ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A HERMENEUTICAL MEDIATOR: RETHINKING BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, THEOLOGICAL FORMATION, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN A DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into contemporary religious and educational contexts is transforming the ways biblical texts are accessed, interpreted, and communicated. This chapter examines AI as an emerging hermeneutical mediator and evaluates its implications for biblical interpretation, Christian worship, and theological formation. Drawing on contemporary hermeneutical theory and African biblical scholarship, the study argues that interpretation has always been shaped by mediating structures such as tradition, community, institutions, and technology. However, unlike earlier technologies that primarily facilitated access to information, AI increasingly participates in the generation, organisation, and presentation of interpretive knowledge, thereby raising significant questions concerning scriptural authority, interpretive responsibility, contextual relevance, and spiritual discernment.

Employing insights from Gadamer, Ricoeur, Thiselton, and Vanhoozer alongside African hermeneutical perspectives represented by Ukpong, West, Adamo, and Dube, the chapter situates AI within the broader history of biblical interpretation. Particular attention is given to African and Nigerian Christian contexts, where digital technologies are increasingly shaping theological education, ministry, and worship. The chapter contends that while AI can enhance access to theological resources and support ministerial practice, it cannot replace the communal, contextual, ecclesial, and Spirit-guided dimensions of biblical interpretation. It proposes a theology of responsible AI-mediated hermeneutics grounded in scriptural authority, scholarly accountability, contextual engagement, ecclesial discernment, and spiritual formation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Biblical Hermeneutics, Scriptural Authority, African Christianity, Theological Formation, Digital Religion

Introduction

Biblical Hermeneutics in an Algorithmic Age

Biblical hermeneutics has long occupied a central place in Christian theology because Scripture functions as the normative witness to divine revelation and the foundation of Christian faith and practice. The task of interpretation, however, extends beyond the recovery of textual meaning to include the processes through which biblical texts are understood, appropriated, and embodied within particular communities and contexts. Hermeneutical scholars such as Gadamer (2004), Ricoeur (1976), Thiselton (2009), and Vanhoozer (1998) have demonstrated that interpretation is a dialogical and communal activity shaped by the interaction of text, reader, tradition, and context. Consequently, biblical interpretation has never been a purely individual enterprise but one mediated through cultural, theological, and ecclesial structures.

Within African biblical scholarship, the contextual character of interpretation has received significant attention. Ukpong's (2000) inculturation hermeneutics, West's (1995) contextual Bible study approach, Dube's (2000) postcolonial hermeneutics, and Adamo's (2015) African Cultural Hermeneutics collectively emphasize that biblical meaning emerges through engagement with lived experiences, cultural realities, and communal identities. These approaches challenge universalized models of interpretation by highlighting the importance of context, culture, and social location in the construction of biblical meaning. As African Christianity continues to expand and diversify, questions concerning the mediating factors that shape interpretation have become increasingly significant.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has introduced a new dimension to contemporary hermeneutical discourse. Digital platforms, online worship environments, social media, and theological databases have transformed the ways religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. More recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity, has emerged as a powerful mediator of information and knowledge. Unlike earlier technologies that primarily facilitated access to existing resources, AI increasingly participates in the synthesis, organization, and presentation of interpretive content. Floridi (2014) observes that contemporary society is increasingly shaped by informational ecosystems in which digital technologies influence knowledge formation and decision-making processes. Within theological contexts, AI is now being utilized for sermon preparation, biblical studies, theological research, curriculum development, and ministerial training.

While these developments offer significant opportunities for expanding access to theological resources and supporting ministerial practice, they also raise important questions concerning scriptural authority, interpretive responsibility, theological reliability, ecclesial accountability, and spiritual discernment. Campbell (2013) and Hoover (2021) argue that digital technologies do more than facilitate communication; they reshape patterns of religious authority and practice. Consequently, the increasing use of AI in biblical interpretation requires critical theological reflection, particularly regarding its role as a potential hermeneutical mediator between Scripture and contemporary readers.

