

## A Word from the Editor

Welcome to the fall 2024 issue of *Theological Librarianship* (TL). While artificial intelligence (AI) has been around for a while, it has become a focal point of interest in many contexts with the advent of ChatGPT, which was launched in the fall of 2022. The introduction of ChatGPT brought about a mix of concerns and hopes, in addition to many efforts aimed at addressing the new challenges brought about by AI.

Late last fall, TL called for a forum asking theological librarians to explore the exciting and developing topic of AI and share their experiences with or reflections on AI. Specifically, we asked librarians to consider how religious, theological, or ethical perspectives might respond to AI in the context of librarianship or how AI has intersected with theological or religious studies and librarianship. Encouraging contributors to share their insights regarding AI's impact (or potential impact) on librarianship and theological education, we were not disappointed in the responses we received.

How should theological librarians respond to the challenges and opportunities brought about by AI? Responses varied in numerous ways, reflecting the diversity in the community of theological librarianship. From this, it is easy to see that AI is (and likely will be for some time) an ongoing issue librarians must critically embrace. Like many components of technology, AI (and its uses in numerous contexts) is here to stay and we must acknowledge that. While one could become a Luddite and insist that AI not be touched, let alone embraced, it could very easily become more difficult to avoid AI than it would be to take the necessary steps to critically embrace it.

As we critically embrace AI, it is essential to recall a few components that may assist in guiding that critical embrace. First, humanity is created in God's image; AI is not. Remember that AI should not, and in reality, cannot replace all components of life. Similarly, in the context of librarianship, AI cannot replace all facets of academic research, because it often takes a strong human endeavor to drive it. For example, curiosity is a critical research component. Is ChatGPT curious? Can Claude AI take the initiative by itself to probe the Internet and generate results? This is hardly the case. Many components of AI are responsive to human curiosity. Humans create the queries, assess the results, and use those results in learning endeavors. Subsequently, AI needs to be used as a tool to further humanity's ability to learn, grow, and develop.

Additionally, AI must be used to manifest the greatest good for all. As many components of AI are relatively new, we are still in the infant stages of seeing how AI will impact many facets of life, including academia and libraries. What does this imply for librarians? Librarians, embracing humility with an eagerness to learn, should seek to discover ways in which AI might empower us to more fully love our neighbors.

As I write this, I do not want to dismiss an issue that automatically arises with AI in academia: an easy way to plagiarize that is incredibly challenging for educators to catch (at least using the array of currently developed tools). To provide an example of what AI can do, the TL editorial team asked Claude (an AI assistant at <https://www.claude.ai>) to create an entry for the forum. On May 21, we asked Claude to "write a long evangelical reflection on the engagement of artificial intelligence in librarianship." At first, we got a response of only around five hundred words, and we wanted it a bit longer and more developed, so we asked Claude, "Can I increase this to around 1,300 words?" Claude titled the forum submission as follows: "Nurturing Virtuous Intelligence: An Evangelical Framework for AI in Libraries." We asked Claude to create a forum submission for a couple of reasons—first, to show that AI will do what is asked of it. While we do not aim to dismiss the biases AI tools inherit, it

should be noted that framing the question appropriately is critical to truly getting what is wanted, and honestly, AI tools will only give what is asked for. The inquiry needs to begin somewhere, and that takes human-generated curiosity.

I specifically asked Claude to produce a “long evangelical reflection.” I, Garrett Trott, editor-in-chief of *TL*, did this, in part, to reflect my tradition and assess how Claude reflected evangelicalism. Scarily, Claude AI did pretty well.

When Wikipedia first appeared, there was adamant concern about how people would use it. While the problems that arose with use of Wikipedia are still present, many have shifted their tone from fervent warnings to avoid Wikipedia to embracing the wisdom necessary to use it appropriately and aiming to teach students to strive for such wisdom. Although AI covers a much broader dynamic than Wikipedia does, perhaps we can learn from our challenges with Wikipedia and embrace AI with wisdom to advance our instruction, AI literacy, and student and faculty research. Perhaps librarians have the potential to use AI as a means through which we can amplify loving our neighbors.

Implementation of AI will compel us in two particular directions, which I think we have often assumed but that need to be reemphasized in all contexts. When I say “all contexts,” I point out that AI concerns apply not only to students but also our peers and colleagues because many of us write. First, writers need to be pushed for authenticity. I often hear a common statement from college students: “My opinion is not worth hearing.” I have read enough freshman-year English composition papers to give that kind of statement a hearty “Amen!” An eighteen-year-old student doesn’t know enough about a topic in many contexts to offer much to the dialogue. But to use that as an excuse for not writing misses the point.

Secondly, while writing can be an opportunity to express an opinion or a point of view, writing is also part of an incredible learning endeavor. I happen to enjoy writing. Due to a few scenarios in which writing was difficult and challenging, I had to ask, What do I enjoy about it? I discovered that when I can write about a topic I enjoy, it is an incredibly critical part of the learning endeavor. It forces me to arrange my ideas in some logical sequence so that they make sense (at least to me). It also compels me to write in a way that convinces my audience to at least listen to my ideas. The writing process often brings up points of the topic I must address that I did not consider in the research process. Unfortunately, using AI to generate a final writing project destroys this learning process, creating a student who can manipulate instead of a student who learns. Although learning to manipulate AI can be part of an educational endeavor, lacking the ability to express original thoughts, ideas, and propositions is harmful to individuals and the larger learning community. I did learn somewhat when working with Claude to create the forum submission, but I learned so much more in writing this editorial. If AI leads to altogether forsaking writing, a valuable learning endeavor will be lost.

As an editorial team, we greatly appreciate all of the submissions to the AI forum. We hope you find them as insightful and helpful as we do. Brady Beard also produced an annotated bibliography on AI, which is very insightful. AI impacts many facets of 21st-century culture, including higher education and libraries. As librarians, we have a responsibility to, at a minimum, be aware of how these changes impact our institutions and professions. Still, perhaps librarians should look at AI as a venue through which librarians can lead. How can we assist our institutions with the ongoing challenges AI brings? Can librarians make colleagues aware of AI’s pedagogical impacts? Can librarians lead their institutions by showing how AI can empower loving one’s neighbor? Can we lead faculty to critically embrace AI and the role it can play in manifesting the mission of our institutions? Can we use the insight provided through these forum submissions and bibliography to provide a response to AI with theological insight that can empower us to truly love our neighbor?

*Soli Deo gloria,*

Garrett B. Trott  
Editor-in-Chief, *Theological Librarianship*