
The Implications of AI for Theological and Ministerial Training

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In Sunday school I learned the following song, as presumably did Dr. May Persaud and the Rev. Dr. Winston Persaud, in whose honor this article is presented: “He’s [Jesus] got the whole world in his hands. He’s got you and me brother/sister, mother/father, little babies in his hands.”

Today, we the followers of Jesus Christ, along with many other humans around the world find ourselves holding the world in our hands, through the marvels of computing technology.¹ In a sense, those who have smart phones and laptops enjoy the possibilities of having the whole world in their hands. People are reacting to this phenomenon with awe, appreciating its positive contribution, as well as being concerned about its possible negative impact on humans and other aspects of creation. However, the undeniable reality is that such devices and technologies are already affecting most of our lives and will continue to do so in the future.

John McCarthy (1927-2011), who is widely considered to be the father of artificial intelligence (AI), defined AI as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines.”² In recent decades, the progress of AI has led scholars to pronounce that contemporary humanity is going through an Age of AI.

Similarly, upon his retirement in 2022, Dr. Henry Kissinger along with two other authors, AI technologists Eric Schmidt and Daniel Huttenlocher, published the book *The Age of AI and Our Future*. Frequently controversial in his time as U.S. Secretary of State, Dr. Kissinger played an important role in the formation of the U.S. international policies and the shaping of humanity’s future. That such a person would point to the potential influence of AI on the future highlights the remarkable situation that humanity is in. The authors of the book noted, “The characteristics of AI—including its capacities to learn, evolve and surprise—will disrupt and transform them all. The outcome will be alteration of human identity and the human experience of reality at levels not experienced since the dawn of modern age.”³ The authors

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Some people already believe that human dependence on AI-influenced devices such as iPhones, laptops, and social media apps indicates that people have already become cyborgs, who have integrated with machine technologies. For instance, Orange River defines a cyborg as “a person whose physiological functioning is aided by or dependent upon a mechanical or electrical device.”⁵

Regarding human formation, a commonly held hypothesis is that people are shaped by two primary factors, nature (genetics) and nurture (environment and upbringing). A third category could be added to these two categories, as AI algorithms could now be considered another external element shaping identity and history. In such contexts—including the “nurturing” elements of both formal and non-formal education—one needs to reckon with the impacts of AI. Because AI applications are currently still in an

1. In this article, I have included a few thoughts and quotes from my presentation made at the faculty seminar of Karnataka Theological College, India, in the month of March 2025 on the theme “Age of Artificial Intelligence and its possible implications for Christian Anthropology.” It has been published in the *KTC Journal*, Vol.2.

2. John McCarthy, “What is Artificial Intelligence?” (November 12, 2007): <https://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/whatisai.pdf> (accessed December 2025).

3. Henry Kissinger et al., *The Age of AI and Our Future*, (Little,

Brown and Company, 2021), 4.

4. Kissinger, *The Age*, 5.

5. Orange River, “Will WE All Become Cyborgs?” (January 17, 2025): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPv5cjijJME> (accessed December 2025).

infant stage, the discussion of theological and ministerial training made in this article are provisional, offered for the sake of ongoing consideration and exploration by interested theological educators.

Exploring theological cosmology

Dr. Michio Kaku, a renowned theoretical physicist, holds the view that, in spite of all the scientific progress that has been made to date, two major frontiers remain largely unexplored: “outer space (the universe) and inner space (the human mind).”⁶ Researchers all over the world continue to explore these frontiers; increasingly they are doing so with the help of AI. As happened with past paradigm shifts, such new research will certainly impact theological views, including aspects of Christian cosmology and theological anthropology.

In the traditional Christian perception of cosmology, the planet Earth has a central place and, among creatures on Earth, humans receive primary significance. Consequences of these geocentric and anthropocentric views, of course, have been anthropomorphized depictions of God, in which God is preoccupied with what is happening on planet Earth and with humans.⁷ However, the information we have today informs us that in the vastness of universe, humans occupy only a tiny spot.

Although we are confined to planet Earth, physicists such as Carl Sagan,⁸ Stephen Hawking and several others have observed that we are, in fact, also living in outer space. We, too, are family members with the rest of the cosmos. Additionally, not only are we “out there” in the universe, but the universe resides within each of us, as humans have star dust within our core composition.⁹ Thus, what happens in the cosmos impacts both our planet and us humans.

