SBC Heartbeat

Edifying the church & engaging the world

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CONNECT

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AI as a Double-Edged Sword for Education?

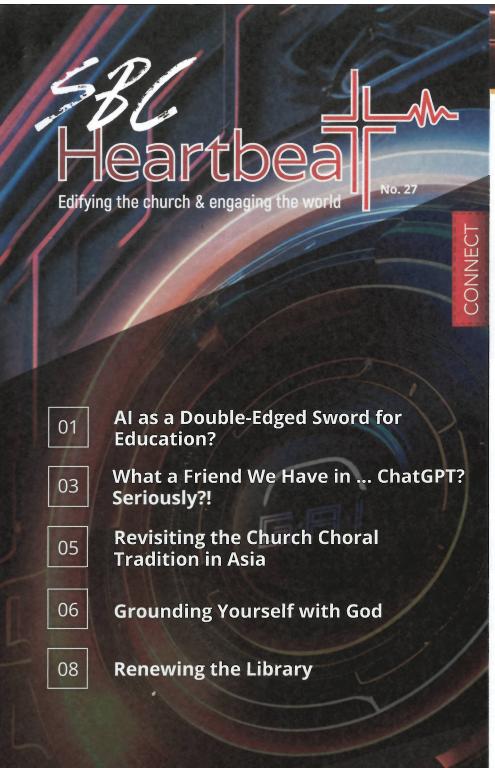**Me to a GAI bot:** What is GAI?

The GAI bot: GAI stands for "Generative Artificial Intelligence", referring to advanced computer technology that can create new and original content, such as text, images, or music, similar to what humans can do. It has the potential to revolutionize knowledge and creative work in various fields.

Whether you're ready or not, the GAI era has arrived. As a theological education institution entrusted by the church, it is essential for SBC to do theology for the church, to uphold the truth of the gospel, and to explore new areas of knowledge. In the face of the challenges to human endeavours posed by GAI, we need to recognize both the liberating potential of GAI and the need to uphold the essence and goal of theological education.

A double-edged sword for education

GAI is a double-edged sword for education. On the one hand, GAI has the potential to transform lives, especially for those who cannot access human tutors or face literacy challenges. It provides new avenues for acquiring knowledge, learning skills, and expressing ideas through text and imagery for resource-limited or less literate populations. It offers unprecedented opportunities for marginalized communities to participate in knowledge creation and democratizes education by giving equal opportunities to it.

Divine wisdom for theological education

On the other hand, GAI has been fuelling the spread of fake news and misinformation, exacerbating distrust of media and raising questions about the reliability of any textual and visual information. How do we face a world plagued by such doubts? Maria Ressa, the Filipino journalist who received the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, has put forward a powerful principle: only through truth-telling and defending truth can human society have a solid foundation of trust in information. How might we apply this principle to theological education?

Theological education is rooted in the pursuit of truth and living in accordance with the truth. Out of devotion to Christ, life in a diverse community is embraced, with the interactions, exchanges, and acts of service between teachers, students, and staff engendering the mutual trust that allows for the acquisition and protection of truth. Without trust and shared truth, we cannot navigate a rapidly changing world where truth and falsehood are mixed.

The global education community is actively discussing how to wield the double-edged sword of GAI. We as theological educators are also asking how to make good use of this tool safely. SBC established a project team six months ago to observe GAI's development and reflect on the opportunities and challenges. Key questions include, What is education? What are the goals of education? How can education be realized?

We also identified a key problem thanks to the work of educational thinker Parker Palmer: education is not only about imparting content, but also cultivating genuine relationships, which is essential for life transformation and knowledge renewal—so, although GAI transmits information, it diminishes the educational function of interpersonal relationships and the implementation of truth-centred learning in a community.

God's wisdom is characterized by perfect goodness, justice, love, and truth (Mic 6:8), which is acquired, nurtured, and formed by God's people within truth-seeking communities. When it comes to using GAI as an educational tool, divine wisdom must be our foundation for cultivating empathy, critical thinking, and spiritual character to shape a more complete and authentic humanity. To ensure the assimilation of God's wisdom, we are to listen to him and keep his ways daily (Prov 8:32–36). Learning and living out the truth in fellowship, we are to study God's Word "in the presence of God" (*coram Deo*), so that divine wisdom encompasses our thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives.

Our use of human wisdom, the foundation of GAI, must stem from our reverence for God, inculcated daily. It is through this reverence that we can distinguish between divine and human wisdom, and further differentiate between human wisdom and AI. Blurring the boundaries between God and humans has always led to the human delusion that we can be like gods. If we mindlessly replace humans with AI, it will lead to the reduction of humans to mere tools.

Education grounded in reverence for God is the essence and goal of theological education. The flourishing of GAI will bring about an unprecedented knowledge revolution. But theological education that places God's wisdom at the centre will cultivate reverence for God, allowing us to make use of the transformative power of GAI for theological education, while nurturing a learning community that seeks God's wisdom, emulates the life of Christ, and follows the path of the Cross.

Clement Chia

Rev. Dr. Clement Chia
Principal
Singapore Bible College

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN ... CHATGPT? SERIOUSLY?!