This concern is especially relevant within African and Nigerian Christianity, where rapid technological adoption coincides with significant Christian growth and expanding digital religious engagement (Kalu, 2008; Ojo, 2006; Ukah, 2020). As churches, theological institutions, and ministry practitioners increasingly incorporate AI-assisted technologies into their interpretive and educational practices, questions concerning authority, contextual relevance, and theological accountability become more pressing.

This chapter argues that Artificial Intelligence represents an emerging form of hermeneutical mediation that is reshaping contemporary engagement with Scripture. Although AI offers significant opportunities for biblical scholarship, theological education, and Christian ministry, it cannot replace the human, communal, contextual, ecclesial, and Spirit-guided dimensions of biblical interpretation. The chapter therefore proposes a theology of responsible AI-mediated hermeneutics grounded in the primacy of Scripture, human interpretive responsibility, ecclesial accountability, contextual engagement, and pneumatological discernment.

Artificial Intelligence as a New Hermeneutical Mediator

Hermeneutics, Mediation, and Biblical Interpretation

Biblical interpretation has never been a purely individual or neutral activity. Throughout Christian history, Scripture has been understood through various mediating structures, including traditions, communities, institutions, languages, and technologies. Hermeneutics therefore concerns not only the meaning of biblical texts but also the processes through which that meaning is interpreted, appropriated, and embodied within particular contexts. Gadamer's (2004) concept of the "fusion of horizons" emphasizes that understanding emerges through dialogue between the world of the text and the world of the interpreter. Similarly, Ricoeur

(1976) argues that interpretation involves a dynamic interaction between text, reader, and context, while Thiselton (2009) and Vanhoozer (1998) maintain that biblical meaning is discerned within interpretive communities that mediate understanding through theological reflection and communal engagement.

Consequently, the authority of Scripture is always encountered through acts of interpretation. Every sermon, commentary, translation, theological formulation, and liturgical practice represents a mediated engagement with the biblical text. The critical issue is therefore not whether interpretation is mediated but how such mediation influences the reception and application of Scripture. Throughout Christian history, interpretive authority has been shaped by ecclesial traditions, theological institutions, oral transmission, and technological developments that have facilitated access to biblical knowledge.

African Hermeneutics and Contextual Interpretation

African biblical scholarship has significantly enriched contemporary hermeneutical discourse by emphasizing the contextual nature of interpretation. Scholars such as Ukpong (2000), West (1995), Dube (2000), and Adamo (2015) argue that biblical meaning emerges through the interaction between Scripture and the lived realities of faith communities. Interpretation is therefore not merely an intellectual exercise but a contextual and transformative process shaped by culture, history, spirituality, and social experience.

Ukpong's inculturation hermeneutics highlights the dialogue between biblical texts and contemporary African contexts, while West's contextual Bible study approach underscores the role of ordinary readers and local communities in the construction of meaning. Dube's postcolonial hermeneutics draws attention to issues of power, identity, and marginalization, whereas Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics demonstrates the significance of indigenous cultural resources for biblical interpretation. Collectively, these approaches challenge universalized models of interpretation and emphasize that Scripture must be read within the concrete realities of particular communities.

This contextual emphasis is particularly significant for evaluating emerging technologies. If biblical interpretation is shaped by communal memory, cultural values, spiritual practices, and lived experiences, then questions arise concerning the capacity of digital systems to engage adequately with these realities. The challenge is not merely technological but hermeneutical,

since interpretation involves dimensions of human experience that extend beyond information processing.

Artificial Intelligence as a Hermeneutical Mediator

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence represents a significant development within the history of hermeneutical mediation. Unlike earlier technologies that primarily facilitated access to information, contemporary AI systems increasingly participate in the organization, synthesis, and presentation of knowledge. Floridi (2014) observes that modern societies operate within an "infosphere" in which digital technologies play an increasingly influential role in shaping knowledge production and decision-making processes. Within this environment, AI functions not merely as a tool but as a mediator that influences how information is encountered, organized, and understood.

Recent developments in generative Artificial Intelligence have intensified this reality. Large Language Models (LLMs) can summarize scholarly literature, generate sermon outlines, explain theological concepts, compare doctrinal positions, and provide responses to complex biblical questions. Consequently, pastors, theological students, researchers, and church leaders increasingly employ AI-assisted platforms for sermon preparation, biblical studies, theological research, and educational support. Such technologies have become especially attractive in contexts where access to academic libraries, specialized resources, and formal theological training remains limited.

