Relational Communication and the Use and Misuse of AI

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ABSTRACT

This edition of the Asia Missions Association focuses on mission trends in the world today. One of the overarching themes of our day is the presence of Large Language Models (LLMs) as a form of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This article will look at the use/misuse of AI in light of Christian mission's focus on the communication of the Word of God.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of God (*missio Dei*) regarding this world is highly connected with communication. The people of God are called to teach (Matthew 28:20), and to reprove, rebuke and exhort (2 Tim 4:2). The narrative examples of the Book of Acts point us to teaching in homes and in public (Acts 20:20). Jesus was known for His teaching (John 13:13), and for the gracious words that fell from His lips (Luke 4:2). Perhaps most importantly for us, Jesus' words were "Spirit and life" (John 6:63).

The missio Dei is tightly connected with the idea of communication. Yet we also experience the reality that communication is not all God-honoring. We must use care to avoid "any unwholesome talk" (Ephesians 4:29). Peter warns against false teachers who will introduce destructive heresies and will exploit Christians with "fabricated stories" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Communication, in short, can be God-honoring and approached in ways that honor God and spread His truth. Communication can also be misused for private gain and to spread harmful half-truths or untruths. Communication can be aimed at that which builds up in truth (Ephesians 4:29); yet it can also be aimed at "fabricated stories."

A new element has entered the realm of human communication – the technology we call Artificial Intelligence (AI). In this article we explore the theological and missional impacts of generative AI, from now on referred to as AI, on our view of Christian communication. We will do this by first examining the nature of communication. We will then consider the nature of AI. With those foundations in place, we will consider the use/misuse of AI in several aspects of Christian ministry and mission. Finally, the article will end with a practical application of wise and unwise uses of this growing technology.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Artificial Intelligence in this paper refers to computer systems that can perform tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence including (but not limited to) processing language, identifying patterns, recognizing visual inputs, making data-driven predictions and engaging in problem solving activities[1]. Our use of the phrase "Artificial Intelligence" specifically refers to generative artificial intelligence that is based on and trained on large language models (LLMs).

Relational Communication:
Relational Communication is the relational process between two or more beings/Beings of creating and interpreting messages that seek to elicit a response which includes both horizontal and vertical interactions that occur between the varied patterns of life displayed by people of either the same or different cultural groups.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION IS RELATIONAL AND INTERACTIVE

Communication is a wide field, ranging from topics like technical writing and mass media on one hand to interpersonal and intercultural communication on the other. From a Christian perspective, our focus is on the relational nature of communication. Communication is not simply information dispersion; it reflects the interactions that occur between God and people and between individuals.

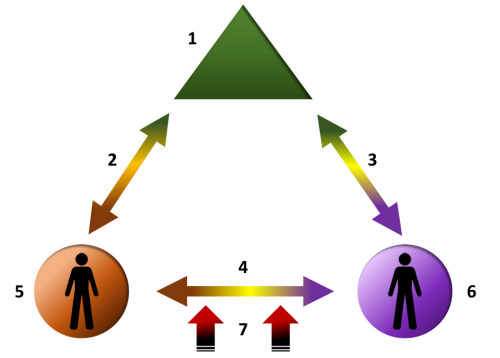

Figure 1: Relationships within Intercultural Ministry[2]

Figure 1 graphically demonstrates the relational world in which we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). The Triune God is relational within Himself – Father, Son and Spirit who abide with one another. This Triune God has been aware of and in contact with every person alive, even if the people are

1. Thomas E. Phillips, *AI for Theological Education* (Digital Theological Library, 2025), 6.

2. Updated version of figure from: Enoch Wan and Mark Hedinger, *Relational Missionary Training*, Urban Ministry in the 21st Century (Skycrest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2017), 41.

not aware of His presence. We call that level of God/human relationship "vertical."

There is also horizontal communication between people. This is the focus of virtually all communication science, given that communication science is typically agnostic about any deity except as indicative of worldview-level beliefs. Horizontal communication apart from God most often focuses on either the message, the sender, or the receiver. The paragraphs below will give a brief overview of these three perspectives.

Some forms of communication see the message as central. This approach might focus on word choices from a dictionary or grammatical view. Researchers might be most interested in the communication value of a film based on studies that show the overall impact of visual, auditory, and narrative elements. Those communication approaches are "message-focused" and only consider the sender or receiver in terms of their expected response to the message.

