

The Anthropological Turn Towards Dialogue in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence is reshaping the conditions of theological interpretation by changing how religious texts are searched, organised, questioned, and methodologically approached. This article examines the methodological and anthropological implications of integrating generative AI into theological research, with particular attention to the formulation of research questions, the interpretation of textual corpora, and the responsibility of the human interpreter. The study is based on a theological-anthropological, hermeneutical, and conceptual analysis that draws on the authors' research trajectory since 2023, including interdisciplinary collaboration with the National Supercomputing Centre, a case study of a religious movement, and scholarly work on AI-assisted analysis of religious texts. It argues that generative AI may function as a dialogical mirror: it can support retrieval, orientation, clustering, and the testing of formulations, while also reflecting the assumptions, prompts, and interpretive horizons of the researcher; however, it cannot replace human interpretation, contextualisation, ethical assessment, or theological discernment. The article therefore proposes an anthropological turn towards dialogue and responsibility, offering a framework for responsible work with generative AI grounded in dialogical hermeneutics and human-in-the-loop theological discernment.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, theological methodology, anthropological turn, dialogical hermeneutics, dialogical mirroring, human-in-the-loop, interpretation of religious texts

Introduction

Generative AI as a Sign of the Times

Generative artificial intelligence does not function merely as an accelerator of work with information. It transforms the environment in which language is formed and meanings are articulated. Theological thinking thereby enters conditions that cannot be described as neutral: the horizon of pre-understanding within which questions are posed is itself changing.

At this level, AI acquires the status of a 'sign of the times': a phenomenon that in turn reshapes the

criteria of knowledge, argument, authority, and trust.¹ Here theology does not confront a technical problem but a hermeneutical shift: what appears to be a tool enters the very mechanisms by which meaning is produced and received.

This article therefore asks how the systematic use of generative AI reshapes methodological decisions in theological research and why this process calls for an anthropological turn towards dialogue. Its aim is to identify the conditions under which generative AI may support theological interpretation without displacing human responsibility, discernment, and dialogical encounter. The article argues that generative AI should not be understood as an autonomous interpreter, but as a dialogical mirror that exposes the structure of the researcher's question and makes the need for human-in-the-loop theological discernment more visible. In this respect, the article positions itself against both the reduction of AI to a productivity tool and approaches limited to external normative assessment without methodological explicitness.

Paolo Benanti, a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, an expert in AI ethics, and an adviser to the Vatican and international institutions, describes the digital condition of contemporary life as an epochal shift in which technologies cease to be a peripheral apparatus and become the coordinating grid of existence.² The fundamental anthropological question therefore does not move towards whether machines 'think' but towards what happens to the human being who delegates an increasing share of cognitive and decision-making operations to technical systems. Theology has no reason to remain neutral here: its object is the human person as a free, relational, and responsible being.

The mechanism by which generative artificial intelligence enters the interpretive process can be illustrated by a short biblical text that works with symbolic oppositions and metaphorical language: 'Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. How narrow is the gate and how constricted the road that leads to life, and few find it.' (Matt 7:13–14)

The text was analysed with generative AI based on two differently formulated prompts. In the first case, the model was asked to summarise the text's central message; in the second, to analyse its potentially polarising effect. The resulting outputs did not differ in the text's content but in the selection of emphases: an existentially oriented prompt foregrounded personal decision, responsibility, and the arduousness of the path to life,³ whereas an analytically oriented prompt—focused on social consequences—highlighted the dichotomous distinction between 'majority' and 'minority' and its possible polarising potential.⁴

The difference does not arise from the biblical text but from the interpretive frame embedded in the question. Generative AI performs neither normative nor theological evaluation; it selectively amplifies lines of meaning according to the orientation of the prompt. The language model works with symbolic and metaphorical language but does not decide on the legitimacy, truth, or ethical consequences of an interpretation. Interpretation, contextualisation, and the evaluation of consequences remain non-delegable.⁵

1 See Jozef Žuffa and Ján Štvrtina, 'Umelá inteligencia ako znamenie čias', *Teologický časopis* 22, no. 2 (2024): 57–66. Ján Štvrtina specialises in symbolism and culturally shaped modes of thinking across diverse contexts.