As Campbell (2013) and Hoover (2021) observe, digital technologies do more than create new channels of communication; they reshape patterns of authority, knowledge production, and religious practice. Artificial Intelligence exemplifies this development by functioning as an intermediary between users and theological resources. Through its ability to organize, prioritize, summarize, and generate content, AI increasingly influences the ways biblical texts and theological traditions are interpreted and understood.

However, AI differs fundamentally from human interpreters. Human interpretation is shaped by consciousness, lived experience, moral responsibility, spiritual formation, and participation within communities of faith. AI, by contrast, operates through pattern recognition, statistical prediction, and algorithmic processing derived from extensive datasets. While it may generate responses that appear interpretive, it does not engage Scripture as a believing subject, participate in ecclesial life, or experience spiritual transformation. Nevertheless, influence does

not require consciousness. Just as commentaries, dictionaries, and theological texts shape interpretation, AI-generated content increasingly contributes to the formation of theological understanding.

The implications of this development are particularly significant within African and Nigerian Christianity. Rapid technological adoption, expanding digital ministries, online theological education, and increased access to AI-assisted platforms have created new environments for biblical engagement. Yet many AI systems are trained predominantly on datasets shaped by Western intellectual traditions and may not adequately reflect African theological perspectives, oral traditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and contextual realities. Consequently, AI may possess substantial informational competence while lacking contextual competence.

For this reason, Artificial Intelligence should be understood neither as a neutral instrument nor as an autonomous interpreter. Rather, it functions as an emerging hermeneutical mediator whose influence on biblical interpretation continues to expand. While AI offers significant opportunities for theological education, biblical scholarship, and Christian ministry, it cannot replace the human, communal, contextual, and Spirit-guided dimensions of interpretation that remain central to Christian faith. The challenge facing the Church is therefore not whether AI should be utilized but how it can be employed responsibly in ways that preserve scriptural authority, theological accountability, contextual sensitivity, and the integrity of Christian interpretation.

Scriptural Authority and Interpretive Responsibility in an AI Context

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence as a significant mediator of religious knowledge raises important theological questions concerning authority, accountability, and interpretive responsibility. Throughout Christian history, debates concerning biblical interpretation have been inseparable from questions of authority: Who has the right to interpret Scripture? How is interpretive legitimacy established? What safeguards ensure faithfulness to the biblical witness? These concerns become increasingly significant in an age when AI systems can generate theological explanations, sermon outlines, doctrinal summaries, and biblical interpretations within seconds. The challenge confronting the Church is therefore not merely technological but theological, requiring a reassessment of how scriptural authority is understood and exercised within an increasingly digital environment.

The Primacy of Scriptural Authority

Within Christian theology, Scripture remains the normative witness to God's self-revelation and the foundational authority for faith and practice. Although Christian traditions differ regarding the relationship between Scripture, tradition, and ecclesial authority, there is broad agreement that biblical authority is derived not from interpreters or institutions but from its unique role as the inspired witness to God's redemptive activity. Consequently, no technological system, however sophisticated, can function as an alternative source of theological authority.

At the same time, scriptural authority is always encountered through interpretation. As Thiselton (2009) and Vanhoozer (2005) argue, the authority of Scripture becomes meaningful through its faithful interpretation and appropriation within the life of the Church. Every sermon, commentary, theological reflection, and doctrinal formulation represents an interpretive act. The critical issue is therefore not whether Scripture should be interpreted but how interpretive processes can remain faithful to the biblical text while engaging contemporary realities.

Artificial Intelligence introduces new complexities into this process. Because AI systems can rapidly generate responses to biblical and theological questions, users may be tempted to substitute algorithmic convenience for sustained engagement with Scripture itself. Such dependence risks weakening the disciplined practices of study, reflection, and communal discernment that have historically characterized Christian interpretation. Responsible engagement with AI therefore requires a clear recognition that technological efficiency cannot replace the authority of Scripture or the interpretive responsibilities it demands.

