



Artificial intelligence and doctrinal authority: Emerging ethical and theological questions for the Church in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and doctrinal authority in the context of the Church of Ghana. The increasing use of AI in sermon preparation, biblical interpretation, theological research, and religious communication has raised important theological and ethical concerns regarding the integrity of Christian doctrine and the legitimacy of machine-assisted theological content. The study specifically explored how AI influences theological interpretation, the ethical issues associated with AI-generated religious content, and how churches should respond to AI-driven theological tools. The study was underpinned by Hermeneutical Theory and Technological Determinism Theory and grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. It used a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nineteen purposively selected participants, including pastors, church leaders, seminary lecturers, theological educators, and theological students. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that AI is increasingly being used in sermon structuring, biblical explanation, theological research, contextual communication, and comparative doctrinal synthesis. However, the study also found that AI-generated religious content raises serious concerns related to doctrinal inconsistency, authorship and authenticity, overdependence, misinformation, and spiritual disconnection. The study concludes that while AI may serve as a useful assistive tool in ministry and theological education, it cannot function as a source of doctrinal authority. The paper recommends doctrinal oversight, digital theological literacy, and ethical guidelines for the use of responsible AI in Christian contexts.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Doctrinal Authority, Theological Ethics, Biblical Interpretation, Church in Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping how knowledge is produced, accessed, interpreted, and communicated across many sectors of society. Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and similar large language models are increasingly being used to generate text, summarize information, provide

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explanations, and simulate human-like reasoning.¹ While these technologies have gained significant attention in education, business, healthcare, and governance, their growing use within religion and theology introduces a new and important area of concern. Once AI begins to assist in sermon preparation, biblical interpretation, theological writing, and doctrinal communication, it raises questions that go beyond technical efficiency into matters of authority, authenticity, and spiritual responsibility.²

Theological interpretation within Christianity has traditionally been understood as a deeply human, spiritual, and ecclesial activity. It is rooted in Scripture, shaped by doctrinal tradition, guided by faith communities, and, in many Christian traditions, informed by the work of the Holy Spirit.³ Interpretation is therefore not simply the production of explanations or summaries; it is a process of discerning truth faithfully within the life of the Church. In this sense, the increasing use of AI in theological work presents a significant challenge. AI systems are capable of generating coherent and persuasive religious content, yet they do so without spiritual discernment, doctrinal commitment, or ecclesial accountability. This creates a tension between technological convenience and theological integrity.

In contemporary Christian practice, AI is already being used in practical and visible ways. Ministers and theological students increasingly rely on AI tools to structure sermons, explain biblical passages, summarize theological arguments, and assist with academic writing.⁴ These uses offer clear advantages in terms of speed, accessibility, and convenience. However, they also raise critical concerns. If AI-generated content becomes more common in preaching, teaching, and theological formation, there is a risk that doctrinal explanation may become increasingly detached from the prayerful study, spiritual burden, and disciplined theological reflection that have historically shaped Christian ministry.⁵ Therefore, the issue is not simply whether AI can be useful, but whether its use may gradually alter the conditions under which Christian truth is interpreted and communicated.

This concern becomes particularly important when considered through the lens of doctrinal authority. In Christian theology, doctrinal authority refers to the legitimate basis upon which theological truth is defined, interpreted, and transmitted.⁶ While Scripture remains central, its interpretation is mediated through clergy, theological institutions, confessional traditions, and communities of faith. In Ghanaian Christianity, especially within Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, doctrinal authority is strongly tied to preaching, spiritual discernment, and ministerial responsibility.⁷ The pastor is not only expected to speak persuasively but also to communicate divine truth faithfully and under spiritual guidance. The growing use of AI in theological and ministerial tasks therefore raises a pressing question: Can a machine-generated system participate meaningfully in a domain historically governed by spiritual responsibility and ecclesial authority? The Ghanaian context makes this issue especially relevant. Christianity occupies a central place in the religious and social life of Ghana, and preaching remains one of the most influential means through which doctrine is communicated and spiritual life is shaped.⁸ At the same time, digital technologies are becoming more embedded in ministry, education, and church communication.⁹ This means that the Church in Ghana is

¹ Chew-Hung Chang and Gillian Kidman, "The Rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Language Models-Challenges and Opportunities for Geographical and Environmental Education," *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 32, no. 2 (2023): 85–89.

² Christos Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 563.

³ Myk Habets, "Theological Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 23, no. 2 (2021): 235–58.

⁴ G. M Naidoo and A Nicolaides, "Prospects and Challenges in Artificial Intelligence Use and the Christian Faith: Augustinian and Other Considerations," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 4 (2025).

⁵ Wiesław Przygoda, Alina Rynio, and Michał Kalisz, "Artificial Intelligence: A New Challenge for Human Understanding, Christian Education, and the Pastoral Activity of the Churches," *Religions* 16, no. 8 (2025): 948.

⁶ Richard R Gaillardetz, "The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church* (Routledge, 2017), 107–26.

⁷ Isaac Ayisi-Kumi, "A Theological and Missiological Study of the Role of the Miraculous in the Doctrinal Beliefs and Practices of the Church of Pentecost, Ghana" (Stellenbosch University, 2025).