2 Paolo Benanti, *Digital Age: Teoria del cambio d'epoca. Persona, famiglia e società* (Edizioni San Paolo, 2020), 49–50; see also 95–96.

3 Output 1: The text uses the image of two paths to articulate a call to personal decision and responsibility. It emphasises that the path leading to life requires deliberate effort and is not the default choice of the majority.

4 Output 2: The text implicitly distinguishes between those who walk the narrow path leading to life and the majority heading towards destruction. Such framing can encourage an exclusive understanding of salvation and reinforce an 'us–them' dichotomy.

5 For further discussion, see Mark Coeckelbergh, a contemporary Belgian philosopher of technology whose work focuses on the philosophical and ethical questions of robotics and artificial intelligence; he is Professor of Media and Technology at the University of

The social dimension of the digital environment intensifies this situation. Benanti describes how the promise of universal communication can turn into fragmentation, conflict, and manipulation when communication is governed by the logic of attention capture, the multiplication of emotions, and the monetisation of data.⁶ In the atmosphere of new technological discoveries, theological communication is invited to enter this logic: we are aware that without an expanded anthropological grasp, complex themes are reduced to signals of loyalty, dialogue is shortened to reaction, and discernment is weakened in favour of affective performance.

In this context, Pope Francis emphasises ‘the wisdom of the heart’ as a counterweight to technical and informational excess: this is not sentimentalism but the cultivation of discernment that protects communication from being reduced to effect.⁷ Ethical philosophy of AI likewise notes that what is decisive is not only individual system errors but a shift in the anthropological image that silently stabilises in technological practice. Coeckelbergh points to the risk of ‘thoughtlessness’: when AI is accepted as self-evident, we stop asking what values and assumptions are inscribed in technologies, and the capacity to bear tension and preserve the dignity of the other—even in conflict—is weakened.⁸

The following sections develop this claim by moving from the problem of prompting and interpretive framing to a methodological account of dialogical mirroring and human-in-the-loop theological discernment.

Methodology: Dialogical Mirroring and Human-in-the-Loop Interpretation

Type of Study

This study is not designed as a quantitative or experimental assessment of generative AI. It is a theological-anthropological, hermeneutical, and conceptual analysis of how generative AI reshapes the conditions of theological interpretation. Its aim is not to measure the performance of a model, but to clarify the methodological and anthropological conditions under which AI-assisted work with religious texts can remain accountable to human responsibility, contextual interpretation, and theological discernment.

This study is grounded in hermeneutics understood not merely as a theory of textual interpretation, but as a theory of understanding. Petr Pokorný defines hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation that, in its contemporary form, becomes a general theory of understanding.⁹ This perspective is decisive for theological work with generative AI. AI-assisted analysis does not simply process textual material; it intervenes in the way questions are formulated, meanings are selected, and interpretive horizons are made visible. For this reason, the model’s role must remain heuristic and auditable, while interpretation, contextualisation, and normative discernment remain the responsibility of the human interpreter.

Vienna and works at the intersection of technological and environmental ethics. Mark Coeckelbergh, *Etika umělé inteligence* (Filosofia, 2023), 96–98, 112–14.

6 Paolo Benanti, *Il crollo di Babele: Che fare dopo la fine del sogno di Internet?* (Edizioni San Paolo, 2024), 37–39, 93–99, 129.

7 Pope Francis, ‘Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 58th World Day of Social Communications: Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication’, 24 January 2024, sec. ‘Starting with the Heart’, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20240124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>: ‘At this time in history, which risks becoming rich in technology and poor in humanity, our reflections must begin with the human heart ... Only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality, only by recovering a wisdom of the heart, can we confront and interpret the newness of our time and rediscover the path to a fully human communication.’

