

**Topic: The Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and
Hermeneutics: A Study of Biblical Interpretation Practices
Among Assemblies of God Pastors in Nairobi City, Kenya.**

By Dr. Kasili Isaac

Background of the Study

- Traditional Assemblies of God hermeneutics: grammatical-historical method; Pentecostal hermeneutic.
- The emergence of Digital Theology is posing a challenge to the traditional practice (AI).
- AI models are predominantly trained on Western datasets, their use in Nairobi raises critical questions regarding the survival of Afrocentric hermeneutics and the preservation of African social-cultural lenses in biblical interpretation.

The Problem Statement

- This research addresses the potential erosion of **pneumatic authority**—the belief that biblical interpretation is a spiritually discerned task—within the Assemblies of God (AG) tradition due to the integration of Artificial Intelligence. In Nairobi's rapidly digitizing urban landscape, AG pastors are increasingly turning to AI tools for exegetical assistance. However, AI operates on statistical probability and data patterns, whereas Pentecostal hermeneutics relies on the "illumination of the Holy Spirit" and the "authorial intent" of the biblical text. There is an urgent need to investigate how these pastors navigate the gap between **technological efficiency** and **spiritual authenticity**, and whether the use of AI is inadvertently secularizing the Kenyan pulpit by prioritizing algorithmic outputs over prayerful reflection.

Research Questions

1. How do KAG pastors define AI within the context of 21st-century ministry?
2. To what extent has Artificial Intelligence been integrated into pastoral ministry?
3. How does AI affect the interpretative authority of the KAG pastors in Nairobi district?



Significance of the Study

1. This study provides a foundational framework for the **Assemblies of God (AG) leadership** to formulate ethical guidelines and ecclesiastical policies regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence in sermon preparation.
2. Will enable pastors to engage with complex biblical commentaries and original language lexicons (Greek and Hebrew) that were historically inaccessible.
3. The study contributes to **Pentecostal theological discourse** by examining the intersection of technology and pneumatology.
4. By focusing on Nairobi, this study offers a **critical Afro-centric perspective** on the global AI debate.

Definition of Terms

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI): In the context of this study, AI refers to computational systems—specifically **Large Language Models (LLMs)** like ChatGPT or Claude—capable of performing tasks that traditionally require human intelligence. This includes natural language processing, text summarization, and the synthesis of vast amounts of theological data to generate sermon outlines or exegetical insights.

2. Hermeneutics: The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts. It involves the transition from "what the text meant" (exegesis) to "what the text means today" (application), accounting for the linguistic, historical, and cultural gaps between the ancient world and the modern reader.

3. Assemblies of God (AG): A Pentecostal Christian denomination characterized by its emphasis on the **baptism in the Holy Spirit**, the authority of the Bible, and a missional focus. In this study, it refers specifically to the ecclesiastical structure and the ordained clergy operating under the Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG) or affiliated global AG fellowships within the Nairobi jurisdiction.

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4.Nairobi: The capital city of Kenya, serving as the geographical and sociological locus of this study. It is characterized as a "**Silicon Savannah**"—a leading African technological hub—providing a unique urban environment where high digital penetration meets a deeply religious social fabric.

5.Digital Theology: An emerging academic discipline that explores the interaction between traditional Christian theology and the digital culture. It investigates how digital environments (social media, AI, virtual reality) reshape theological thinking, church practices, and the manifestation of faith in a technologically mediated world.

6.Biblical Interpretation: The practical application of hermeneutical principles by a pastor to derive meaning from the Bible. In this research, it specifically refers to the **preaching-preparation process**, encompassing the study of scripture, the use of external resources (including AI), and the final synthesis of a message intended for a congregation.

Literature Review

- According to Bernhard Ott, "digital revolution" is not just a technological shift but a cultural and pedagogical one that reshapes the formation of Christian leaders (2022).
- He observes that there is tension between **globalization** and **localization**.

Much of the software and data used in the Global South is imported from the West. This creates a "resource imbalance" where Southern institutions rely on Western digital infrastructure.

- He emphasizes that digitalization must not lead to a "homogenized" theology. Instead, digital tools should be used to amplify local, indigenous voices and African-centered hermeneutics.

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- In the article titled “**The Digital Shepherds: How AI is Changing Pastoral Ministry**” (2021), Kimberly Oliver explores the shift from traditional pastoral methods to AI-augmented leadership where she argues that pastors are transitioning from a "physical" shepherd to a "digital" one.
- Other areas she addressed are: **Efficiency vs. Presence (The Efficiency Trap)**; **"Algorithm as Associate Pastor"**; **Ethical Responsibility** and **"Algorithmic Discernment"** and **"Technological Gap"** in Global Ministry.

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While Ott and Oliver focus on technology, Smith focuses on the **Pentecostal worldview**, which is essential to explain how AI interacts with a pastor's "world-and-life view" (2010).

- Smith argues that Pentecostalism:

a) isn't just a set of beliefs; it's a way of *perceiving* the world. He identifies a "**social imaginary**"—a pre-theoretical way of being in the world that is

- **Open to the Supernatural:** A "porous" world where God acts directly.
- **Enchanted:** Everything has spiritual significance.
- If the world is "enchanted," does an AI tool feel "secular" or "disenchanted" to a Nairobi pastor? Or can the pastor "baptize" the AI as a tool the Spirit uses?

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- b) "know" things through their hearts and bodies, not just their brains.
- c) that Pentecostalism is defined by an expectation that God will do something **new** and **surprising**.
- d) Pentecostals don't separate the "sacred" from the "secular" or the "mind" from the "body."