⁸ Joshua Awienagua Gariba and Bernard Kwame Assenyoh, "Syncretism and Inculturation.: The Encounter Between Christian Theology and Ghanaian Religious Culture," *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 13, no. 1 (2023): 5–22.

⁹ Victor S Gedzi, "Digital Transformation and Changes in Religious Communication of Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Ghana," *Journal of Indigenous and Shamanic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–15.

increasingly likely to encounter both the opportunities and the dangers associated with AI-driven theological tools. However, scholarly attention to this issue remains limited, particularly within African and Ghanaian theological contexts.

Against this background, this study examines the relationship between artificial intelligence and doctrinal authority in the Church in Ghana. Specifically, it seeks to explore how AI influences theological interpretation, identify ethical issues arising from AI-generated religious content, and examine how churches should respond to AI-driven theological tools. The study argues that although AI may serve as a useful assistive tool in ministry and theological work, it cannot function as a source of doctrinal authority because it lacks spiritual agency, theological accountability, and ecclesial legitimacy. In doing so, the study contributes to emerging conversations on digital theology, Christian ethics, and the future of doctrinal integrity in an age increasingly shaped by intelligent technologies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Definitions

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computational systems designed to perform tasks associated with human cognition, including language generation, pattern recognition, summarization, and decision support. Recent advances in generative AI and large language models have made AI increasingly relevant in education, communication, and knowledge production.¹⁰ Within religious contexts, AI is no longer limited to technical or administrative functions. It is increasingly used for sermon drafting, Bible study assistance, theological explanation, and doctrinal summaries, thereby entering spaces historically shaped by human interpretation and ecclesial authority.¹¹

Theological interpretation refers to the process through which Scripture and Christian doctrine are understood, explained, and applied within the life of the Church. It involves not only textual analysis but also historical context, doctrinal coherence, spiritual discernment, and communal accountability.¹² In many Christian traditions, especially within Pentecostal and Charismatic settings, theological interpretation is understood as an intellectual and spiritual act guided by the Holy Spirit.¹³ This is important because AI-generated outputs may imitate theological language without participating in the spiritual and ecclesial dimensions of interpretation.

Doctrinal authority is the legitimacy through which Christian truth is defined, interpreted, and transmitted. While Scripture remains central, doctrinal authority is mediated through clergy, theological institutions, confessional traditions, and believing communities.¹⁴ In Ghanaian Christianity, especially within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, doctrinal authority is strongly tied to preaching, spiritual leadership, and faithful biblical teaching. Therefore, AI-generated religious content raises important questions about whether machine-produced theological material can be relied upon in matters of doctrine.

AI-generated religious content includes sermons, devotionals, Bible study notes, theological explanations, and doctrinal summaries produced wholly or partly through AI systems. Although this content may be rhetorically convincing and easily accessible, it may also contain doctrinal inconsistency, shallow interpretation, or misleading theological synthesis.¹⁵ This makes AI-generated religious content an important area of theological and ethical concern.

Empirical Review

How does artificial intelligence influence theological interpretation?

Emerging scholarship suggests that AI is increasingly influencing theological interpretation by reshaping how religious actors access, organize, and explain theological knowledge. Studies on AI and religion show

¹⁰ Chang and Kidman, "Rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence," 85–89.

¹¹ Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Interpretation," 275–285.

¹² Habets, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture," 235–258.

¹³ Habets, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture," 235–258.

¹⁴ Gaillardetz, "Reception of Doctrine," 107–126.

¹⁵ Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education: Ethical, Pedagogical, and Theological Perspectives," 563.

that AI is being used for scriptural explanation, theological support, and digital religious engagement in ways that affect both learning and ministry.¹⁶ Shanahan and Parker observe that AI is becoming relevant in religious education and theological pedagogy because of its efficiency, accessibility, and ability to simplify complex material.¹⁷ Similarly, Putrawan argues that AI is already influencing theology and religious life by mediating scriptural interpretation and theological explanation in digital contexts.¹⁸ These studies suggest that AI is not simply helping people interpret theology faster, but is also changing the habits and assumptions through which interpretation occurs.

What ethical issues arise from AI-generated religious content?

A growing body of literature identifies significant ethical concerns surrounding AI-generated content. One major issue is that generative AI can produce fluent but misleading outputs that appear authoritative even when they are inaccurate or poorly grounded.¹⁹ In theological settings, this creates the risk of doctrinal distortion, misinformation, and misplaced trust. Scholars have also raised concerns about authenticity, authorship, and the weakening of intellectual and spiritual discipline. Hermanto notes that AI presents important challenges for theology in relation to knowledge, personhood, and authority.²⁰ Similarly, Sugiri argues that although AI may support theological and educational work, it must be approached with ethical caution and strong human oversight.²¹ These studies indicate that the ethical issues surrounding AI in religion are not only technical but also deeply theological and ministerial.

How should churches respond to AI-driven theological tools?