8 Coeckelbergh, *Etika umělé inteligence*, 210–11.

9 Petr Pokorný et al., *Hermeneutika jako teorie porozumění: Od základních otázek jazyka k výkladu bible* (Vyšehrad, 2005), 17.

Hermeneutical Framework

Building on this general understanding of hermeneutics, this study approaches interpretation as a dialogical movement rather than as the extraction of information from a text. Schökel and Bravo Aragón describe the relation between author, work, and receiver as a dynamic process in which the text does not merely inform the reader but addresses, challenges, and invites him or her into renewed understanding. This dialogical understanding of interpretation corresponds to Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons, in which understanding arises not from methodological control alone but from the interplay between the interpreter's historical situatedness and the text's claim to truth.¹⁰ In this sense, interpretation involves an alternation between the reader's questions and the text's capacity to reshape those questions. This is directly relevant to AI-assisted theological research: the model may help organise textual material, but the dialogical movement of understanding remains bound to the human interpreter who asks, receives, tests, and responds.

The metaphor of mirroring is therefore used here in a limited and hermeneutical sense. The metaphor of mirroring should not be understood in a representationalist sense. It does not imply that AI reflects reality or meaning as such, but rather that it reflects the structure of the researcher's questioning and interpretive horizon. Ska's discussion of mirrors, lamps, and windows in biblical interpretation shows that the image of the mirror has long served to describe textual mediation. A text may function as a mirror insofar as it reflects a literary or theological world before the reader and invites the reader to enter it. Yet the metaphor also requires caution: what is reflected must be read and discerned, since reflected images may be partial or distorted.¹¹ In this article, generative AI is understood as a dialogical mirror in this restricted sense. It does not disclose the meaning of the text by itself; rather, it reflects the assumptions, prompts, and interpretive horizon through which the researcher approaches the text.

Research Material

The research material for this study consists of the authors' research trajectory since 2023. This trajectory includes interdisciplinary collaboration with the National Supercomputing Centre, AI-assisted work with religious text corpora, a case study of the Nazaret religious movement, and subsequent theological reflection on the methodological role of generative AI. These materials are not treated as isolated empirical data, but as a research trajectory through which the methodological question of AI-assisted theological interpretation becomes visible.

The study's methodological framework emerged through a sequence of concrete research decisions. The key choices were derived from the practical need to preserve criteria of scholarly control, auditability, and hermeneutical responsibility.

In 2023, the authors of this study, Milan Urbančok and Jozef Žuffa, established a research collaboration with the National Supercomputing Centre in the area of analysing religious texts using large language models. Urbančok's work focuses on moral theology, human freedom, and discernment in religious experience, while Žuffa develops and interlinks methodological approaches

10 Luis Alonso Schökel and José María Bravo Aragón, *Appunti di ermeneutica: Comprendere e interpretare i testi biblici e letterari*, trans. Gabriella Zucchi (Centro editoriale dehoniano, 2014), 'Struttura dialogica della comprensione', EPUB. On Gadamer's fusion of horizons and the intersection of horizons, see Petr Pokorný et al., *Hermeneutika jako teorie porozumění: Od základních otázek jazyka k výkladu bible* (Vyšehrad, 2005), 196, 198.

11 Jean-Louis Ska, *Specchi, lampade e finestre: Introduzione all'ermeneutica biblica* (Centro editoriale dehoniano, 2014), 'Lo specchio', EPUB.

in pastoral theology. The professional coordination of the collaboration is currently provided by Lucia Malíčková, who connects the academic, technological, and research sectors in the use of artificial intelligence.¹² The aim was not to substitute theological interpretation, but to test the extent to which digital tools can support orientation in extensive corpora of digitised texts from a religious movement and identify patterns of meaning that remain less visible in traditional reading. The outcome was a research report and an article published in *HPC Focus*.¹³

Role of Generative AI

On this basis, the use of generative AI in this study is not understood as the automation of theological judgement. It is understood as a controlled heuristic procedure within a broader hermeneutical process. The model supports retrieval, orientation, clustering, and the testing of formulations; it does not replace interpretation, contextualisation, or theological discernment. While generative AI performs operations that resemble interpretive selection and recombination, it lacks the capacity for accountable, situated, and normatively grounded interpretation.