Interpreters, Community, and Ecclesial Accountability

Questions concerning scriptural authority are closely related to questions concerning interpretive authority. Throughout Christian history, prophets, apostles, theologians, pastors, councils, and ecclesial traditions have exercised interpretive influence. Their authority has traditionally been grounded in theological competence, spiritual maturity, communal accountability, and fidelity to Scripture. Interpretation has never been a purely private activity but one situated within communities of faith that test, evaluate, and refine theological understanding.

Artificial Intelligence complicates this framework because it can produce responses that appear comprehensive, objective, and authoritative. For many users, particularly those with limited theological training, AI-generated interpretations may acquire an influence disproportionate to their reliability. Yet unlike human interpreters, AI systems cannot be held accountable for their conclusions. They possess neither theological conviction nor moral responsibility and cannot participate in the communal processes through which interpretations are examined and corrected.

Vanhoozer (2005) emphasizes that biblical interpretation reaches its fullest expression within the worshipping community rather than in isolation from it. Similarly, African scholars such as West (1995) and Ukpong (2000) stress the communal character of interpretation, highlighting the importance of worship, testimony, storytelling, prayer, and collective reflection in the construction of biblical meaning. The Church therefore remains an indispensable interpretive community where scriptural understanding is formed, tested, and embodied.

The increasing reliance on AI-generated theological content raises concerns regarding interpretive individualism. While AI may expand access to biblical resources, it should supplement rather than replace ecclesial discernment, pastoral guidance, and communal engagement. Theological authority ultimately resides neither in algorithms nor in isolated individuals but within the dynamic relationship between Scripture, interpreters, and the worshipping community.

Context, Culture, and African Christianity

The question of authority assumes particular significance within African Christianity, where biblical interpretation is deeply connected to communal identity, oral traditions, spirituality, and lived experience. African hermeneutics consistently emphasizes that interpretation occurs within concrete cultural and social realities. Ukpong (2000), Dube (2000), and Adamo (2015) argue that biblical meaning emerges through interaction between Scripture and the experiences of particular communities rather than through abstract textual analysis alone.

This perspective highlights a significant limitation of AI-mediated interpretation. Although AI systems can provide substantial information, they often struggle to engage adequately with contextual realities such as communal memory, indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and local ecclesial experiences. Informational competence should not be confused with

contextual competence. Accurate interpretation requires sensitivity not only to textual meaning but also to the social, cultural, and spiritual contexts within which Scripture is read and appropriated.

This concern is particularly relevant in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, where digital technologies are increasingly integrated into ministry, theological education, and biblical study. While AI-assisted platforms provide valuable resources, their growing influence requires careful theological evaluation to ensure that contextual realities are not overshadowed by technologically generated interpretations shaped primarily by external intellectual traditions.

Influence, Authority, and Spiritual Discernment

A crucial distinction must be maintained between influence and authority. Theologically speaking, AI cannot possess interpretive authority because it lacks consciousness, intentionality, faith, moral agency, and accountability. Nevertheless, it can exert considerable influence over interpretive outcomes. Many individuals increasingly consult AI systems before engaging pastors, theological resources, or scholarly works. In this sense, AI may function as a de facto authority despite lacking formal theological legitimacy.

For this reason, AI should be understood as a secondary interpretive resource rather than an authoritative interpreter. Like commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, and theological monographs, it may contribute valuable insights to the interpretive process. However, its outputs remain subject to evaluation by scholars, pastors, and faith communities committed to the authority of Scripture.

The limitations of AI become most apparent when interpretation is understood as a spiritual activity. Christian hermeneutics has consistently maintained that understanding Scripture involves more than textual analysis; it requires spiritual discernment, moral formation, and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. While AI can identify patterns, compare viewpoints, and synthesize information, it cannot pray, worship, repent, exercise faith, or experience spiritual transformation. These dimensions remain central to Christian interpretation and cannot be reduced to computational processes.