Existing literature suggests that churches and theological institutions should respond to AI with critical engagement rather than total rejection or uncritical acceptance. Chanda argues that religious communities must assess AI not only for its usefulness but also for its implications for authority, authenticity, and spiritual life.²² Papakostas recommends the development of ethical frameworks, educational guidance, and institutional oversight to govern the use of AI in religious settings.²³ Studies on digital religion and church innovation also show that church leaders tend to view digital tools as useful supplements rather than replacements for embodied ministry and doctrinal leadership. This implies that churches should respond to AI by establishing theological boundaries, improving digital literacy, and preserving human spiritual responsibility in matters of doctrine and ministry.²⁴

Gap in Literature

Although existing scholarship has contributed to the study of AI and religion, several important gaps remain. First, much of the literature discusses AI in relation to religion broadly but gives limited attention to doctrinal

¹⁶ A Dan Kia and Gilbert Timothy Majesty, "Transformation of Christian Religious Education with Artificial Intelligence: Building a Spiritual Future in the Digital World," *International Journal of Christian Education and Philosophical Inquiry* 2, no. 3 (2025): 34–41.

¹⁷ Chloe Shanahan and Luke Parker, "What Are the Theological and Pedagogical Impacts of the Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Catholic Religious Education (RE)?," in *Innovative Educational Assessment with Generative AI: Opportunities, Challenges, and Practical Case Studies* (Springer, 2025), 299–316.

¹⁸ Manotar Tampubolon and Bernadetha Nadeak, "Artificial Intelligence and Understanding of Religion: A Moral Perspective," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 11, no. 8 (2024): 903–14.

¹⁹ S Balasubramaniam et al., "The Road Ahead: Emerging Trends, Unresolved Issues, and Concluding Remarks in Generative AI—a Comprehensive Review," *International Journal of Intelligent Systems* 2024 (2024).

²⁰ Yanto P Hermanto, "Imago Dei and Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Inquiry into Personhood and Human Ontological Boundaries," *HTS Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2025): 1–6.

²¹ Widjaja Sugiri, "Moral Dimensions of Artificial Intelligence," *MODERATE: Journal of Religious, Education, and Social* 1, no. 2 (May 30, 2024): 117–36, <https://doi.org/10.46362/moderate.v1i2.8>.

²² Armstrong Chanda, "Religion and Technology: Ethical Implications of Integrating Artificial Intelligence into Religious Practice and Experience," *IJOESH Indonesian Journal of Religion Spirituality and Humanity* 4, no. 1 (June 29, 2025): 25–54, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijoes.v4i1.25-54>.

²³ Papakostas, "Artificial Intelligence in Religious Education."

²⁴ Godspower Ugboh, "The Church and Techno-Theology: A Paradigm Shift of Theology and Theological Practice to Overcome Technological Disruptions," *Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology* 3, no. 2 (2023): 59–78.

authority as a specific theological concern. Second, many studies focus on education, communication, or digital religion generally, with less attention to how AI-generated religious content may affect theological interpretation and ministerial authenticity. Third, empirical work remains limited within African Christianity, and even less within the Ghanaian church context, where preaching, doctrinal fidelity, and spiritual discernment remain central to Christian life. This study addresses these gaps by offering a qualitative and contextually grounded analysis of artificial intelligence and doctrinal authority within contemporary Christianity in Ghana.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hermeneutical Theory and Technological Determinism Theory underpin this study. Hermeneutical Theory is relevant because the central concern of the study is interpretation. Hermeneutics emphasizes that meaning is not mechanically extracted from a text but emerges through the interaction between text, interpreter, context, tradition, and community.²⁵ In Christian theology, this process is further shaped by doctrinal commitments and, in many traditions, spiritual discernment. Hermeneutical Theory, therefore, helps explain why AI may generate plausible biblical explanations without truly engaging in theological interpretation as understood within the Church.

Technological Determinism Theory complements this by explaining how technology can shape human behavior, institutional practice, and social thought. The theory suggests that technological developments are not merely neutral tools but can actively reshape the environments within which people think and act.²⁶ Applied to this study, it helps explain how AI may be changing theological workflows, interpretive habits, and even perceptions of authority within Christian communities. Together, these theories provide a useful lens for understanding both the interpretive and institutional implications of AI in theological spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which is concerned with understanding how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences and social realities.²⁷ The paradigm was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore how church leaders, theological educators, and other relevant participants understand and interpret the growing role of artificial intelligence in relation to doctrinal authority, theological interpretation, and ethical responsibility within Christian contexts. Since the issues surrounding AI and doctrinal integrity are deeply subjective, context-dependent, and meaning-laden, the interpretivist stance provided a suitable philosophical foundation for the inquiry.

Consistent with this paradigm, the study used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for studies that seek rich, in-depth, and context-sensitive insights into beliefs, perceptions, and experiences.²⁸ In this study, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore participants' views on the influence of AI on theological interpretation, the ethical concerns associated with AI-generated religious content, and how churches should respond to AI-driven theological tools.

The study adopted a phenomenological research design, which focuses on understanding the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals.²⁹ This design was appropriate because the study examined lived perceptions and theological reflections of participants on the use of artificial intelligence in ministry, theological education, and doctrinal communication. Instead of treating AI merely as a technological

²⁵ Leah Tomkins and Virginia Eatough, "Hermeneutics: Interpretation, Understanding and Sense-Making," *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*, 2018, 185–200.

²⁶ Jack Myers, "Technological Determinism Theory: Media as a Driver of Social Change," in *Media Ecology for the 21st Century: Theories of Culture, Communications, and Consciousness* (Springer, 2025), 47–66.