A decisive step was to restrict the model's function to retrieving relevant passages (information retrieval), not generating new texts.¹⁴ This restriction is not only technical; it is methodological. The model selects; interpretation remains the researcher's task. It safeguards context, preserves the possibility of checking back against the source, and makes interpretive decisions traceable. Meaning does not arise in a synthetic paraphrase detached from the text, but in work with a concrete source and its connections.

The next phase, represented by a case study of the Nazaret movement (the same religious community as in the first study), shifted methodological reflection into an explicit anthropological register.¹⁵ Technical assistance ceased to be a topic and became a means: it revealed the limits of a purely analytic approach. Language models can identify thematic clusters and repetitions, but the meaning of these patterns can be interpreted only in contact with concrete experience. Methodologically, this entails a shift from technical sorting to dialogical discernment: research does not become 'faster' in production, but more precise in questioning and more responsible in dealing with meaning. By discerning dialogue, we mean a mode of dialogical inquiry in which the aim is not primarily to defend positions or to reach rapid agreement, but to clarify the meanings, values, and experiential assumptions that shape interpretation. In this sense, dialogue is understood as a process of critical and reflective discernment: it attends to tensions, implicit frameworks, and the possible consequences of interpretation, while preserving the responsibility of the human interpreter for normative judgment. Within this study, discerning dialogue functions as a methodological orientation for working with texts, lived experience, and AI-assisted interpretive support. In preparing this study, the language model ChatGPT Pro 5.2 was used as a support tool in academic writing, especially for analysing lines of thought, refining formulations, and editing the text. Its use was limited to working with existing material; interpretive decisions, methodological conclusions, and normative evaluations remain exclusively within the authors' competence.

12 Halyna Hyryavets, 'Dáta, teológia a HPC: Spolupráca, ktorá hľadá cesty k porozumeniu', EUROCC@NSCC, 8 July 2025, <https://eurocc.nssc.sk/data-teologia-a-hpc-spolupraca-ktora-hlada-cesty-k-porozumeniu/>.

13 Bibiána Lajčinová, Jozef Žuffa, and Milan Urbančok, 'Využitie veľkých jazykových modelov na efektívnu analýzu náboženských textov', *HPC Focus* 8, no. 1 (2024): 76–89, <https://journals.savba.sk/index.php/hpcfocuse/article/view/4246>.

14 Lajčinová, Žuffa, and Urbančok, 'Využitie veľkých jazykových modelov', 76–89.

15 Milan Urbančok and Jozef Žuffa, 'Od opravidnosti k polarizácii. Krehkosť duchovného vedenia v hnutí Nazaret', *Studia Aloisiana* 16, no. 1 (2025): 59–72.

Criteria of Control

The methodological use of AI was therefore governed by several criteria: the human-in-the-loop principle, the traceability of interpretive claims, the distinction between retrieval, clustering, and interpretation, and the non-delegable responsibility of the human interpreter. The model may select, compare, or reorganise textual material, but the evaluation of meaning, theological relevance, ethical consequences, and pastoral implications remains a human task.

Analytical Material: The Nazaret Case Study

The Nazaret case study functions in this article as analytical material for reflecting on the methodological role of generative AI in theological interpretation. It is not presented here as a self-standing empirical study, but as an illustrative case in which the relation between textual analysis, interpretive framing, and human responsibility becomes visible.

The case study of the Nazaret movement has methodological value as a model of dynamics that may emerge in various religious and formation contexts. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) made it possible to reconstruct the meanings that actors attributed to spiritual guidance, obedience, and their own decision-making.