This insight is particularly important within African Christianity, where Scripture is often approached as a living medium through which God speaks, guides, heals, and transforms believers. Such experiences transcend algorithmic analysis and remain rooted in the spiritual

life of faith communities. Consequently, the challenge facing contemporary Christianity is not whether AI should be used in biblical interpretation but how it can be employed responsibly without compromising scriptural authority, ecclesial accountability, contextual engagement, and spiritual discernment.

The future of Christian interpretation therefore depends upon maintaining a proper theological balance. Artificial Intelligence may assist the Church in accessing and organizing knowledge, but it cannot replace Scripture as the supreme authority, the Church as the primary interpretive community, or the Holy Spirit as the ultimate guide in the interpretation and appropriation of God's Word.

Opportunities and Challenges of AI for Ministry and Theological Formation

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence into biblical studies, ministry, and theological education presents both significant opportunities and substantial challenges. As with previous technological developments in Christian history, AI should neither be embraced uncritically nor rejected outright. Rather, its potential and limitations must be evaluated in relation to the mission of the Church, the authority of Scripture, and the goals of Christian formation. The central question is not whether AI should be used, but how it can be employed in ways that strengthen rather than diminish faithful engagement with Scripture and Christian discipleship.

Opportunities for Biblical Scholarship and Ministry

One of the most significant contributions of AI is its ability to expand access to theological knowledge. For pastors, theological students, and church leaders, particularly in contexts where access to academic libraries and specialized resources remains limited, AI provides rapid access to biblical, theological, and historical information. By making scholarly resources more accessible, AI has the potential to democratize theological education and broaden participation in theological discourse.

AI also offers practical benefits for biblical scholarship and ministry. Researchers increasingly utilize AI-assisted tools for literature reviews, language support, thematic analysis, and data organization. These capabilities can improve research efficiency and allow scholars to devote greater attention to theological reflection and critical analysis. Likewise, pastors may employ

AI to assist in sermon preparation, Bible study development, curriculum design, and discipleship materials. In many African contexts, where ministers often serve large congregations with limited institutional support, such tools may provide valuable assistance for ministry preparation and continuing education.

Beyond formal theological education, AI can support lay discipleship by providing accessible explanations of biblical texts and theological concepts. When used responsibly, it may encourage deeper engagement with Scripture and facilitate theological learning among believers who might otherwise have limited access to educational resources. Consequently, AI possesses considerable potential to strengthen biblical literacy, theological awareness, and ministerial effectiveness.

Challenges of Reliability and Contextual Relevance

Despite these opportunities, AI-assisted hermeneutics faces significant limitations. One of the most frequently identified concerns is theological reliability. AI systems are capable of generating inaccurate information, misrepresenting scholarly arguments, oversimplifying theological debates, and even fabricating references. Because such responses are often presented confidently and coherently, users may accept them without adequate verification. This challenge is particularly serious in theological disciplines, where historical nuance, doctrinal precision, and exegetical accuracy are essential.

A second concern involves contextual relevance. African hermeneutical scholars have consistently argued that biblical interpretation emerges through the interaction between text and context. Meaning is shaped not only by linguistic and historical analysis but also by communal experiences, cultural realities, and social conditions. Yet many AI systems are trained predominantly on datasets shaped by Western intellectual traditions and may not adequately reflect African theological perspectives, oral traditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and local ecclesial experiences.

This limitation is particularly significant within African Christianity, where biblical interpretation frequently occurs within contexts characterized by communal worship, oral communication, Pentecostal spirituality, and engagement with pressing social realities such as poverty, injustice, corruption, insecurity, and religious pluralism. AI may provide extensive information about Scripture while remaining insufficiently attentive to the contextual dimensions that shape its interpretation and application.

Artificial Intelligence and Christian Worship

The influence of AI extends beyond scholarship and education into the sphere of Christian worship. Worship is inherently hermeneutical because it involves the interpretation and embodiment of Scripture through preaching, prayer, music, testimony, sacramental practice, and communal participation. Consequently, changes in the ways Scripture is accessed and interpreted inevitably affect the worshipping life of the Church.