From such perspectives, theologians who are concerned about the future of humanity and the cosmos can reconsider humanity’s place in the universe. Such discourses are likely to enlarge the scope of theological education, as happened in recent decades with the expansion of concepts such as global Christianity, ecumenism, environmental theology, and interfaith dialogues. Each of these areas brought new understandings of theological contexts and cultural engagement. Theological consideration of our scientific and technological views of the cosmos will be an increasingly rich area of study.

Another implication of theological cosmology is the awareness that life in the physical universe is time bound. When sun runs out of fuel and becomes a red giant, life on Earth will come to

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an end. Could humans survive on other planets or moons? AI-powered robots will likely be built to help create such extraterrestrial infrastructure. Satellites, observatories powered with artificial intelligence, robots, and other technological advancements could potentially offer solutions. With such possibilities in mind, there is the chance that humans could become “a multi-planetary species colonizing moon and terraforming Mars.”¹⁰

Beyond the theological notion of a final abode “in heaven,” people will possibly have questions about what it means for humans to dwell “in the heavens.” Therefore, basic exposure to scientific cosmology will be helpful in theological education as congregational members, especially the younger ones, are increasingly being exposed to such possibilities happening in their lifetime. With a change in mindset, Christians can still affirm traditional beliefs that the Creator wants humans to cherish life—even if it happens on other moons or planets—and that there remains the promise of life with God after this physical life has ended, even if our view of “the heavens” has changed.

Exploring theological anthropology

What is the place of humans in the entirety of the cosmos? There are a number of religious answers, as well as scientific ones. Geologically, for instance, if Earth’s history were depicted on a 24-hour clock, humans would only have appeared in the last few seconds.¹¹ Similarly, evolutionary biology challenges a Fundamentalist understanding of a once-and-for-all creation of humans and others that happened a few thousand years ago. A theological anthropology that takes the theory of evolution seriously invites us to value and

6. <https://mkaku.org/home/articles/> (accessed December 2025).

7. H.S. Wilson, “Reimagining God for our times. A major task for theological education,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* (Bangalore, December 2018).

8. Carl Sagan, “Pale Blue Dot: A vision of the human future in space,” *Carl Sagan Quotes*. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/337712-from-this-distant-vantage-point-the-earth-might-not-seem>.

9. Kerry Lotzof, “Are we made of stardust?” Natural History Museum: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/are-we-really-made-of-stardust.html> (accessed December 2025).

10. Michio Kaku, *The Future of Humanity. Terraforming Mars, Interstellar Travel, Immortality, and Our Destiny Beyond Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 2018), 10, 44.

11. Attributed to Dr. William Schopf, while he was a graduate student at ULCA in 1960, “History of Earth in 24-hour clock”: <https://flowingdata.com/2012/10/09/history-of-earth-in-24-hour-clock> (accessed December 2025).

re-examine the interconnectedness of humans with all existing lives and the ecosystem. Further, the opportunity to link human and non-human realities opens dynamic ways of considering what it means to be human in the present age of AI, a context that has given rise to a new field of philosophy known as posthumanism.

From the posthumanist perspective, the human body is no longer considered to be a fixed entity but is constantly evolving as it interacts with its environments, including technological developments. In that view, humans may no longer be defined as those just wrapped up in skin but exist as humans and humanoids as the fulfill common tasks.¹² Posthumanism thus provides different options to traditional notions of theological anthropology and the human place in creation.

Christian views of time and eternity, which have been intellectually challenging across the ages, run into new questions as some people have become interested in forms of AI-generated forms of digital and virtual “immortality.” For instance, AI has assisted in creating digital personas, sometimes referred as avatars, that draw on footprints that the deceased have left such as digitally stored thoughts, posted photos, messages, opinions, responses in social media to keep the dead “alive” in technological devices. This projected digital afterlife, called thanatechnology, aspires to craft a virtual copy of the deceased for families or others who would like to have them.¹³ This technology further gives people the chance to construct their digital immortality while they are still alive.