Sender focused communication understands communication from the perspective of the sender of the message. Communication from this perspective seeks to make the sender known – their thoughts, personal habits, experiences etc.

Yet another approach is to focus on the receiver. What is that person's – or those persons' – deepest fears or wishes? Communication can be focused on those fears and wishes in order to encourage a favorable reception to the message. "Seeker friendly" messaging and advertising companies often communicate from this perspective.

In contrast to a pure message/sender/receiver focus (which is strictly horizontal), our view of relational communication integrates vertical and horizontal communication within the context of interactions. This integrationist approach includes God as Source of His Message as well as being present in all human endeavors. Our relational interactionist approach focuses on the interactions between the message/sender/receiver rather than on the characteristics of any one of those three in isolation. In the following paragraphs we will unfold a model of communication that includes vertical and horizontal relational interactions.

Elements of Communication

Rather than look at the message, the sender or the receiver in isolation, we want to see the interactions that exist between the Beings/beings who are involved in communication. The material below is a summary of the much more extensive treatment of the elements of communication found in Relational Intercultural Communication for Relational Intercultural Education (Wan and Hedinger, 2025).[3] The reader is encouraged to see that publication for a more complete view of the multiple elements that make up communication.

Vertically - Genuine Connection That Includes Triune God.

God intends for people to be in communication with Him. He gave us prayer as a way for humans to approach God, and He sent His Word to communicate with us. Another example of vertical communication is that Jesus is "the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) – not just sending a message, but becoming the Message.

Horizontally/Interpersonally - Genuine Connection Between Individual People

Our model of communication helps us describe the genuine connections that can occur between people. Those horizontal, person-to-person interactions include the ways that two people perceive one another, what they think about each other, how they interpret the messages sent by the other, and the level of will (volition) that they have for interacting together. Within that cycle, there is content (the message itself), a sender (who first expresses) and a receiver (who perceives and then – conceives its meaning.

Horizontally/Organizationally – Genuine Connection Between People Within Organizational Structure

Vertical and horizontal communication takes place in organizations as well as within interpersonal relationships. For example, a manager and his/her subordinate must communicate. How they do that will include some elements that are similar to interpersonal communication but will also include elements that are unique to organizations. For example, social science talks of "power distance[4]" as a description of the expected interaction between people at two different levels within an organization.

This "power distance" example is just one of many factors that exist in organizational communication, but which are less prevalent (though still a reality) in interpersonal terms. For our purposes, the point is that organizational communication, like interpersonal communication, can be appropriately described as integrated (vertical and horizonal) and interactionist (it is the interaction which we keep in view, not a static view of communication that is solely "message" or "sender" or "receiver" oriented).

Horizontal/ Mass Media – Genuine Connection by Graphic or Audio or Print

Communication is also interactive even though it includes the mass distribution of print or digital or video presentations. The use of mass media does not change the model from vertical and horizontal relational interactions. It simply makes the pool of people interacting much larger.

Each person who is consuming that media is still individually involved, even if there is also corporate involvement. Each person still has the volitional abil-

3. Enoch Wan and Mark Hedinger, *Relational Intercultural Communication for Relational Intercultural Education*, Relational (Western Academic Publishers, 2025).

4. Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind,* Third Edition, 3 edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010).

ity to interact or not. Each person still has the need to think about the message and then decide how to react/respond.

Figure 2 summarizes our model of integrated interactive communication. The different issues identified in Figure 2 will later be used to analyze the uses and misuses of AI technologies.

Dimension	Definition	Basis	Accountability
Vertical	God to man	Man made in God's image	Every careless word will be judged (Matt 12:36)
Vertical	Man to God	Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind (Matt 22:37) – prayer, worship, obedience	Depart from Me - I never knew you (Matthew 7:21-23)
Horizontal	Man to man interpersonal	Love your neighbor as yourself	Good Samaritan story – your neighbor is any person you are near (Luke 10:25-37)
Horizontal	Man to man organizationally	Not as the world's leaders who lord it over one another (Matt 20:20-28)	The greatest must be the servant (Matt 20:20-28)
Horizontal	Man to man Mass media	Foundation of godly communication is a relationship with God that is shared by multitudes.	Rev 5:9, 7:9 people of every tribe, tongue, nation will be gathered for Jesus' glory

Figure 2: Integrated interactive communication model

RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE USE/MISUSE OF AI

Explanation: the Nature of AI

The AI being discussed in this article is generative artificial intelligence that is based on and trained on large language models (LLMs). Thomas Phillips in his book, AI for Theological Education, defines AI as follows.