The most visible impact of AI within worship has been in the area of sermon preparation. Many pastors now employ AI-assisted platforms to generate sermon outlines, identify biblical themes, summarize commentaries, and organize theological materials. Such resources may be particularly beneficial where access to theological training and scholarly resources is limited. Nevertheless, preaching involves far more than information management. Faithful proclamation emerges from prayerful engagement with Scripture, pastoral sensitivity, theological reflection, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. A sermon may be technically accurate and rhetorically impressive yet lack spiritual depth and contextual relevance.

This concern is especially important within African Christianity, where preaching is frequently understood as a Spirit-guided encounter through which God addresses the needs of the congregation. While AI may assist the preparation process, it cannot replace the spiritual, pastoral, and prophetic dimensions of proclamation. Consequently, AI should be viewed as a ministerial aid rather than a substitute for the interpretive and spiritual responsibilities of the preacher.

Theological Formation Beyond Information

Theological formation seeks not only to impart knowledge but also to cultivate wisdom, character, spiritual maturity, and ministerial competence. As Banks (1999) argues, theological education should move beyond the mere transmission of information toward the holistic formation of persons for Christian ministry and discipleship. AI can support learning through access to scholarly materials and research assistance, yet formation involves realities that extend beyond information acquisition. Spiritual disciplines, mentoring relationships, ministry experience, communal accountability, and participation in the life of the Church remain indispensable.

However, theological formation involves dimensions that cannot be reduced to information acquisition. Christian ministry requires spiritual discipline, moral integrity, pastoral wisdom, and participation in communities of faith. These qualities are developed through worship, mentoring relationships, ministry experience, communal accountability, and engagement with real-life contexts. A significant danger of AI-assisted learning is the temptation to prioritize efficiency over formation. Students may become dependent upon summaries rather than engaging primary sources, or they may pursue rapid answers at the expense of critical reflection and theological depth.

For this reason, theological institutions must encourage responsible and critical engagement with AI. Rather than replacing traditional forms of theological formation, AI should function as a supplementary resource that supports rigorous scholarship, contextual awareness, spiritual growth, and ministerial development.

Toward a Balanced Evaluation

The opportunities and challenges associated with AI-assisted hermeneutics suggest the need for a balanced theological assessment. AI possesses significant potential to expand access to theological resources, support ministry preparation, strengthen biblical scholarship, and enhance educational opportunities. At the same time, its limitations remind the Church that faithful interpretation requires realities that no technological system can replicate: contextual sensitivity, ecclesial accountability, spiritual discernment, pastoral wisdom, and transformative engagement with Scripture.

The future of theological education and ministry therefore depends not upon technological innovation alone but upon the wisdom with which such innovations are employed. Artificial Intelligence may serve as a valuable tool in the service of the Church, but it must remain subordinate to the authority of Scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the formative practices through which Christian communities are nurtured in faith and discipleship.

Excellent. This final section should not repeat earlier discussions. Instead, it should synthesize the argument and provide a constructive theological framework. Most Festschrift chapters become unnecessarily long because the conclusion merely repeats previous sections. The objective here is to move from analysis to proposal and end with a concise scholarly conclusion.

Toward a Theology of Responsible AI-Mediated Hermeneutics

The growing influence of Artificial Intelligence in biblical interpretation, theological education, and Christian ministry necessitates a constructive theological framework for responsible engagement. Throughout this chapter, it has been argued that AI represents an emerging hermeneutical mediator that increasingly shapes how Scripture is accessed, interpreted, and communicated. While these developments offer significant opportunities, they also raise important questions concerning authority, accountability, contextual relevance, and spiritual discernment. The challenge before the Church is therefore not whether AI should be used, but how it can be employed in ways that remain faithful to the theological foundations of Christian interpretation.

A theology of responsible AI-mediated hermeneutics must begin with the **primacy of Scripture**. Christian theology affirms Scripture as the normative witness to divine revelation and the ultimate authority for faith and practice. Consequently, AI-generated interpretations must always remain subordinate to the biblical text. Theological validity cannot be determined by technological sophistication, computational efficiency, or popular acceptance, but by fidelity to Scripture. Artificial Intelligence may assist readers in accessing information and identifying interpretive possibilities, yet it cannot replace direct engagement with the biblical text or function as an independent source of theological authority.