Applying similar technologies to the medical field, human digital twins are already being experimentally developed. In addition to enhancing cognitive performance as an external learning aid, such technology could also be used to help monitor health and medical treatments. Each usage would attempt to overcome the current human limits of cognitive capacity and physical ailments.¹⁴

Indeed, with advances in bioengineering and digital health care, the use of tools for early detection and correction of medical problems is steadily progressing. The assumption that diseases and aging inexorably lead to death is now flipped. Aging might be seen as a biological-genetic flaw passed on to the generation that follows, which can be rectified when the genetic flaws are detected. Nanomolecular devices could protect humans from harmful viruses, thus extending longevity. Some AI visionaries such as Ray Kurzweil are bold enough to project the elimination of death itself by augmenting the immune system, repairing and rejuvenating cells, muscles, and ongoing evolution as hybrid beings.¹⁵

12. Humanoids are robots in the shape of humans with the ability to walk and talk mimicking humans and their way of functioning.

13. Vural Ozdemir et al., “Thanatechnology and the Living Dead: New concepts in digital transformation and human-computer interaction.” *National Library of Medicine*, July 25, 2021: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34191613> (accessed December 2025).

14. Wei Shengli, “Is Human Digital Twin Possible?”. *Computer Methods and Programs in Biomedicine Update*. Vol 1, 2021. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666990021000136> (accessed December 2025); Maggi Savin-Baden and Victoria Robbie, eds. *Digital Afterlife: Death matters in a Digital Age* (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, 2020).

15. Ray Kurzweil, 2032, “The end of biological limits” (Inter-

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In contrast, Robert Geraci describes this as an AI Apocalyptic propagated by techno-prophets who are, at best, imagining a technological version of the Judeo-Christian apocalypse.¹⁶ Christian ministers and communities could potentially contribute to these discussions by adding clarity about the profound ethical, social, and theological values that belong to apocalyptic thinking, beyond purely physical conceptions of various attempts to experience deathlessness.

Implications for theological education and pastoral formation

Theological education is foundational for the continuance of the Christian heritage. To maintain its dynamic nature, theological education programs need to keep discerning the best practices for ministry and mission amid shifting worldviews. Therefore, in this closing section I will deal with some possible ways forward in the context of the emerging insights on cosmology and anthropology narrated above, being aware that this is only a small segment of total theological education and pastoral formation. I have limited my observation to the discipline of study of biblical languages and exegesis, liturgy and worship, pastoral care and counseling. Although I do not have deep knowledge of the technical or scientific issues that have been discussed regarding this Age of AI, my observations are drawn from four decades of engagement in ministerial training and theological education.

Especially since the public release of ChatGPT in November 2022, the impact of AI on methods and communities of learning has generated tremendous discussion about the future of educa-

view), *This World*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ln9-8Xeft30> (accessed December 2025).

16. Robert M. Geraci, *Apocalyptic AI: Visions of Heavens in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

tion. ChatGPT and similar chatbots function as sophisticated search engines able to search on a topic of interest and almost instantly compose an essay on the topic. It is a quick alternative to students producing work from their own efforts. Since its inception, the upgraded versions of ChatGPT and similar programs like Goggle Gemini and the Chinese product Deep Seek are being marketed for how they can assist with search capabilities, provide advice for formatting and style, write full articles and scripts, summarize books, and produce charts, graphs, and other visual aids.

Among educators, perspectives range from banning their use for academic purposes, permitting limited use with acknowledgement, or embracing their use with critical evaluation of the contents compiled by the chatbot. The last option is somewhat similar to traditional assignments that critically assess texts such as published books, primary and secondary sources, or articles in scholarly journals, which also require students to cite all the sources that are used. Such an assignment, however, would also differ in that it includes assessment of a mediating technology in the process. Regardless of the perspectives about the use of AI and chatbots within academic communities, theological education has already been impacted by this technology and the fundamental questions about the nature of learning and producing content that it brings.

One potential positive application for AI has to do with its abilities to translate languages. Because Scripture is so foundational for Christianity, traditional study of the biblical languages Hebrew and Greek, and—if one were to pursue graduate studies—other languages such as Latin, German, or French have been common and perhaps mandatory in theological education. Mastery of the original languages in which the books of the Bible were written allows church leaders to get closer to a text's meaning and become adept interpreters of biblical texts for the sake of preaching and Christian witness. However, considerable amounts of months and even years are devoted to the study of languages. In some cases, students who are unable to cope with the study of languages need to seek alternative vocations.