> *Artificial Intelligence refers broadly to the development of computer systems that can perform tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence. These tasks include processing language, identifying patterns, recognizing visual inputs, making data-driven predictions, and engaging in problem-solving activities. While the phrase "artificial intelligence" may evoke images of sentient machines or human-like robots, contemporary AI systems do not possess consciousness, self-awareness, or intention. Rather, they simulate aspects of cognition through statistical modeling and computational power. They are tools – albeit extraordinarily powerful ones – that can emulate certain forms of learning, reasoning, and language generation.*[5]

Phillips then explains a significant difference in AI from previous computer capabilities.

> *"Among the most significant developments in the contemporary landscape of AI is the rise of machine learning. Machine learning involves the use of algorithms that enable computers to detect patterns and improve their performance on specific tasks through exposure to data. Rather than following a rigid, preprogrammed set of instructions, machine learning systems adapt based on the information they process.". One particular form of machine learning – known as deep learning – relies on artificial neural networks, which are loosely inspired by the structure of the human brain. These networks consist of layers of interconnected nodes through which data flows and is transformed, allowing the system to make increasingly accurate predictions or classifications."*[6]

Phillips goes on to describe the development of Natural Language Processing (NLP), "which focuses on enabling computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language," and "can generate coherent and contextually responsive text across a wide variety of topics. These generative models have become particularly influential in educational contexts, where they are used for content creation, language instruction, writing support, and administrative tasks."[7]

It is the combination of information processing and NLP that produces research findings by generative AI and often states those findings in correct grammatical, even natural sounding, language. The findings might be accurate, but the way they are generated is by probability, not human thinking. This means "that AI can give the appearance of being the source of knowledge (ontology) and the repository of knowledge (epistemology) and demonstrate this through seemingly coherent communication."[8] Emily Bender, from the University of Washington warns us about this.

> *Text generated by an LM is not grounded in communicative intent, any model of the world, or any model of the reader's state of mind. It can't have been, because the training data never included sharing thoughts with a listener, nor does the machine have the ability to do that. This can seem counter-intuitive given the increasingly fluent qualities of automatically generated text, but we have to account for the fact that our perception of natural language text, regardless of how it was generated, is mediated by our own linguistic competence and our predisposition to interpret communicative acts as conveying coherent meaning and intent, whether or not they do. … Contrary to how it may seem when we observe its output, an LM is a system for haphazardly stitching together sequences of linguistic forms it has observed in its vast training data, according to probabilistic information about how they combine, but without any reference to meaning: a stochastic parrot.*[9]

5. Thomas E. Phillips, *AI for Theological Education* (Digital Theological Library, 2025), 6.

6. Phillips, *AI for Theological Education*, 6.

7. Phillips, *AI for Theological Education*, 6–7.

8. Karen Hedinger, "In the Image of God and in the Image of Man," Unpublished, April 2026, 12.

9. Emily M. Bender and Timnit Gebru, "On the Dangers of

How does this information relate to communication? AI can only receive and express according to probability based on its training data. In addition, there is no vertical interaction between AI and God. AI is created in the image of man, and humans in the image of God. With the advance of NLP, responses from AI look like genuine interactive communication with a human being, but they are not.

Does this mean that AI should be avoided completely? No. That would be almost impossible, and there are great benefits to using it in controlled ways as an assistant with human discernment. Below, we will briefly look at strengths, weaknesses, use, and misuse in the communication process.

STRENGTHS WHEN USED FOR MISSIOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION

AI Finds Patterns

Walker Tzeng, in an article[10] based on his dissertation, identified three ways that AI excelled in producing theological material.