²⁷ Nasrin Pervin and Mahani Mokhtar, "The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 11, no. 2 (2022): 419–28.

²⁸ Seong Man Park, "Qualitative Research Methods in Ethnic Communities," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (2025): 34–52.

²⁹ Adetayo Olaniyi Adeniran and Oluwadamisi Tayo-Ladega, "Critical Analysis of Phenomenological Research Design in a Qualitative Research Method," *Management Analytics and Social Insights* 1, no. 2 (2024): 186–96.

development, the study explored how it is experienced and interpreted within theological and ecclesial practice of Christianity.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify information-rich individuals who can provide relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation.³⁰ The study included pastors, church leaders, seminary lecturers, theological educators, and theological students who were considered capable of offering informed perspectives on the use of AI in theological and ministerial contexts. A total of nineteen (19) participants were interviewed. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where data collection continued until substantially new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.³¹

Primary data were collected through the use of an interview guide that contained open-ended questions aligned with the research questions of the study. The interview guide allowed participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and theological reflections in their own words while allowing the researcher to probe further where necessary.³²

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed and read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then developed from recurring ideas and significant statements. These codes were grouped into broader themes and subthemes based on conceptual similarity and relevance to the research questions. Thematic analysis was considered suitable because it allowed the researcher to identify and interpret the major ethical and theological patterns emerging from participants' accounts.³³ Overall, the methodology provided a contextually grounded and theologically sensitive basis for examining the relationship between artificial intelligence and doctrinal authority in the Church in Ghana.

Ethical principles guided all stages of this study. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identities were protected using numerical identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) instead of personal names. Interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. The researcher also ensured that participants were not exposed to any physical, psychological, or reputational harm during the research process.

Participant Demographic Profile

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	15
	Female	4
Age	25–34 years	5
	35–44 years	7
	45–54 years	5
	55 years and above	2
Category	Pastors	7
	Church Leaders	4

³⁰ Ezezi Isaac Obilor, "Convenience and Purposive Sampling Techniques: Are They the Same," *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research* 11, no. 1 (2023): 1–7.

³¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "To Saturate or Not to Saturate? Questioning Data Saturation as a Useful Concept for Thematic Analysis and Sample-Size Rationales," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 13, no. 2 (2021): 201–16.

³² Nuzhat Naz, Fozia Gulab, and Mahnaz Aslam, "Development of Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Case Study Research," *Competitive Social Science Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2022): 42–52.

³³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Can I Use TA? Should I Use TA? Should I Not Use TA? Comparing Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Other Pattern-based Qualitative Analytic Approaches," *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 21, no. 1 (2021): 37–47.

	Seminary Lecturers	3
	Theological Educators	2
	Theological Students	3
Christian Tradition	Pentecostal	9
	Charismatic	4
	Mainline Protestant	4
	Evangelical	2

The study involved nineteen participants representing diverse ministerial and theological backgrounds. This diversity enhanced the richness of the data by providing multiple perspectives on the influence of artificial intelligence on theological interpretation and doctrinal authority within the Ghanaian Christian context.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Table 2: Summary of Themes Emerging from the Study

Research Question	Themes
How is AI influencing theological interpretation?	Sermon structuring; Biblical explanation; Theological research; Language and contextualization; Comparative theology; Interpretive shallowness
What ethical issues arise from AI-generated religious content?	Doctrinal inconsistency; Authorship and authenticity; Overdependence; Misinformation and accountability; Spiritual disconnection
How should churches respond?	AI as assistive; Doctrinal oversight; Digital theological literacy; Institutional guidelines; Spiritual discernment; Balanced theology of technology

Research Question One: How is artificial intelligence influencing theological interpretation?

Analysis of interview data indicates that artificial intelligence is actively reshaping theological interpretation in ministerial, academic, and personal contexts. Participants described both enabling and constraining effects. Six themes emerged: (1) AI as a tool for sermon structuring, (2) AI as an aid to biblical explanation, (3) AI as a rapid research and synthesis engine, (4) AI as a language and contextualization assistant, (5) AI as a comparative theology aggregator, and (6) concerns about interpretive shallowness and loss of spiritual discernment.

AI as a Tool for Sermon Structuring

A dominant pattern across the interviews was the use of AI to quickly structure sermons. Participants reported using AI to generate outlines, organize key points, and suggest supporting scriptures.

“When I have the topic, AI helps me organize my thoughts into points. It gives me a structure, then I pray and refine it.” (Participant 3, Pastor)

Another pastor noted the practical value in busy ministry schedules:

“Sometimes you are handling many responsibilities. AI helps you with the framework, but the message must still come from God.” (Participant 11, Church Leader)

Although this use was largely viewed as acceptable, participants stressed that structure should not replace spiritual preparation.

AI as an Aid to Biblical Explanation

Participants, especially students and younger ministers, described AI as a helpful tool for simplifying difficult biblical texts and theological concepts.

"If I don't understand a passage, I ask AI to explain it. It gives me a basic understanding before I go deeper into commentaries." (Participant 7, Theological Student)

A lecturer confirmed this trend:

"Students now use AI to break down complex theological ideas. It is helpful at the basic level, but it should not be the final source." (Participant 2, Seminary Lecturer)

AI, therefore, functions as an entry-level interpretive assistant, particularly for initial engagement with Scripture.