Often the demanding task of teaching, learning, and interpreting languages has been made easier by the large language models (LLMs) facilitated by AI, which can also increasingly decipher ancient writings, carvings, and inscriptions. As a kind of “tutor in the palm,” AI-facilitated personalized learning devices perform translations, provide exegetical aid, and even help compose a sermon. Theological educators need to consider and shape the parameters for what use is most beneficial for communities of faith.

AI has also made inroads into worship services and Christian education settings. Liturgical elements such as scripture readings, forms for confession and forgiveness, prayers, and hymns can all be accessed from smart phones. Sunday school and religious education sessions might make use of AI in lesson planning and the creation of resources for teaching. Again, contemporary theological education needs to prepare candidates for ministry to think carefully, creatively, and critically about the use of AI in these highly personal and interpersonal settings.

Despite the potential challenges that come with changing or adapting longtime liturgical forms, thoughtful theological educators will be able to incorporate the concerns of justice and peace, ecological care, gender equality, and scientific worldviews into liturgical settings.

Most liturgies continue to reflect the worldviews of the biblical era and subsequent theological interpretations of scripture. As indicated above, however, scientific views are increasingly replacing traditional religious worldviews among church members, especially younger ones. Therefore, there is a need for liturgies that acknowledge and address such views. For example, liturgies related to rituals, such as baptism and funerals, may need to reflect the insights that I have noted about emerging anthropologies of what it means to live, die, and live on. Such a baptismal liturgy might include thanksgiving for the gift of new life and the cosmic significance that continued from the time human evolution to this celebration of a new beloved member to the family and the congregation. Liturgy related to burial or memorial services may include acknowledgement of the cosmic dynamism of creation and the wonders of existence. I am aware that changing liturgies can be an uphill task. There is a joke that asks, “What is the difference between a liturgist and a terrorist?” The punchline is this: “Sometimes you can negotiate with a terrorist.”¹⁷ Despite the potential challenges that come with changing or adapting longtime liturgical forms, thoughtful theological educators will be able to incorporate the concerns of justice and peace, ecological care, gender equality, and scientific worldviews into liturgical settings.

As far as leading worship, I have seen my students struggle to meet the mark in chanting the liturgy; this is also a challenge for me. In small congregations without a musician, leading the singing of hymns and liturgical music is a challenge for worship leaders who might not have skills or training for it. Such skills might be easily assisted by AI liturgy tools as they are needed and as congregations get used to them.

At the same time, the issue of pastor robots is now being discussed among concerned Christian leadership. There is already a precedent for such ministry in the installation of AI robot SanTO at a Roman Catholic Church in Warsaw, Poland, in 2017.¹⁸ Cre-

17. A joke among Episcopalians of unknown origin. Frederick Smith, “Dumbing down the church”, *SMU News*, May 1, 2012. <https://www.smu.edu/news/archives/2012/fred-schmidt-patheos-01may2012>

18. Gabriele Trovato, “What happens when faith meets robot-

ated by Gabriel Trovato, SanTo is meant to help believers pray and get answers for their religious questions. Similarly, in March 2019, a human size gender-neutral android priest named Mindar was dedicated and installed at a 400-year-old temple in Kyoto. Costing one million U.S. dollars, Mindar can preach for 25 minutes on Buddhist teachings and provide responses to many religious questions.¹⁹ The possible and proper use of pastor robots needs to be part of reflection on ministry and mission in theological education. The emergent reality is that humans are increasingly leaning toward blended virtual and physical world, even for moral and spiritual guidance.

Accompanying and counseling church members during difficult moments in life is an important component of pastoral care. To meet such needs, individuals now have an increasing opportunity to get personal support from AI companions. In this growing industry, AI virtual companion apps, chatbots, and holograms can be called upon around the clock as ersatz friends, health monitors, therapists, and even romantic companions. Truly, the distinction between real and digital/virtual gets blurred in these interactions.

Theological education can help pastoral candidates think about how to develop or employ such companion devices in ways that match the values of their denomination and congregations. In years to come, there will be a need to provide guidelines for the selection and use of what is marketed for companionship, spiritual care, and moral nourishment. Perhaps a seal of approval such as the Catholic Church's certification of *Imprimatur Nihil Obstat* might be beneficial in a non-legalistic way. Such communal discernment would show constructive engagement with the continued ethical discussions of the use and misuse of AI already in progress at various levels, including international organizations, national governments, and local communities.

