warren's principal supervisor was Ian Hussey and his co-supervisor, Tim Patrick. Having identified the lack of information available regarding Queensland Baptist pastors' preaching practices including the justification of their methods, this research was undertaken to fill this gap in knowledge and provide valuable feedback to the Queensland Baptist denomination and its training arms, especially Malyon Theological College. It found that pastors are content to employ a breadth of biblically grounded preaching approaches in pursuing their primary aim of transformation in their hearers. This research is an exercise in Practical Theology using a Grounded Theory methodology. This work also contains an historical survey of Queensland Baptist preaching which aids interpretation of data relating to the contemporary homiletical landscape.

Master of Theology (Research)

Steven Daly
Trinity Theological College

"The Riddle of the Beloved Disciple's Anonymity in the Fourth Gospel."

Principal Supervisor: Dr Grant Taylor
Co-Supervisor: Dr Allan Chapple

Why does the Fourth Gospel present its star eyewitness anonymously? This is quizzical given his importance. It is demonstrated that anonymity performs an important role both in the Beloved Disciple's characterization as well

as, paradoxically, in the revelation of his identity. The author eventually shows the Beloved Disciple and the Narrator unequivocally to be one and the same: John son of Zebedee. The Fourth Gospel marries the eyewitness testimony of the younger John with the spiritual insight of the older John into one coherent, Christological witness, with anonymity underscoring the nature of the narrator as a servant of Christ, a messenger whose message is Christ, and a wise person whose wisdom is the Word of God.

Rob Falls
Christ College

“The Newness of the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:6.”

Principal Supervisor: Dr Ian Smith
Co-Supervisor: Dr Greg Goswell

Robert Falls is awarded the degree of Master of Theology (Research) for his thesis *The Newness of the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:6*. Rev Dr Ian Smith was his principal supervisor and Rev Dr Gregory Goswell was his co-supervisor. The thesis first establishes the proper framework by which to approach Paul’s use of the phrase “new covenant” namely the prevailing Jewish covenantal theology of the first century, which never conceptualised that God would invalidate and replace his own covenant. Second, through a close exegetical analysis of the antitheses of 2 Corinthians 2:14–3:18, the thesis demonstrates that Paul’s paramount concern was the new nature and efficacy of covenantal ministry, not the covenants themselves. It therefore concludes that 2 Corinthians 3 explores the new, efficacious ministry of the covenant, and provides no support for covenantal abrogation.

Gordon Menzies
Morling College

“Heteronormativity as Harmony”

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Sloane
Co-supervisor: Dr. Matthew Andrew

This thesis argues for recognizing ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as divinely given identities, highlighting the harmony in heteronormativity. It critiques Judith Butler’s anti-essentialism by reestablishing a link between the body and gender expression, acknowledging their variability. The work integrates theology, network economics, biology, psychology, and sociology to form a model for understanding gender norms. This model emphasizes two harmonies: inner harmony, where gender aligns body, romantic desire, and identity; and outer harmony, where men and women relate as similar yet distinct, fostering both connection and interest. This dual harmony supports the idea that, while gender isn’t everything, it is meaningful. The thesis promotes “heteronormativity as harmony,” endorsing non-oppressive gender norms as expressions of “gendered moral beauty.” This beauty represents a triad of truth, goodness, and beauty that opposes oppression and encourages human flourishing, advancing both personal and relational freedom.

Attention all ACT Faculty & HDR students

Don't forget to register for the ACT
PD & HDR Conference days!!



To see the full program, visit the 'Events' section of
the Graduate School of Research page on the
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Any enquires about the PD or HDR conference days
should be directed to Anusha DeSilva:
adesilva@actheology.edu.au

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ACT Office News

ACT Dean & CEO Professor James Dalziel will be on study from July to December 2024. Deputy Dean, Dr Edwina Murphy, will serve as Acting Dean for this period.

NEXUS Communications

For any communications regarding the ACT's NEXUS magazine, please contact us at:

research@actheology.edu.au