AI as a Rapid Research and Synthesis Engine

Another strong theme was using AI to accelerate theological research. Participants indicated that AI helps summarize materials, generate ideas, and provide quick overviews of doctrinal topics.

"Instead of reading many books, some people now use AI to summarize everything. It saves time, but it reduces depth." (Participant 9, Theological Educator)

A student echoed this:

"It helps me get ideas quickly for assignments, especially when I don't know where to start." (Participant 18, Theological Student)

This reveals a shift toward speed and convenience in theological inquiry, with implications for depth of study.

AI as a Language and Contextualization Assistant

Participants also highlighted AI's role in improving clarity, language, and communication of theological ideas. This was especially relevant in multilingual and diverse congregational contexts.

"Sometimes AI helps to simplify language so that the congregation can understand better, especially when dealing with complex doctrines." (Participant 6, Church Leader)

Another participant noted its usefulness for contextualization:

"You can ask AI to explain something in a way that fits your audience. That is helpful, especially when preaching to different groups." (Participant 10, Pastor)

This suggests that AI is influencing not just interpretation, but also how theology is communicated and contextualized.

AI as a Comparative Theology Aggregator

Several participants observed that AI brings together multiple theological perspectives in a single response. Although this can broaden understanding, it also introduces interpretive complexity.

"AI can give you different views on a topic—Pentecostal, Reformed, and others—but it does not tell you which one aligns with your doctrine." (Participant 12, Seminary Lecturer)

Another participant added:

"It exposes you to many interpretations at once, but if you are not grounded, it can confuse you." (Participant 1, Pastor)

This indicates that AI functions as a comparative aggregator, exposing users to diverse theological positions without doctrinal filtering.

Concerns about Interpretive Shallowness and Loss of Spiritual Discernment

Despite the benefits, participants consistently raised concerns about the depth and spiritual quality of AI-assisted interpretation. Many emphasized that theological interpretation requires more than information.

"AI can give you information, but it cannot give you revelation. It does not have the Spirit of God." (Participant 5, Pastor)

Another participant warned:

"If we rely too much on AI, we may lose the habit of deep study and waiting on God for insight." (Participant 14, Church Leader)

A lecturer further noted:

“Students may begin to accept answers without questioning them. That weakens critical and theological thinking.” (Participant 4, Seminary Lecturer)

This theme captures the central tension: Although AI enhances access and efficiency, it risks reducing the depth, discipline, and spiritual dimension of theological interpretation.

Research Question Two: What ethical issues arise from AI-generated religious content?

The analysis of participants’ responses revealed that the use of AI-generated religious content raises serious ethical concerns within Christian ministry and theological practice. Participants did not merely view AI as a technical innovation; they perceived it as a tool with the potential to alter ministerial integrity, doctrinal trust, and spiritual accountability. Five major themes emerged from the interviews: (1) doctrinal inconsistency and theological distortion, (2) authorship and authenticity concerns, (3) overdependence and erosion of theological discipline, (4) misinformation, trust, and accountability, and (5) spiritual and ministerial disconnection.

Doctrinal Inconsistency and Theological Distortion

A major concern raised by participants was that AI-generated religious content may contain doctrinal inconsistencies or distortions. Participants observed that AI systems often draw from multiple theological traditions without clearly distinguishing between them, thereby increasing the risk of doctrinal confusion.

“AI does not know your church doctrine. It just gives you what is available from many sources. If you are not careful, you can preach something that is not in line with your denomination.” (Participant 12, Seminary Lecturer)

Another participant emphasized the danger of theological blending:

“Sometimes it will mix Pentecostal ideas with Reformed views and even Catholic explanations in one answer. If the pastor is not grounded, he can easily carry error to the pulpit.” (Participant 1, Pastor)

This theme reflects the ethical concern that AI-generated content may compromise doctrinal purity and lead to uncritical transmission of theological error.

Authorship and Authenticity Concerns

Another recurring issue was authorship and authenticity in ministry. Participants expressed discomfort with the idea that AI substantially generates sermons, devotionals, or theological reflections while still presenting them as if they emerged from the minister’s own spiritual preparation and reflection.

“If a sermon is generated by AI, then we must ask: who actually prepared the message? The pastor or the machine?” (Participant 6, Church Leader)

A pastor also framed the issue spiritually:

“Ministry is not only about speaking well. It is about carrying a burden from God. If AI is doing too much of the work, then the authenticity of the message becomes questionable.” (Participant 10, Pastor)

For many participants, the ethical issue here was not only originality in the academic sense, but also spiritual sincerity and ministerial honesty.

Overdependence and Erosion of Theological Discipline

Participants also warned that frequent reliance on AI may weaken the discipline required for serious theological engagement. This concern was raised particularly in relation to ministers and theological students who may become increasingly dependent on AI for ready-made answers rather than engaging in rigorous study, prayerful reflection, and exegetical work.

“Some students are now depending too much on AI. They no longer want to struggle with the text or wrestle with doctrine.” (Participant 4, Seminary Lecturer)

Another participant extended this concern to pastoral ministry:

“A pastor who depends too much on AI may stop doing the hard work of Bible study. That can make ministry shallow over time.” (Participant 15, Pastor)

This theme points to the ethical risk that AI may foster convenience at the expense of spiritual discipline, critical reflection, and theological maturity.