In this study, IPA is understood as a qualitative methodology focused on how participants make sense of significant lived experience. Its idiographic orientation requires close engagement with individual testimonies before moving toward more general thematic patterns. At the same time, IPA is interpretative in a double sense: participants interpret their own experience, while the researcher interprets these meaning-making processes within a broader anthropological and theological horizon.

The analysis exposed tensions between faith as a gift and its transformation into a demand, between free discernment and the delegation of responsibility to authority. Respondents' testimonies revealed a risk of polarisation arising where discernment is replaced by obedience and conscience comes into conflict with authority.¹⁶

Phenomenological approaches in theological research often remain methodologically constrained by the practical demands of working with extensive textual material. IPA requires close reading of testimonies, attention to nuance, and respect for the subjective perspective. With larger corpora, this requirement becomes an organisational problem, often leading either to a reduction of the material or to a shift of attention from meaning to logistics.

At this stage, the pragmatic value of collaboration with language models was confirmed. The model does not perform phenomenological interpretation; it can, however, support preliminary orientation in the text, locate thematically relevant passages, and make recurring linguistic patterns more transparent.¹⁷ Phenomenological interpretation can then concentrate on discerning meaning rather than on mechanical data sorting. Within this division of methodological labour, AI-assisted retrieval serves a preparatory and heuristic function, whereas phenomenological interpretation proper remains tied to close reading, contextual sensitivity, and the researcher's accountable judgment.

In the Nazaret text-analysis study, the model helped to identify stable linguistic constructions associated with obedience, authority, and spiritual guidance, while IPA made it possible to show

¹⁶ Urbančok and Žuffa, 'Od opravičnosti k polarizácii', 59–72.

¹⁷ Urbančok and Žuffa, 'Od opravičnosti k polarizácii', 59–72.

how these constructions enter concrete life stories. The result was not a typology based on textual aggregation, but a reconstruction of dynamics that shaped the experience of faith, discernment, and personal responsibility.

The cooperation between technical assistance and phenomenological interpretation thus expands methodological possibilities without changing theology's epistemological core. It is not a transfer of authority from interpreter to tool, but an extension of the reach of work with the material while preserving hermeneutical responsibility. At the same time, it sharpens the distinction between the linguistically processable layer of experience and what remains the inexpressible core of lived experience: the model can amplify and systematise linguistic layers, but it cannot replace the act of understanding that arises in the dialogue between the interpreter and a concrete story.

The case therefore provides a concrete basis for formulating the conceptual findings of this article: prompting functions as interpretive framing, AI can support but not replace theological judgement, and responsible interpretation requires a circle of experience, knowledge, dialogue, and discernment.

Results: From Interpretive Framing to the Circle of Responsibility

The analysis yields three conceptual findings. First, prompting functions as interpretive framing: the question posed to a model does not merely request information but structures the field of possible meanings. Second, generative AI can support theological research by retrieving, comparing, and organising textual material, but it cannot assume theological judgement. Third, responsible AI-assisted interpretation requires a circle of responsibility in which experience, knowledge, dialogue, renewed understanding, and discernment remain connected.

1. Prompting as Interpretive Framing

The example of the two prompts confirms a basic hermeneutical insight: the question posed to a text is never neutral. Pokorný describes the reader's question as an expression of pre-understanding.¹⁸ In AI-assisted interpretation, the prompt functions in an analogous way. It does not merely request information; it establishes an interpretive frame, foregrounds certain possible meanings, and leaves others in the background. The methodological task is therefore not only to evaluate the model's answer, but also to examine the question that generated it.

The first finding is therefore that AI does not simply answer theological questions; it reflects the interpretive frame through which those questions are asked.