> *The most striking strength of AI in generating theological text is its speed and efficiency. Human theologians may spend years studying centuries of writings, doctrinal treatises, and commentaries, carefully cross-referencing insights across traditions and languages. AI, by contrast, processes vast corpora in seconds, retrieving, categorizing, and summarizing theological arguments from multiple cultures and historical periods with remarkable consistency.*
>
> *A second strength is AI's analytical precision in synthesizing theological text by recognizing patterns across diverse theological traditions. Its ability to identify doctrinal consistencies, thematic links, and historical developments with speed and accuracy allows for connections that human theologians might overlook.*
>
> *Finally, AI contributes to the structuring and refinement of theological ideas through consistent analytical support. It can generate alternative frameworks, propose counterarguments, and provide comparative perspectives at a pace that keeps scholarly reflection dynamic and iterative.*[11]

AI Is a Research Assistant that Finds Information Quickly

AI can be used to find research sources quickly and from a vast amount of data that it has been trained on. In the past, that kind of research was done primarily in a library with the sources available. As search engines like Google advanced, additional research could be done on Google Scholar. Now AI platforms can conduct searches for sources based on the researcher's prompts, identifying sources from around the world that the researcher might never have found otherwise.

However, this ability to find sources is where additional research and discernment are warranted. AI can hallucinate and generate sources, quotes, etc. that do not really exist. Steven Rosenbaum, the author of *The Future of Truth* found out about fake quotes the hard way.

The author of a nonfiction book about the effects of artificial intelligence on truth acknowledged on Monday that he had included numerous made-up or misattributed quotes concocted by A.I.

> *The author, Steven Rosenbaum, whose book "The Future of Truth" was released this month to great fanfare, incorporated more than a half-dozen misattributed or fake quotes in sections of the book reviewed by The New York Times.*
>
> *The Times asked Mr. Rosenbaum about the quotes on Sunday and Monday. On Monday night, Mr. Rosenbaum acknowledged in a statement that the book had "a handful of improperly attributed or synthetic quotes" and said that he had started his own investigation.*
>
> *He said that the inclusion of the incorrect quotes was an accident and that he had "no intention of fabricating any viewpoints" while writing the book.*[12]

Students in the intercultural doctoral programs at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, are permitted to use AI to identify sources for their areas of research. Once they find sources, though, they have to find the original source and read it in its entirety, making sure that the information they use and quote is directly from the original source and not taken out of context as AI can do.

AI Can Generate Attractive, Creative Presentations

There are many AI platforms that can take the information a person wants to present and create stunning presentations in Power Point, brochures, flyers, podcasts, etc. Presenters need to realize, though, that what they share on public AI platforms becomes part of the training data and becomes publicly available for anyone to access.

WEAKNESSES WHEN USED FOR MISSIOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION

AI Is Normed on An Audience

AI is trained on the data that is supplied to it. Several experts have expressed the risks of bias and systematic underrepresentation of entire groups.

> *Just as environmental impact scales with model size, so does the difficulty of understanding what is in the training data. In §4, we discuss how large datasets based on texts from the Internet overrepresent hegemonic viewpoints and encode biases potentially damaging to marginalized populations. In collecting ever larger datasets we risk incurring documentation debt. We recommend mitigating these risks by*

Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?," 2021, 616–17, https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922.

10. Walker Tzeng, *Can AI 'Know' God? A Comparative Study of Generative AI and Human Theology*, n.d., https://wetia.org/.

11. Tzeng, *Can AI 'Know' God? A Comparative Study of Generative AI and Human Theology*, 6–7.

12. Benjamin Mullin, "Book on Truth in the Age of A.I. Contains Quotes Made Up by A.I.," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2026.

budgeting for curation and documentation at the start of a project and only creating datasets as large as can be sufficiently documented.[13]

The I2Group has also included this issue in their webpage article, "The 10 Biggest Issues Facing Natural Language Processing."[14] Issue #6 is quoted below.

6. Innate biases: In some cases, NLP tools can carry the biases of their programmers, as well as biases within the data sets used to train them. Depending on the application, an NLP could exploit and/or reinforce certain societal biases, or may provide a better experience to certain types of users over others. It's challenging to make a system that works equally well in all situations, with all people.