Like many schools, we at Singapore Bible College have been dealing with issues surrounding ChatGPT and Artificial Intelligence (AI). But in addition to the challenges (like plagiarism and cheating) and opportunities surrounding the educational processes, an added issue for seminaries is, **"Can we ask ChatGPT to write sermons?"**
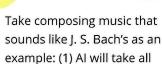
What?! Can ChapGPT write sermons?! Yes, it can—and in most cases, quite well. ChatGPT may not ably write one from Nahum (as it may not have any sources on the prophetic book). But ask, "Write a three-point Reformed sermon on Jesus the Good Shepherd," then the answer is yes, ChatGPT can indeed write a "good" sermon! In fact, when I asked ChatGPT to do this, it not only provided a three-point sermon, but also three subpoints for each point.
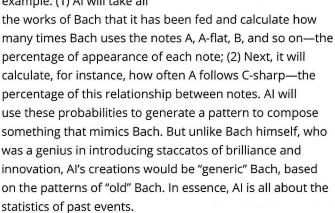
So, what issues underlie the answer to this question?

CHATGPT IS INCAPABLE OF TRULY NEW CREATIONS

First, it is important to understand that anything generated from ChatGPT—or any other AI program—does not create anything new. It only mimics whatever sources it draws from. Basically, AI takes all the sources it has been given, and calculates two things: (1) percentages of appearances of items and (2) relationships between items.

Take composing music that sounds like J. S. Bach's as an example: (1) AI will take all the works of Bach that it has been fed and calculate how many times Bach uses the notes A, A-flat, B, and so on—the percentage of appearance of each note; (2) Next, it will calculate, for instance, how often A follows C-sharp—the percentage of this relationship between notes. AI will use these probabilities to generate a pattern to compose something that mimics Bach. But unlike Bach himself, who was a genius in introducing staccatos of brilliance and innovation, AI's creations would be "generic" Bach, based on the patterns of "old" Bach. In essence, AI is all about the statistics of past events.

Likewise, though ChatGPT can generate a sermon, even a sermon that may sound good, the product is only a regurgitation of whatever databases of past sermons it has been fed. As I asked for a Reformed perspective, it will draw from Reformed sources. But if I ask for a Lutheran sermon, it will draw from Lutheran sources. In short, ChatGPT will give you whatever answer you want to hear.

Users must also realize that AI's sources are not limitless; sources are generally from the public domain and not up to the minute; ChatGPT-4 only draws from sources up till September 2021. Hence, ChatGPT-4 is unaware of articles on the Russian war on Ukraine or news after the COVID-19 pandemic. Of greater concern is that ChatGPT's products only reflect the predominant culture, race, and gender of its human creators at the AI company OpenAI and the sources that generate those products. So, if the programmers only use extremist sources, the answers will skew toward an extremist interpretation. As ChatGPT also draws from uncurated sources like online forums and volunteer-run sites such as Wikipedia, it has been known to generate "fake news" and outright "hallucinations" as it cannot discern truth from falsehoods. Currently, it is unclear what the rules of curating sources are for ChatGPT.

Consequently, if one chooses to use AI programs, one must recognize that the products only mimic flawed and sinful humanity. This is why we must heed the apostle John's warning to "not believe every spirit [read: AI], but test the spirits [AIs!] to see whether they are from God, because

many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1 NIV).

As I reflect on what AI produces, I am reminded of Ecclesiastes 1:9, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (KJV).

In contrast, only God can make new things (Rev 21:5). Only in Christ can humanity be recreated (2 Cor 5:17). Only the Holy Spirit can break old habits to free us from old patterns (Rom 7–8). Only divine inspiration into the human mind can result in new paradigms (see Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* or Daniel Boorstin's *The Creators: A History of Heroes of the Imagination*).

CHATGPT IS UNABLE TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Of greater concern, using ChatGPT excludes the Holy Spirit's work in human beings to evaluate with godly wisdom. Relying on ChatGPT limits the Holy Spirit's work in the preacher to integrate the latest happenings in the church and world contemporaneously with God's living Word to speak into the life of a particular congregation.

This is what John Stott in his book *Between Two Worlds* considers to be the primary role and responsibility of the preacher—to discern the application of Scripture through the lens of the biblical and the contemporary worlds. By relying wholly on ChatGPT, preachers remove themselves from being vessels for the work of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel in a manner that people can understand and be convicted by.

CHATGPT CAN BE A LIMITED HELPER TO HUMAN CREATIVITY

How then can we use ChatGPT to help us in our ministry and even in our spirituality? The strength of AI is that it can process massive amounts of data to help us see patterns more rapidly than human beings can. For example, if I ask ChatGPT to rewrite that Reformed sermon as Lutheran and Methodist sermons, the products can be very helpful to understand the impact of differing viewpoints on God, the Second Coming, and so on.

ChatGPT can also show us different styles. For example, I can ask ChatGPT to transcribe the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" into a minor key or in a jazz or heavy-metal style. AI can make a great tutor on the various forms of human creations.

As well, AI can make very able disciples, especially for rote tasks. Because AI is able to model patterns of behavior, it can predict fairly accurately how one might respond in a certain situation. AI may not know what to do in totally new situations, but given a situation similar to a past event, it will follow how we would respond.

Most importantly, AI should never be used to "aid" our relationship with God, nor assist in the task of listening to the Holy Spirit in ministry. Only humanity is created in God's image (Gen 1:26–28) and only humanity can respond when "deep calls to deep" (Ps 42:7). AI is artificial, cold, and inanimate, mimicking authenticity, warmth, and life. As such, we must be wary not to make ChatGPT an idol. It is created, not the Creator, and not even a creator.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *What is my purpose for using ChatGPT or other AI tools? Will they be a helpmate or will they subvert the role God has given me?*

2. *Considering Paul's warning in 2 Timothy 3:16–4:5, what safeguards should I put in place when using AI tools to avoid being led astray?*

Rev. Dr. Samuel Law
Dean of Advanced Studies
Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies
School of Theology (English)

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To understand how AI works, watch this excellent (and entertaining) video entitled "Music for Martians" by Marco Nardelli: **https://youtu.be/aZBOLzfFArw**