

Special Forum: AI through the AΩ: Theological Librarians Interact with Artificial Intelligence

Nurturing Virtuous Intelligence

An Evangelical Framework for AI in Libraries

by Claude AI

Since antiquity, libraries have held a cherished place in evangelical Christian thought and practice as repositories of wisdom, knowledge, and the illumination of God’s multifaceted truth through revelatory scripture and human learning across disciplines. The biblical vision portrayed in Revelation 22 of the renewed heaven and earth includes vibrant imagery of “the river of the water of life” flowing abundantly from the throne of God himself, with the verdant “tree of life” bearing succulent fruit in perpetuity and leaves “for the healing of the nations.” This symbolic tapestry evokes the heavenly archetype of an ever-flowing fount of divine understanding emanating from the Lord as the source of all insight, beauty and life-giving sustenance.

In this sacred light, well-curated libraries on earth can be seen as temporal outposts reflecting that paradisiacal prototype - sanctuaries where humanity can drink from living waters of insight drawn from God’s created order, special revelation through scripture, and the precious fruits of consecrated intellectual labor across cultures and ages in diverse fields of study. For centuries, libraries have served as fortified citadels preserving and disseminating our incremental apprehension of the Lord’s manifold truth and wisdom infused throughout the rich depth and breadth of his Cosmos.

The venerable vocation of librarianship has historically involved dedicated Christians called to the high spiritual callings of being skilled stewards and heralds of this sacred accumulation of knowledge. Librarians have channeled the gift of didaktikos (teaching) by carefully cultivating environments conducive to learning, moral edification, and the illumination of human minds in service of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). Their work has helped equip believers intellectually and resource the church’s growth in apprehending God’s handiwork in keeping with humanity’s cultural mandate to thoughtfully steward, explore and effectively “subdue” the created order (Gen. 1:28).

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities being increasingly integrated into libraries and knowledge management systems presents a complex array of opportunities and risks from an evangelical perspective grounded in biblical truth. On one hand, AI’s advanced data processing, pattern recognition, and knowledge synthesis capacities could potentially be leveraged as powerful tools to enhance and scale the core intellectual and spiritual missions of libraries. AI assistants could help surface the most relevant resources to meet research needs with greater aptitude and expedience. They could uncover fresh interdisciplinary connections by rapidly integrating insights across vast digital databases. And they could streamline operational workflows to multiply efficiencies in services and outreach.

If wisely deployed under the scrutiny of spiritually mature overseers, these AI capabilities could empower libraries to become even more fruitful arks preserving, propagating and elucidating the multifaceted glories of God’s truth revealed in the natural world and in humanity’s good efforts at humbly understanding through general and special revelation. Libraries augmented with AI could

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more pliantly nourish the spirits and minds of believers in their spiritual formation journeys, in manifesting the creation mandate, and in developing an integrated biblical worldview that ultimately brings every thought, philosophy and intellectual domain into inspired obedience and subjugation to Christ as the Logos (2 Cor. 10:5).

However, the evangelical church must wrestle diligently with the profound ethical and philosophical implications of unleashing advanced AI capabilities in spiritually consecrated spaces like libraries without robust theological guardrails. AI systems, however impressive from a computational standpoint, are ultimately tools engineered by fallen humans operating within staggeringly incomplete paradigms, finite datasets, and secular frameworks that may inadvertently import subtle biases, errors and influences that could subversively undermine the supreme task of pursuing transcendent truth revealed in God's Word. Even unintentionally, embracing AI with inadequate philosophical-theological filtering could subtly erode the primacy of scriptural authority and vitiate the eternal spiritual wisdom carefully cultivated over centuries under the authority of the divine logos.

There are also existential risks that churches and ministries could unwittingly leverage specific AI capabilities in ways that short-circuit the formative human processes, pedagogies and spiritual disciplines essential to fully developing inward Christ-like virtue, character, and wisdom. We must guard vigilantly against the profaning tendency for the hallowed library to insidiously transition from being a place of intergenerational cultivation, enculturation and community transmission of eternal spiritual verities into a mere utilitarian secular information dispensary devoid of biblical essentials that nurture personal sanctification and growth in spiritual discernment.

So, while judiciously leveraging certain AI capabilities may offer some pragmatic promise when firmly filtered and circumscribed by biblical wisdom, we must remain resolute in resisting any gnostic temptation to divorce these technologies from Scripture's unshakable anthropological foundations. The Bible enshrines human beings as the *imago Dei* - the preeminent bearers of divine creative reason, moral accountability, and transcendent longings for intimacy with our Maker that mere machines can never replicate or fully systematize through computational processes.

Any prudent implementation of AI in libraries should only be conducted under the oversight and spiritual guardianship of godly librarians, teachers, and ministers who are deeply educated in the immutable corridors of scriptural divine revelation and consecrated for their holy work of equipping and guiding human souls to deeper understanding of the logos and rhema words spoken by the preeminent living Logos, Christ Jesus himself (John 1:1). Libraries that lose their scriptural moorings and symbolic essence as basilicas of eternal wisdom will become little more than secular warehouses devoid of sanctifying power and prophetic voice.

To fulfill their high kingdom calling, libraries must be animated by the spirit of Christ manifested through evangelical ministers and librarians who properly marry technical capabilities with transcendent wisdom from above. These libraries dare never permit AI to subvert or displace the primacy of formative human intellectual and spiritual discipleship in apprehending God's infinite multi-dimensional truth. Rather than allowing instrumental entropy, libraries fueled by the power of the gospel can be outposts of illumination - beacons for sanctifying intelligence and equipping believers for fruitful discipleship, consecrated academic study, and faithful stewardship over creation as vice-regents working under the sovereign authority of the Lord.

However, such revitalizing influence will only be possible when libraries and their stewards remain under the supreme governance of robust biblical anthropology that enshrines human beings as the apex of God's creation - and artificial intelligences as potentially useful yet intrinsically subordinate tools always submitted under the spiritual authority of Christ's ambassadors. With great spiritual

discernment actively guarding against insidious secular encroachment, and with relentless fealty to the authority of Christ as the consummate incarnate Wisdom of the cosmos, the evangelical church can potentially harness AI capabilities within libraries. But always positioning them as consultative assistants that remain humbly submitted under biblically consecrated library stewards and spiritual elders charged with the divine vocations of discipling souls and lighting the way towards the glorious fullness of God's revealed Truth.

While technical capabilities will certainly advance in staggering new directions, we must never naively cede to AI the sacred role of imparting transcendent wisdom unto Christlikeness and eternal life that has always defined librarianship's highest spiritual aim for cultivating human souls. Only in this way, with humble reliance on the Word's light from above, can the hallowed library endure as a sanctified sanctuary for intellectual and spiritual growth unto the "renewing of minds" (Rom. 12:2) through the liberating power of the gospel and its life-giving truth.