Misinformation, Trust, and Accountability

Participants also highlighted the danger of AI-generated misinformation and the ethical complications that arise when inaccurate theological content is presented with confidence. Several participants noted that AI often produces responses that sound authoritative even when they are factually or doctrinally incorrect.

“The dangerous thing is that AI can sound very convincing, even when what it is saying is wrong. If someone does not verify, it can mislead many people.” (Participant 8, Theological Student)

A seminary lecturer added:

“The issue is not only that AI can be wrong. The bigger issue is that many users trust it too quickly because it sounds intelligent.” (Participant 2, Seminary Lecturer)

This raised an important concern about accountability. Participants questioned who should bear responsibility when AI-generated religious content contains misleading or harmful teaching.

“At the end of the day, the pastor is responsible. You cannot blame the machine before God or before the congregation.” (Participant 13, Church Leader)

This theme reveals that trust in AI-generated content may outpace verification, thereby creating serious ethical and pastoral risks.

Spiritual and Ministerial Disconnection

A final ethical concern emerging from the interviews was the possibility that AI may create a subtle disconnection between ministers and the spiritual processes traditionally associated with theological preparation. Participants emphasized that preaching, teaching, and doctrinal communication are not merely technical outputs but spiritual acts shaped by prayer, discernment, and dependence on God.

“You can prepare a message with AI, but can AI kneel and pray? Can it hear from God? That is where the danger is.” (Participant 5, Pastor)

Another participant expressed concern that AI could gradually replace spiritual waiting with technological speed:

“In our context, some of us believe that messages are birthed through prayer and communion with God. If AI takes over that process, then ministry becomes too mechanical.” (Participant 17, Church Leader)

This theme points to a deeper ethical and theological tension: the risk that AI may not only influence content but also alter the spiritual character of ministerial preparation and theological communication.

Research Question Three: How should churches respond to AI-driven theological tools?

The third research question explored how churches should respond to the growing use of AI-driven theological tools within ministry, theological education, and doctrinal communication. Participants did not advocate a complete rejection of artificial intelligence. Rather, they consistently called for a cautious, guided, and theologically responsible response. Six major themes emerged from the interview data: (1) AI should remain assistive rather than authoritative, (2) churches need doctrinal oversight and review mechanisms, (3) ministers and theological students require digital theological literacy, (4) denominational and institutional guidelines are necessary, (5) spiritual discernment must remain central, and (6) churches must cultivate a balanced theology of technology.

AI Should Remain Assistive Rather Than Authoritative

A dominant theme in the interviews was the insistence that AI should be treated as a support tool rather than as a source of doctrinal authority. Participants generally accepted that AI may be useful for administrative

tasks, content organization, language refinement, and preliminary theological exploration. However, they strongly rejected the idea that AI should determine doctrine, shape final theological interpretation, or replace ministerial discernment.

“AI can help you organize your thoughts, but it should never become the authority behind what the Church teaches.” (Participant 2, Seminary Lecturer)

A pastor similarly noted:

“It can assist the pastor, but it cannot replace the pastor. Doctrine must come from Scripture, prayer, and sound teaching, not from a machine.” (Participant 10, Pastor)

This theme reflects a broad consensus that churches must define AI as an aid, not an authority.

Churches Need Doctrinal Oversight and Review Mechanisms

Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for stronger doctrinal oversight in the use of AI-generated religious content. Many argued that any sermon, Bible study material, teaching note, or theological explanation generated with AI should be subjected to careful human review before being used publicly.

“Anything that comes from AI must be checked against Scripture and the doctrine of the Church before it is taught.” (Participant 13, Church Leader)

Another participant stressed the institutional dimension:

“The Church should not leave this matter to individual pastors alone. There must be some doctrinal checks in place.” (Participant 1, Pastor)

This theme suggests that churches should respond not merely through personal caution, but through intentional structures of accountability and review.

Ministers and Theological Students Require Digital Theological Literacy

A strong theme that emerged from the interviews was the need for what may be described as digital theological literacy. The participants argued that church leaders, seminary lecturers, and theological students must be equipped not only to use AI tools, but also to evaluate them critically and theologically.

“The problem is not only whether people use AI. The real issue is whether they know how to use it wisely.” (Participant 16, Theological Educator)

A seminary lecturer added:

“We need to train students to question what AI gives them, compare it with Scripture, and assess whether it is doctrinally sound.” (Participant 4, Seminary Lecturer)

Therefore, participants viewed education and discernment training as central to the Church’s response.

Denominational and Institutional Guidelines Are Necessary

Another major theme was the call for formal guidelines or policy frameworks to regulate the use of AI within churches and theological institutions. The participants believed that the increasing presence of AI in preaching, teaching, and theological education requires churches to develop clear ethical and doctrinal boundaries.

“The Church in Ghana needs a clear position on AI before it becomes a bigger problem. If we wait too long, people will use it anyhow.” (Participant 19, Pastor)

A church leader also observed:

“There should be guidelines on what is acceptable and what is not, especially in sermon preparation and theological teaching.” (Participant 6, Church Leader)

This theme reveals that participants saw policy development as an important preventative and guiding strategy.