Systematic use of language models in theological research has revealed a methodological problem of polarisation as a structural, not merely a content-related, category. Polarisation in religious settings rarely grows out of explicit doctrinal differences; more often, it is rooted in differing value frameworks, experiences, and implicit assumptions that remain unarticulated.¹⁹

2. AI as Support, Not as Theological Judgement

In this context, language models can serve a supportive function by mapping the argumentative and evaluative logics present in a text or discourse. The point is not to delegate the decision as to which position is 'true'; it is to clarify the starting points: which values positions seek to protect,

18 Pokorný et al., *Hermeneutika jako teorie porozumění*, 195.

19 Urbančok and Žuffá, 'Od opravdivosti k polarizácii', 59–72.

which concerns they carry, and which wounds they may be articulating. Such clarification creates a precondition for mediation that is not based on relativising truth but on understanding the experience from which truth-claims arise.²⁰

Chouraqui's account of rabbinic exegesis shows that close attention to linguistic detail has long belonged to theological interpretation. Rabbinic reading attends to words, repetitions, stylistic figures, and textual patterns, yet this attention is ordered toward meaning rather than mere formal analysis.²¹ This distinction is important for AI-assisted theological work. Generative AI can help identify textual regularities and possible semantic emphases, but it cannot determine their theological significance. Pattern recognition becomes hermeneutically meaningful only when it is integrated into responsible human interpretation.

The second finding is that AI-assisted pattern recognition becomes theologically meaningful only when integrated into human interpretation, contextualisation, and discernment.

Methodologically, this entails a shift from a polemical model to a model of discerning dialogue. In this article, discerning dialogue denotes a structured interpretive process that seeks to uncover the experiential, evaluative, and anthropological assumptions underlying competing positions. Its purpose is neither mere conflict reduction nor the suspension of truth-claims, but a more adequate understanding of how particular convictions emerge, what values they seek to protect, and what forms of vulnerability or responsibility they express. In this way, dialogue becomes a mode of discernment rather than a mere exchange of opinions. Dialogue here is neither a technique for de-escalating conflict nor a compromise between claims; it is an anthropological process in which truth is sought in a shared space of experience and knowledge. The model can help to identify overlaps between value frameworks as well as points of fundamental divergence; in doing so, it reduces the risk of caricaturing the other and helps to guide the conversation with greater precision. The implications extend beyond academic methodology. In pastoral and synodal processes, mapping argumentative frameworks can support a shift from exchanging positions to understanding experience. The other ceases to be the bearer of a 'problematic opinion' and becomes a subject seeking to protect value and meaning. Discernment understood in this way reduces the pressure of polarising identities and increases the chance of rebuilding trust in environments where convictions overlap with personal history.

3. The Circle of Responsibility

The third finding is that responsible AI-assisted theological interpretation requires a circle of responsibility. This circle of responsibility is not identical with the hermeneutical circle; it may be seen only as structurally analogous to it, insofar as understanding moves between parts and whole, question and answer, pre-understanding and revised meaning. The difference is that the proposed circle explicitly foregrounds accountability for the use of AI-mediated outputs. Experience generates questions; knowledge organises and tests them; dialogue opens them to other perspectives; renewed understanding reshapes the interpreter's horizon; and responsibility governs the use of the resulting interpretation. Within this circle, AI can assist several operations, but it cannot replace the human act of discernment that holds the circle together.

The central image of this methodology is the circle of experience and knowledge. Experience generates knowledge, knowledge in turn shapes further experience. Dialogue expands the circle: one

20 Lajčinová, Žuffa, and Urbančok, 'Využitie veľkých jazykových modelov', 76–89; Urbančok and Žuffa, 'Od opravdivosti k polarizácii', 59–72.

21 André Chouraqui, *Il pensiero ebraico*, trans. Alberto Bigarelli (Queriniana, 1989), 33–34.

person's experience becomes a stimulus for another's knowledge, and shared understanding creates a new space of experience for the community. Generative AI can make implicit frameworks more transparent and amplify lines of meaning, but it does not close the circle. Discernment remains a human act and bears responsibility for the consequences of interpretation.