A second principle is **human interpretive responsibility**. Throughout Christian history, interpretation has involved intellectual engagement, moral judgment, theological reflection, and spiritual discernment. These responsibilities remain fundamentally human and cannot be delegated to algorithms. While AI may facilitate research and provide interpretive assistance, pastors, scholars, students, and church leaders remain accountable for evaluating sources, testing conclusions, and exercising critical judgment. Responsible hermeneutics therefore requires active human participation rather than passive technological dependence.

Third, **ecclesial accountability and communal discernment** must remain central to biblical interpretation. Scripture has historically been interpreted within communities of faith where meaning is tested, refined, and embodied through worship, teaching, discipleship, and theological dialogue. The Church remains the primary interpretive community in which biblical understanding is formed and practiced. AI-generated theological content should therefore be subjected to communal evaluation rather than accepted uncritically. The wisdom of the worshipping community provides an essential safeguard against interpretive isolation and technological overreliance.

Fourth, responsible hermeneutics requires **contextual engagement**. African biblical scholarship has consistently demonstrated that interpretation is shaped by cultural realities, social experiences, communal identities, and historical circumstances. Theological reflection that ignores context risks becoming detached from the lived realities of faith communities. Since many AI systems are trained primarily on datasets shaped by Western intellectual traditions, their outputs must be evaluated critically in relation to African contexts and local ecclesial realities. Faithful interpretation requires not only textual accuracy but also contextual relevance.

Finally, **pneumatological discernment** remains indispensable. Christian interpretation involves more than the acquisition of information; it is a spiritual activity through which believers seek to hear and obey the voice of God. The Holy Spirit continues to illuminate Scripture, guide believers into truth, and transform communities through the Word of God. While AI can organize information and generate interpretive summaries, it cannot participate in worship, faith, repentance, obedience, or spiritual transformation. These dimensions remain uniquely human and ecclesial realities that no technological system can replicate.

Building upon these principles, this study proposes a five-dimensional framework for responsible AI-assisted interpretation: **Scriptural Evaluation, Scholarly Verification, Contextual Engagement, Ecclesial Discernment, and Spiritual Formation**. AI-generated content should first be examined in light of Scripture, then evaluated through scholarly and theological scrutiny, assessed for contextual relevance, tested within communities of faith, and finally considered in relation to its capacity to promote authentic spiritual growth. Such a framework enables churches, theological institutions, and ministry practitioners to benefit from technological innovation while safeguarding the theological integrity of biblical interpretation.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the implications of Artificial Intelligence for biblical hermeneutics within the broader context of contemporary theological reflection and African Christianity. It has argued that AI should be understood as an emerging hermeneutical mediator that increasingly influences how Scripture is accessed, interpreted, and communicated. Although AI offers significant opportunities for theological education, biblical scholarship, and Christian ministry, it also presents important challenges relating to authority, accountability, contextuality, and spiritual discernment.

The study has demonstrated that biblical interpretation has always been mediated through traditions, communities, institutions, and technologies. Artificial Intelligence therefore represents the latest development within a long history of hermeneutical mediation. However, unlike earlier technologies that primarily facilitated access to information, AI increasingly participates in the generation and presentation of interpretive content. This development requires careful theological evaluation to ensure that technological innovation does not undermine the foundational commitments of Christian interpretation.

Particular attention has been given to insights from African hermeneutics, which emphasize the contextual, communal, and transformative dimensions of biblical interpretation. These perspectives remind the Church that faithful engagement with Scripture involves more than information processing; it requires sensitivity to culture, lived experience, community, and spiritual formation. Consequently, AI must be understood as a useful interpretive aid rather than an authoritative interpreter.

The future of biblical hermeneutics will not be determined by technological innovation alone but by the faithfulness with which Christian communities continue to interpret, proclaim, and embody Scripture. Artificial Intelligence may enhance access to knowledge and support theological inquiry, but it cannot replace the authority of Scripture, the wisdom of the Church, the responsibility of interpreters, or the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The enduring task of Christian hermeneutics remains the same: to discern and faithfully live out the Word of God in every generation, including the emerging realities of the algorithmic age.

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