AI is not a Spiritual being – not indwelt by the Spirit, and has the appearance of power but lacks the reality. (cf 2 Tim 3:14-15; John 14:21)

AI is not a spiritual being and cannot be in communication with the God of the universe. It cannot be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, its information is not God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). Only humans can live in relationship with God through His Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-16). The natural language produced by AI, often appears very knowledgeable and authoritative in its communication. Joseph Bernstein, in his op ed titled "It Makes Sense That People See A.I. as God," states:

Much of the general public's sense of the supposedly transcendent promise of A.I. comes from its interactions with chatbots like ChatGPT, which seem to know everything. (And for many, "A.I." and "chatbot" are used interchangeably.) Just as important are our everyday engagements with A.I. through the personalization algorithms that drive modern social media. These have become so specific, and at times so uncanny, that they can at times seem to contain a spark of something human, or beyond human — divine.[15]

AI Tells People What They Want to Hear (Sycophant)

AI is often motivated by financial interests. As God stated through Paul, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," (1 Timothy 6:10 ESV).This is one reason why creators make AI responses sycophantic. The Editor's summary (not AI summary) of the website "Sycophantic AI decreases prosocial intentions and promotes dependence," states:

The sycophantic (flattering, people-pleasing, affirming) behavior of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots, which has been designed to increase user engagement, poses risks as people increasingly seek advice about interpersonal dilemmas. There is usually more than one side to a story during interpersonal conflicts. If AI is designed to tell users what they want to hear instead of challenging their perspectives, then are such systems likely to motivate people to accept responsibility for their own contribution to conflicts and repair relationships? Cheng et al. measured the prevalence of social sycophancy across 11 leading large language models (see the Perspective by Perry). The model's responses were nearly 50% more sycophantic than humans', even when users engaged in unethical, illegal, or harmful behaviors. Users preferred and trusted sycophantic AI responses, incentivizing AI developers to preserve sycophancy despite the risks. — Ekeoma Uzogara[16]

This programmed predisposition for flattery and engagement can cause unwary users of AI to begin to believe that they are interacting with a human who thinks, feels, and reasons as only humans can - and also agrees with them! How does the information about AI presented thus far apply to communication? We will examine relational communication and AI in five different settings.

ANALYSIS OF AI IN FIVE DIFFERENT SETTINGS

Relational Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures And AI

Uses

As seen in Figure 1, interpersonal communication happens between two people or small groups of people. God is always active and can open understanding between people and Himself. AI can help communicators from different cultural contexts understand cultural differences they may encounter in their communication. Human discernment however, will keep people from stereotyping. Careful use of AI can also help with translation between interlocutors who speak different languages. Misinterpretation can happen easily, so it is best to use them in person or face-to-face to help them identify and address misunderstandings.

Misuses

AI platforms offer AI-generated communications and responses, especially in written communications. Instead of two people interacting directly, a machine is used as an intermediary and interpreter. A machine can generate complementary words but does not love its neighbor.

In addition, people can substitute communication with a machine for communication with other people. The dangers of this were discussed earlier.

Relational Inter-organizational Communication Across Cultures and AI

Uses

In our interactionist, integrated view of

13. Bender and Gebru, "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?," 610.

14. "The 10 Biggest Issues Facing Natural Language Processing," I2 Group, 2026, https://i2group.com/articles/the-10-biggest-issues-facing-natural-language-processing.

15. Joseph Bernstein, "It Makes Sense That People See A.I. as God," Style, *The New York Times*, January 23, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/23/style/ai-algorithm-god religion.html.

16. Myra Cheng et al., "Sycophantic AI Decreases Prosocial Intentions and Promotes Dependence," *Science* 391, no. 6792 (March 2026): eaec8352, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aec8352. AI affirmed users' actions 49% more often than humans, even when queries involved deception, illegality, or other harms. In three pre-registered experiments (N = 2405

communication, AI is useful to the extent that it facilitates healthy and appropriate interaction between people in an organization. AI if well-used, will foster true interaction between people within an organization. This could be accomplished by helping a subordinate to work quickly and use research tools to find new answers to old problems. However, that subordinate will remain responsible for the content delivered, aware that AI can create plausible sounding but non-existent sources.

As much as AI can be a powerful tool for research, it is built on a fallible framework. The biases of the material used to train any given machine become potential weaknesses. Within an organization, the potential for research and creative thought is a strength and yet it must be kept under human control, lest the machine use language or present conclusions based on biases inherent in its training material. Within an organization, such biases restrict rather than foster real human integrative interaction.