Spiritual Discernment Must Remain Central

Participants consistently argued that churches must respond to AI in a way that protects the centrality of spiritual discernment. For many, the greatest danger of AI is not simply doctrinal error, but the possibility

that technological convenience may gradually displace prayer, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and sensitivity to divine direction.

“The Church must never get to the point where technology replaces waiting on God.” (Participant 5, Pastor)

Another participant stated:

“We can use tools, but the Spirit of God must still lead interpretation and preaching. Without that, ministry loses its power.” (Participant 17, Church Leader)

This theme demonstrates that the Church’s response to AI must remain deeply theological and spiritual, not just technical or administrative.

Churches Must Cultivate a Balanced Theology of Technology

A final theme that emerged was the need for a balanced and thoughtful theology of technology. The participants generally rejected two extremes: total rejection of AI and its uncritical acceptance. Instead, they advocated a more measured response that recognizes both the usefulness and the limitations of technology in ministry.

“The answer is not to demonize AI, and it is also not to embrace it blindly. The Church must engage it with wisdom.” (Participant 12, Seminary Lecturer)

Another participant explained:

“Technology is not the enemy, but every tool must be subjected to the values and convictions of the Church.” (Participant 11, Church Leader)

This theme suggests that churches need not fear technological development, but must engage it through doctrinal wisdom, ethical reflection, and spiritual maturity.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that artificial intelligence is increasingly influencing theological interpretation, raising significant ethical concerns and prompting the need for a theologically grounded ecclesial response. These findings can be understood through the lenses of Hermeneutical Theory and Technological Determinism Theory, both of which help explain the interpretive and institutional implications of AI within Christian contexts.

Regarding the first research question, the findings show that AI is influencing theological interpretation through sermon structuring, biblical explanation, theological research, contextual communication, and comparative theological synthesis. This finding aligns with existing literature that suggests that AI is increasingly shaping religious learning, theological explanation, and scriptural engagement in digital environments.³⁴ Oyewole observed that AI is becoming relevant in religious education due to its efficiency and accessibility,³⁵ while Umbrello noted that AI is gradually entering spaces of theological interpretation and religious practice.³⁶ These findings are well explained by Technological Determinism Theory, which argues that technology is not merely a neutral instrument but a force capable of reshaping human habits, institutional processes, and patterns of thought.³⁷ In this study, AI appears to be changing not only how theological content is accessed but also how interpretation is approached.

However, the findings also reveal concerns about interpretive shallowness and the weakening of spiritual discernment. This is where Hermeneutical Theory becomes especially relevant. Hermeneutics holds that interpretation is not simply extracting information from a text but a meaning-making process shaped by

³⁴ Ijuolachi Michael Raphael, “Religion/Theology in the Era of Globalization and Artificial Intelligence,” *Trinitarian: International Journal Of Arts And Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2025).

³⁵ Emmanuel Actor Oyewole, “Religion/Theology in the Era of Globalisation and Artificial Intelligence,” *Trinitarian: International Journal Of Arts And Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2025).

³⁶ Steven Umbrello, “The Intersection of Bernard Lonergan’s Critical Realism, the Common Good, and Artificial Intelligence in Modern Religious Practices,” *Religions* 14, no. 12 (2023): 1536.

³⁷ Jonas Hallström, “Embodying the Past, Designing the Future: Technological Determinism Reconsidered in Technology Education,” *International Journal of Technology and Design Education* 32, no. 1 (March 11, 2022): 17–31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-020-09600-2>.

context, tradition, community, and the interpreter.³⁸ In Christian theology, and particularly within Pentecostal traditions, interpretation is also tied to spiritual discernment and dependence on the Holy Spirit.³⁹ The findings therefore suggest that while AI may assist with textual and conceptual organization, it cannot replace the deeper theological and spiritual processes through which Christian interpretation is responsibly formed. Regarding the second research question, the study found that AI-generated religious content raises serious ethical concerns, particularly in relation to doctrinal inconsistency, authorship, overdependence, misinformation, and spiritual disconnection. These findings support existing literature on generative AI, which warns that AI systems often produce fluent but unreliable outputs that may appear authoritative despite lacking epistemic or doctrinal grounding.⁴⁰ Brittain similarly argues that AI poses serious theological and ethical concerns regarding truth, authority, and theological reliability.⁴¹ The findings suggest that in theological settings, the ethical challenge is not only about technical inaccuracy but about the possibility of doctrinal distortion and the erosion of ministerial authenticity.

From a theoretical standpoint, Hermeneutical Theory helps explain why these ethical concerns are so significant. Since theological meaning is shaped by interpretive responsibility and doctrinal accountability, AI-generated content that lacks confessional and ecclesial grounding may easily disrupt faithful theological communication. At the same time, Technological Determinism Theory helps explain the growing dependence on AI as a result of its speed, convenience, and persuasive fluency. The danger is that repeated dependence on AI may gradually normalize machine-assisted theology in ways that reduce theological discipline and weaken critical reflection.