The metaphor of the circle of responsibility presupposes keeping the human being at the centre of interpretive and decision-making operations—that is, the principle of human in the loop.²² Within this framework, generative AI is a component of a work cycle that includes formulating the question, delimiting the corpus, retrieving relevant passages, critical interpretation, and feedback verification; auditability of the procedure is a methodological prerequisite. Along these lines, the document *Antiqua et nova* distinguishes human intelligence as a personal expression and moral capacity from artificial intelligence, to which it ascribes the role of a tool without consciousness and responsibility.²³

Discussion: The Anthropological Turn Towards Dialogue

The anthropological turn in the age of generative artificial intelligence is not merely a thematic orientation; it functions as a methodological discipline. AI does not automatically accelerate production; rather, it can foster a qualitative development of questions, a closer contact with context in working with sources, and a finer and more precise distinction between data and meaning. In an environment of textual 'overload', this discipline becomes crucial.

The authors' experience confirms that working with language models functions as a test of the quality of one's own thinking: the model answers the structure of the question. A superficial question produces a simplified output; a precise question makes it possible to uncover hidden assumptions and open space for discernment. AI does not assume epistemic authority here; it highlights methodological weaknesses and forces correction.

Within this framework, dialogue is not an option but an anthropological necessity.²⁴ In dialogue, humanity is tested: responsibility, respect, truthfulness, and the ability to bear tension without forcibly closing it. Generative AI can support dialogue by clarifying frameworks and comparing perspectives without immediate evaluation. It does not, however, stand in for discernment; it merely raises the demand that discernment be made explicit.²⁵

Buber's dialogical anthropology provides an important criterion for evaluating the use of generative AI in theology. His distinction between the I–Thou and I–It attitudes shows that not every linguistic exchange constitutes dialogue. Generative AI operates primarily within the sphere of mediation, objectification, and symbolic processing; it may therefore support interpretation, but it cannot become a personal Thou.²⁶ Friedman's interpretation of Buber is helpful here, since it

22 Paolo Benanti, *Human in the Loop: Decisioni umane e intelligenze artificiali* (Mondadori Università, 2022), 1, 3–4; cf. 15–16.

23 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education, 'Antiqua et nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence', 28 January 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddd_doc_20250128_antiqua-et-nova_en.html.

24 For a broader context, cf. Stanisław Chrobak SDB, Professor of Education at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, whose research addresses general pedagogy, the theoretical foundations of education, and Christian-inspired pedagogy. Stanisław Chrobak, 'The University – A Space for Building Community and Trust', *Forum Pedagogiczne* 9, no. 2, part 1 (2019): 255–56, <https://doi.org/10.21697/fp.2019.2.18>.

25 'Generative AI can produce text, speech, images, and other advanced outputs that are usually associated with human beings. [...] Here, intelligence becomes a wisdom that "enables us to look at things with God's eyes, to see connections, situations, events and to uncover their real meaning." Our creativity enables us to generate new content or ideas, primarily by offering an original viewpoint on reality. Both capacities depend on the existence of a personal subjectivity for their full realization.' See Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education, 'Antiqua et nova', paras. 59, 115, and n. 40.

26 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (T&T Clark, 1937), 3–4.

shows that the I–It world is not evil in itself, but becomes problematic when it dominates and excludes relation.²⁷ The danger of conversational AI is therefore not that it is a tool, but that its dialogical form may conceal a non-dialogical structure. AI can assist the work of theological interpretation only when its outputs are reinserted into human responsibility, personal encounter, and discernment.

For Buber, real life is grounded in meeting.²⁸ Friedman’s account of Buber’s ‘sphere of between’ and of making the other present further clarifies that genuine dialogue is not reducible either to subjective experience or to objective information exchange.²⁹ The presence of alternating utterances does not by itself create dialogue; a technologically mediated exchange may remain enclosed within the user’s assumptions and become a sophisticated form of self-confirmation.³⁰ This is why the anthropological turn towards dialogue must distinguish between conversational form and dialogical reality.