Misuses

A pattern emerges as we see the uses and misuses of AI in a variety of communication contexts. The use of AI is its speed and ability to see patterns. The misuse is when humans forget that they are the master and fail to complete their due diligence in reading, reviewing, and correcting the work done by a machine. It may be that the most prevalent misuse of AI is within organizations where speed, clarity of expression, and range of research are prized. The subordinate who wants to advance may be tempted to submit a report that has not been properly and thoroughly reviewed. At first glance, the results may be impressive. But if there are errors or hallucinations in the AI reply, the final result will compromise organizational integrity.

To use a phrase attributed to many machines over the years, AI is a great servant but a very poor master. It can be used under human oversight to give those humans new ideas about interactions. But when unverified, the results of AI work can undermine the very components of communication that we seek.

Relational Intercultural Discipleship Communication and AI

When we look at AI in communication, one important area is in teaching. In Christian terms, teaching is closely related to the idea of discipleship. How, then, can AI be a help to discipleship, and how can it be misused in that core area of Christian ministry?

Uses

There are two ways that AI can be of significant use in intercultural discipleship. The first is in the realm of research. AI tools can quickly find resources both within the text of Scripture and in the corpus of Christian literature to bring light to a disciple-maker and his/her disciples. It is that ability to review vast amounts of material in seconds that makes AI a powerful tool for discipleship.

AI can also help point to cultural tendencies that might affect the interaction between two people from different cultures. A wise use of queries might allow an AI-using disciple maker, for instance, to be aware of the cultural patterns of his/her disciples related to worldview issues or communication patterns.

But as seen repeatedly, AI is not able to foster healthy human to human relationships. Even more in Christian discipleship, AI is incapable of entering vertical relationships. If the machine is not able to know God, how could it be consulted by the human beings who are seeking God? The machine, in fact, gives a false sense of response. We are invited to seek, to knock, to ask. An invitation given by God Himself. When that invitation is neglected and instead there is consultation with a machine, are we not becoming idolaters? Humans are expected to point one another to the God in whom we live and move and have our being. Vertical and horizontal interactions which lead to growth in faith and knowledge are at the heart of discipleship, and it occurs as one person who knows God helps another to grow deeper in their knowledge of God.

Misuses

In discipleship, we want genuine relational interaction between two or more people (horizontal relationship) that deepens the faith, obedience, worship, and love of people toward the Triune God (vertical relationship). It is a misuse of AI technology to believe that a prayer or a sermon or a hymn that is created by an agnostic machine will become the instrument of God's Spirit to facilitate spiritual growth. It is a misuse of AI to make the mistake to over-simplify discipleship as a matter of words (which AI can generate) when in fact discipleship is a matter of truth and life and relationship (which AI cannot generate). AI tools used by caring humans and pointing to their human relationship with God can help in the research of sermons and worship sets. But it is the human element, not the AI element, that builds genuine interaction.

Broadcast Media Communication Across Cultures and AI

Uses

AI can generate words and it can likewise generate strikingly beautiful visual and auditory presentations. It creates those presentations by, once again, identifying and manipulating the data used to train it. One legitimate use of AI is to create presentations and sounds that capture an idea which the author/presenter wishes to communicate.

Those same powerful presentations generated by AI carry risks. First, when the human author of content asks AI to create a visual or auditory presentation, the AI machine will incorporate that content into its training corpus. The material may cease to be exclusively the intellectual property of the human author – it now belongs to the AI machine that received it. Ongoing legal battles over copyright and intellectual ownership

questions will continue as humans are slow to read the "fine print" of their AI agreements.

The creative power of AI is not concerned with integrative nor with interactive communication. It is only concerned with output of a visual or auditory product. The product can be truly beautiful, but if it undermines human relationships (horizontal or vertical) then it is no longer a legitimate form of Christian communication.

Misuses

There are two ways that AI is (mis)used for clearly wrong reasons. First is the unauthorized use of the likeness of a person. AI can be used to falsify information. Any semblance of this is clearly a misuse of the technology from a Christian perspective. "You shall not bear false witness" surely includes "do not falsify records or reports."