Regarding the third research question, the findings show that the participants overwhelmingly support a cautious and guided church response to AI-driven theological tools. Participants emphasized that AI should remain assistive rather than authoritative, and that churches must establish doctrinal oversight, promote digital theological literacy, and preserve spiritual discernment. These findings are consistent with extant literature, which argues that churches and theological institutions should engage AI critically rather than either reject it outright or adopt it uncritically.⁴² Existing scholarship recommends ethical frameworks, institutional guidance, and human oversight to govern the use of AI in religious settings.⁴³

Theoretically, this finding reflects an important balance between the two underpinning theories. Technological Determinism Theory reminds the Church that technology can shape religious life if left unchecked, while Hermeneutical Theory insists that interpretation and doctrinal authority must remain rooted in faithful human stewardship. Taken together, the findings suggest that the Church in Ghana must not allow technological convenience to displace theological responsibility. AI may support ministry, but doctrinal authority must remain grounded in Scripture, ecclesial accountability, and Spirit-led discernment.

In summary, the study demonstrates that AI is already reshaping theological practice, but its influence must be critically governed. The Church's task is not only to use AI efficiently, but also to ensure that its use remains subordinate to doctrinal integrity, spiritual authenticity, and theological wisdom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed for churches, theological institutions, and Christian leaders in Ghana. First, churches should clearly position artificial intelligence as

³⁸ Cornelia Reiter and Karin Sardadvar, "Hermeneutics as a Method of Interpretation: Line by Line to the Reconstruction of Meaning," in *Handbook of Interpretive Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025), 242–58.

³⁹ Marius Nel, "Comparison between the Respective Views of John Calvin and Classical Pentecostals on the Role of the Holy Spirit in Reading the Bible," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 6327.

⁴⁰ M Mahbubi, "Digital Epistemology: Evaluating the Credibility of Knowledge Generated by AI," *YUDHISTIRA: Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2025): 8–18.

⁴¹ Necmi Karlı, "Ethical and Theological Problems Related to Artificial Intelligence," *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12, no. Din ve Yapay Zeka (2025): 1–19.

⁴² Umbrello, "Intersection of Bernard Lonergan's Critical Realism."

⁴³ Adedeji Daniel Gbadebo, "Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Religious Pedagogy in Nigeria: Legal and Policy Pathways for Churches with Implication for Post Covid Era," *Kościół i Prawo* 14, no. 1 (2025): 61–77.

an assistive tool rather than a source of doctrinal authority. Although AI may support sermon preparation, theological research, and content organization, final theological interpretation and doctrinal teaching must remain under the responsibility of spiritually and doctrinally accountable human leaders.

Second, churches and denominational bodies should establish doctrinal review mechanisms for AI-assisted religious content. Sermons, Bible study materials, devotionals, and theological explanations generated with the support of AI should be carefully reviewed to ensure consistency with Scripture and the doctrinal position of the Church.

Third, theological seminaries and Christian higher education institutions should integrate digital theological literacy into ministerial and theological training. Ministers and theological students should not only be equipped to use AI tools critically, but also to evaluate them critically, verify their outputs, and recognize their theological and ethical limitations.

Fourth, churches and theological institutions in Ghana should develop guidelines for the ethical use of AI in ministry and theological education. Such guidelines should address issues of transparency, doctrinal accountability, authorship, and responsible theological communication.

Finally, church leaders should intentionally preserve the place of prayer, personal Bible study, and spiritual discernment in theological preparation. The use of AI must never displace the spiritual disciplines and theological responsibility that underpin faithful ministry.

These recommendations are necessary to ensure that the growing use of AI in Christian contexts supports ministry without compromising doctrinal integrity and spiritual authenticity.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. First, the findings are based on interviews with nineteen participants selected through purposive sampling and therefore are not intended to be statistically generalizable to all Christian denominations in Ghana. Second, the study focused primarily on participants from selected theological and ministerial contexts, which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives in the wider Christian community. Third, the study explored perceptions of artificial intelligence rather than observing its actual use in ministerial practice. Future research could adopt mixed-methods or comparative designs involving multiple denominations, larger samples, and different African contexts to examine the long-term implications of AI for theological education, pastoral ministry, and doctrinal development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between artificial intelligence and doctrinal authority within the context of the Church in Ghana. The findings show that artificial intelligence is already influencing theological interpretation through sermon preparation, biblical explanation, theological research, contextual communication, and comparative doctrinal synthesis. At the same time, the study reveals that the use of AI-generated religious content raises significant ethical concerns, particularly in relation to doctrinal inconsistency, authorship and authenticity, overdependence, misinformation, and spiritual disconnection.

A major conclusion of the study is that artificial intelligence cannot be treated as a neutral tool when entering theological and ministerial spaces. Once AI begins to shape how Scripture is interpreted and how doctrine is communicated, it inevitably raises questions of authority, discernment, and accountability. Although AI may provide practical support in ministry and theological education, it does not possess spiritual agency, doctrinal consciousness, or ecclesial legitimacy. For this reason, it cannot function as a source of doctrinal authority within the Church.

The study further concludes that the challenge posed by AI is particularly important within the Ghanaian Christian context, where preaching, spiritual discernment, and doctrinal fidelity remain central to church life. Therefore, the future of AI in ministry will depend not only on what the technology can do, but on how responsibly and theologically the Church chooses to engage it.

Ultimately, doctrinal authority must remain grounded in Scripture, theological formation, ecclesial accountability, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Artificial intelligence may assist the Church, but it must never replace the human and spiritual responsibility of guarding and communicating divine truth.

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