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- biblical interpretation isn't just about getting the "right answer" (which AI can do), but about having a "**spiritual encounter**" with the text (which AI cannot do).

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- While your other sources deal with *how* we interpret the Bible, Thacker in his book titled, “the age of AI” asks *who* is doing the interpreting and what it means for our identity as beings made in the **Image of God** (*Imago Dei*).
- He argues that human dignity is not based on what we can **do** (intelligence, productivity, speed), but on **who we are** as created beings.
- Thacker challenges the idea that technology is just a "neutral tool" like a hammer.

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- Thacker focuses on who is responsible for the "word" being preached.
- Unlike some religious voices that reject AI, Thacker advocates for **Christian Stewardship**.
- AI is a tool that, if used wisely, can expand the reach of the Gospel and assist in complex tasks.

Research Methodology

- **Research Design**

- This study employed a **qualitative descriptive design**. This approach is most suitable because it allows the researcher to document the "lived experiences" of pastors and the subjective meanings they assign to the use of AI in their sacred duties.

- **3.2 Sampling Technique: Purposive and Criterion Sampling**

- The study utilized **Purposive Sampling** to select participants who are "information-rich" cases. To be included in the study, pastors must meet the following criteria:

1. Must be an ordained or licensed minister within the **Assemblies of God (Kenya)**.
 2. Must be currently pastoring a local congregation within **Nairobi City County**.
- Must have utilized at least one **Generative AI tool** (e.g., ChatGPT, Perplexity, or AI-powered Bible software) for ministry purposes within the last six months.

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- **Justification of Sample Size (n=15)**

- The selection of 15 participants is justified by the principle of **Thematic Saturation**. In qualitative inquiry, saturation is reached when no new themes, insights, or patterns emerge from additional interviews.

- **Contextual Depth:** Research by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggests that for a relatively homogenous group (e.g., pastors within the same denomination and city), saturation often occurs within **12 to 15 interviews**.
- **Urban Homogeneity:** Since Nairobi-based AG pastors operate within a similar technological infrastructure and denominational theological framework, 15 respondents provide sufficient diversity of age and educational background while maintaining a manageable scope for in-depth analysis.

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- **Data Collection Instruments**

The primary data collection tools were:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Allowing for flexibility to explore "rabbit trails" regarding spiritual experiences that AI might trigger.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** One FGD with 5 of the participants was conducted to observe the "communal hermeneutic" in action as they debate the ethical implications of AI together.

Data Analysis

- Theme 1: Adoption and frequency
 - 5 (33%) pastors out of 1 had used AI once or twice.
 - 8 (53%) pastors out of 15 (53%) had used it for historical/background study (hermeneutical purposes).
 - 3 (20%) pastors had not used AI even once.

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Theme 2: Hermeneutics and Exegesis

- **Efficiency:** 9 (60%) pastors agree that AI tools help them understand Greek/Hebrew contexts more efficiently than traditional commentaries.
- **Verification:** 2 (13%) pastors **always** cross-check and 3 (33%) **often** do and 6 (49%) **sometimes** cross-checks AI insights with physical Bibles or theological books.

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Theme 3: Pneumatology (The Holy Spirit)

- **The Anointing:** The response is perfectly split.
 - 4 (27%) believe God can use any tool,
 - 4 (27%) believe it requires prayerful oversight, and
 - 4 (27%) believe AI inherently lacks the human-spirit connection required for anointing while
 - 3 (20%) did not respond to the question.

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- **Prayer Time:** Interestingly,
- 4 (27%) pastors feel AI **increases** their prayer time by freeing them from tedious research, while
- 4 (27%) pastors feel it has no effect.
- Only a minority felt it reduced their prayer time.

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Theme 4: Ethics and the Nairobi Context

- **Top Concerns:** The "Laziness" of pastors: 6 (40%) pastors and spread of "False Doctrine": 6 (40%) pastors.
- ❖ Loss of local Nairobi flavor: 0 pastors.
- **Transparency:**
 - 6 pastors said they could disclose to the congregation that they used AI.
 - 7 pastors said they could not disclose, it's like a commentary.

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• **Observation on "Rejected" Responses**

There were consistently 1–3 "Rejected" responses across all questions. This could indicate:

1. Incomplete surveys.
2. Respondents who found the questions too controversial to answer.
3. A segment of the population that fundamentally rejects the premise of AI in ministry.

Conclusion

- This study has demonstrated that for AG pastors in Nairobi, Artificial Intelligence is no longer a futuristic concept but a present ministerial reality. While AI tools provide a "Digital Scaffold" that democratizes access to high-level scholarship and lexicons, they also introduce a risk of "mechanical hermeneutics" that can bypass the formative process of spiritual wrestling. The findings suggest that the Pentecostal tradition is resilient enough to integrate AI, provided that the technology is positioned as a **research assistant (Logos)** rather than a **spiritual source (Pneuma)**.

Recommendations

- To ensure theological integrity across the denomination's 4,500+ churches, the following actions are recommended:
 - **1. Development of an "AI Pastoral Code of Ethics":** The General Council should draft a formal position paper. This code should emphasize **Transparency** (disclosing AI use in research) and **Authenticity** (ensuring the "prophetic heart" of the sermon remains human-led).
 - **2. Curriculum Integration at EAST University:** Incorporate "Digital Theology" and "AI Literacy" into the ministerial training curriculum. Pastors must be taught *how* to use AI without becoming dependent on it.
 - **3. Digital Equity Initiatives:** Since AI acts as an equalizer, the leadership should provide a curated list of "Sanctified" or "Theologically Sound" digital resources to rural pastors to bridge the gap between urban and rural ministerial quality.

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