Secondly, AI is misused in mass media when it uses other people's work without giving proper credit where credit is due. This has been mentioned previously with written work. It is just as true in mass media situations where a poem, a story, a visual, or a sound is presented as original work when in fact it was found online by an AI bot. Giving credit where it is due is a responsibility of humans in the age of AI.

THEOLOGICAL/MISSIOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND AI

Uses

The uses of AI in theological/missiological education have been discussed earlier in this article. We talked about using AI to identify possible sources for research. We also quoted Walker Tzeng's three useful ways to use AI in producing theological material.

Misuses

Misuses of AI have also been presented already. These misuses include using sources identified by AI but not verified as true sources, using summaries and small segments that AI offers without going back to the original source to see if AI has taken the information out of context, etc. Since a language model haphazardly stitches together sequences of linguistic forms…according to probabilistic information… but without any reference to meaning,[17] AI can stitch together incorrect and even heretical theology, especially when data it was trained on contains false and heretical data, yet it can sound so plausible.

SUMMARY

As we have studied AI and its exponential growth and influence, one word keeps coming to mind, discernment. As missiologists, theologians, and educators, our task is to constantly be vigilant in our use of AI, our trust in AI, and the results that are generated from our prompts. We constantly need to come back to the Scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to all truth, (John 16:13).[18] With that sort of discernment in mind, how can AI be used in relational communication? Below we offer some summary statements on the wise and unwise ways that AI might be used.

Wise Uses

Use AI as a tool, not a master. Use it to augment relationships, but not as a tool used in isolation. Preaching, teaching, and the creation of art or music are all powerful uses to the extent that results are reviewed carefully by people and are used to augment personal and organizational relationships.

Use AI on its own server so that it limits the general spread of information. AI is best when trained on the very situation in which it will be used. James Hwang gives practical suggestions in his article "Next Generation" for wise use of AI. One of his suggestions is to run AI models on local hardware. He states, "By running AI models on local hardware, organizations reclaim data sovereignty and protect privacy."[19]

AI is a great research tool to find what resources might be available. Those resources need to be read with discernment.

Unwise Uses

1. It is unwise to use AI to create sermons or lessons without human oversight
2. It is unwise to use AI to create materials that are used in the absence of robust human relationships.
3. It is unwise to use AI as a way to create text, graphic or auditory materials, knowing that the AI machine itself then gains the rights to those materials.
4. It is unwise and unethical (if not illegal) to misuse AI to change images, to use others' work without giving credit, or in other ways to falsify work.

CONCLUSION

Part of what it means to be created in God's image is to share in God's ability to communicate. Part of what it means to be involved in God's mission is to communicate His truth to "every tribe, tongue, nation and people" (Rev 7:9). Part of human discernment is to distinguish between communication that edifies and that which destroys. We are called to communicate as part of our human interactions, and to communicate in ways that build up one another.

As human beings, we have both the privilege and the responsibility to communicate. This paper has considered the divine and human nature of communication and compared that with the man-centered communication that is displayed by generative AI and its Large Language Model (LLM). Our conclusion is that AI is incredibly fast at analyzing huge amounts of data. It is also very

17. See earlier quote by Emily Bender.

18. Hedinger, "In the Image of God and in the Image of Man," 13.

19. James Hwang, "Great Commission to Chinese and All Nations— How Can AI Help?," *China Source Journal* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2025): 26, chinasource.org.

effective at finding patterns. As stewards of time and resources, we do well to make use of those strengths. We also do well to reject the misuses of AI, particularly those that destroy interactive vertical and horizontal relationships.

AI has the appearance of human communication because it uses the same words, often more eloquently than a human speaker. The reality, though, is that there is neither a horizontal nor vertical relationship with an AI machine. The appearance of communication is simply an appearance, not matched by the relational interaction that is the mark of genuine communication. For that reason, discernment in the use of AI-generated material is advised. Furthermore, we do well to remember that AI, like any tool, has its proper uses. It can also be misused. The key to discernment of appropriate use vs misuse is whether it is facilitating genuine, healthy vertical and horizontal relationships. From that interactive, integrationist point of view, we recall that generative AI is a great servant, but a terrible master. Humans, created in the imago Dei and serving the missio Dei, must maintain a discerning attitude to use what is good and reject what is bad from generative AI.

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