Theological methodology therefore is not faced with the alternative of ‘accepting’ or ‘rejecting’ technology. It faces the requirement to integrate it in a way that strengthens human discernment and protects the dignity of the experience from which theological thinking grows.³¹

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of religious language clarifies why theological interpretation cannot be reduced to the processing of textual data. The biblical text does not merely transmit religious information; it opens a world before the reader, a world in which new possibilities of existence, faith, and response become intelligible. From this perspective, interpretation is not exhausted by commentary, analysis, or linguistic processing. It involves the reader’s appropriation of the world disclosed by the text.³² This is why the use of generative AI in theology requires an anthropological and dialogical framework: AI may assist in mapping linguistic patterns, but it cannot assume the existential and responsible act by which the human subject responds to the world disclosed by the text.

Jüngel sharpens this point by showing that the language of faith is fundamentally metaphorical and allocutory.³³ Speech about God does not function as a neutral description of an object within the world. It addresses the human person and opens reality beyond what can be grasped by ordinary descriptive language. This theological insight is decisive for AI-assisted interpretation: a model can identify metaphors, compare semantic fields, and suggest possible linguistic relations, but it cannot determine the truth of God-talk as an address that calls the human person to response, transformation, and responsibility.

Conclusion: The Adventure of Knowledge

This article has asked how the systematic use of generative AI reshapes methodological decisions in theological research and why this calls for an anthropological turn towards dialogue. The answer proposed here is that generative AI changes not only the speed or scale of textual work, but also the conditions under which questions are formulated, meanings are selected, and interpretive horizons become visible.

27 Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (University of Chicago Press, 1955), 57–66.

28 Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

29 Friedman, *Martin Buber*, 82, 85–87.

30 Friedman, *Martin Buber*, 123–25.

31 Paolo Benanti and Sebastiano Maffettone, *Noi e la macchina: Un’etica per l’era digitale* (Luiss University Press, 2024), 65–67.

32 Paul Ricoeur, ‘Ermeneutica filosofica ed ermeneutica religiosa’, in Paul Ricoeur and Eberhard Jüngel, *Dire Dio: Per un’ermeneutica del linguaggio religioso*, ed. Giuseppe Grampa, 4th ed. (Queriniana, 2013), 65–72, PDF e-book.

33 Eberhard Jüngel, ‘Verità metaforica: Riflessioni sulla rilevanza teologica della metafora come contributo all’ermeneutica di una teologia narrativa’, trans. Giovanni Moretto, in Paul Ricoeur and Eberhard Jüngel, *Dire Dio: Per un’ermeneutica del linguaggio religioso*, ed. Giuseppe Grampa, 4th ed. (Queriniana, 2013), 179–80, PDF e-book.

The main contribution of the article is the concept of generative AI as a dialogical mirror. AI can support retrieval, orientation, clustering, and the testing of formulations, but it also reflects the assumptions and pre-understandings of the researcher. For this reason, it cannot be treated as an autonomous interpreter.

The methodological implication is twofold. First, theological research must explicitly distinguish heuristic operations delegated to the language model—retrieving relevant passages, thematic clustering, mapping argumentative frameworks—from hermeneutical decision-making, which remains the interpreter's responsibility. Second, the auditability of the prompt, the corpus, and interpretive steps becomes a condition of scholarly control wherever generative systems enter the work.

The study works with text-oriented materials and qualitative interpretation. It does not provide a quantitative evaluation of model performance or a reception analysis of how AI changes theological communication in specific communities; these questions exceed the scope of the article. Nor does it address the technical aspects of training data and model architecture insofar as they do not translate directly into hermeneutical practice.

Further research can test the transferability of the proposed framework in other areas of theology and in related humanities disciplines that rely on interpretation. Comparative value lies in contrasting information-retrieval and text-generation regimes, since the degree of control, auditability, and the risk of epistemic drift differ between them. From a practical-theological perspective, the question also arises whether AI-assisted mapping of value frameworks can reliably support, for example, mediation and synodal discernment without reducing conflict to a technical problem.

Integrating AI can raise the scholarly level of theological work, the clarity of argument, and the methodological rigour of approaches—but only insofar as it remains bound to an anthropological premise: responsibility for meaning cannot be delegated to a system.

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