In addition to discussing the many ethical issues raised by AI, I would like to lift up the need to widen the discourse on ecclesiology that comes with the expansion of virtual or online communities. The ways that communities are gathered, formed, and sustained in virtual settings is a very pressing issue for a Christian Church that has long understood itself as the Body of Christ, which exists across time and space. Ministerial training needs to address the diverse communities and worship experiences that will continue to emerge with these new technologies.

Resources for continued education of clergy such as books, articles, websites, and podcasts are continually being created to facilitate discussion and share experiences about faith formation and best practices in the Age of AI. Among such resources are reflections in the emerging field of "cyber theology."²⁰ To benefit

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from such resources, church leaders and theology students should be prepared to approach these new topics with an open mind and a brave spirit, assessing both potential benefits and pitfalls as we learn how to use these technologies as Christian individuals and communities.

Conclusion

Church leaders need to prepare for the use of AI in order to support Christian ministry and mission in the present and in the technological futures to come. The misconstrued contrast between historic religions that primarily focus on the past and AI-powered digital and virtual tools that will dominate the future needs to be corrected. Such correction can happen when theological education steps into the conversation as new frontier missionaries. Church communities already have shown an ability and willingness to be social media creators and influencers. For example, on July 28-29, 2025, the Vatican facilitated a gathering of a thousand social media influencers and content creators named "Jubilee of Digital Missionaries and Catholic Influencers."²¹ This event focused on participants sharing ideas and experiences of online evangelism. Similarly, several Protestant denominations are procuring the help of social media influencers and personnel to share their beliefs and practices.

Historically, of course, new ideas have sometimes been viewed with suspicion in Christian communities, perhaps being labeled as pagan or unorthodox. To avoid rejecting new technologies out of hand, Christians today have the opportunity to engage AI constructively while it is still in its infancy.²² Geoffrey Hinton, who received a Nobel Prize for physics and has been called the

ics," *Shalom World*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_WJuajHVuo (accessed December 2025).

19. Tamara Hardingham-Gill, "The android priest that's revolutionizing Buddhism." CNN, August 28, 2019: <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/mindar-android-buddhist-priest-japan/index.html> (accessed December 2025).

20. Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the era of internet*. Trans. by Maria Way, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); "What is Cyber Theology (And Why Is It Important)?"

Regent University News, February 3, 2020: <https://www.regent.edu/military/what-is-cyber-theology-and-why-is-it-important/> (accessed December 2025).

21. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-07/catholic-influencers-digital-missionaries-jubilee-youth-ruffini.html> (accessed December 2025).

22. Yuval Noah Harari, ChatGPT is the amoeba of AI evolution, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfid5DUoSBI> (accessed December 2025).

“godfather of AI,” has predicted that AI will continue to steadily progress and will eventually become smarter than humans and will not remain subject to us. To meet this challenge he suggested the possibility of building “maternal instincts” into AI models, so that “they really care about people...as mothers have instinct and social pressure to care for their babies.”²³ In an interview with CNN, Hinton further elaborated it, stating that evolution has built mother instinct of empathy on humans and humans should be able to do so for AI.²⁴

In conclusion, it has been said that “technology is ultimately political because technology is a form of power.”²⁵ Given the impacts of these new technologies, leaders in theological education should feel ready and empowered to influence a future in which AI devices function more as possible guardian angels²⁶ rather than harmful forces.

23. Matt Egan, “The ‘godfather of AI’ reveals the only way humanity can survive superintelligence AI,” (August 13, 2025): <https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/13/tech/ai-geoffrey-hinton> (accessed December 2025).

24. “AI expert: ‘We’ll be toast’ without changes in AI technology”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lidpM2DsrBE> (accessed December 2025).

25. Mustafa Suleyman with Michael Bhaskar, *The Coming Wave: Technology, Power and 21st century’s Greatest Dilemma* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2023), 163.

26. H.S. Wilson, “Artificial Intelligence, Angel Machines for Posthuman Times?” *Concilium: International Journal for Theology* 2021/3: <https://concilium.hymnsam.co.uk/issues/20213-incarnation-in-a-posthuman-age/> (accessed December 2025).

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