



AI Sermons

The Church's Future?

By

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Can Artificial Intelligence Write A Sermon?

You show up for Sunday services, sit down in your favorite section of the auditorium, and prepare to worship and hear from God. The music and announcements finish, and the pastor stands up to deliver his sermon. How do you know it's their sermon? How do you know that they studied and prepared the sermon themselves? How do you know a 'machine' didn't prepare it for the preacher?

Can AI write a sermon? The short answer is – yes. I learned decades ago that many pastors preached sermons written by someone else. I used to receive mailings from 'sermon' companies with hundreds of pre-written sermons for sale. I loved to study the Bible and prepare sermons and Bible studies, so I couldn't imagine why any preacher or teacher would want to buy someone else's sermons. In my opinion, it was dishonest to present someone else's writings as your own. How would a pastor know the writer was a good student of Scripture if they weren't also studying the same passage?

I learned later that many pastors viewed their ministries differently than I did. Sermons were secondary to other pressing matters pastors faced at the time. I wondered how that could be in light of what the Scriptures clearly told pastors about feeding God's 'flock.' It seemed that a pastor's primary duty was to 'preach the Word.'

Sermons For Sale

Advances in technology the last few decades offer pastors a variety of highly produced sermon series. You can find a lot of sermons available online. Search the key words “buy sermons” on your favorite search engine and you’ll find thousands of websites selling sermon outlines, pre-written sermons, books with sermons, sermon DVDs, sermon graphics, sermon videos, etc.

One ‘sermon’ company promotes its products by appealing to how busy today’s pastors are caring for their people, managing their staff, growth planning, programs, committee meetings, etc. The idea of actually having to ‘write’ a sermon is just too much for the busy pastor. So, the ‘sermon’ writing company can free up a busy pastor’s time by writing the sermon for them. They also provide videos, graphics, and promotion to go along with each sermon series.

Some of the ‘sermon-writing’ services I found online promote themselves as ‘ghost writers,’ meaning they will write sermons for pastors on demand. Pastors give the ‘ghost writer’ topics and the ghost writer produces the sermon or sermon series, then delivers the content electronically. Some of the ‘ghost writers’ I found will also write books, ebooks, journals, Bible studies for adults and teens, Christian devotionals, etc. The ‘ghost writer’ writes and the pastor takes the credit.

I shared that with you to ask a question. Do you know who or ‘what’ is behind the sermons your pastor preaches? Do you know who or ‘what’ is behind the lessons your Bible teacher teaches? Are they buying it from a ‘sermon’ service? Are they downloading it from an online sermon ‘site’? Or ... are they using Artificial Intelligence to write their sermons or lessons for them?

Now, wait just a minute! My preacher would never resort to doing anything like that. Are you sure about that? I personally know that preachers are buying sermons and sermon series because I've seen the catalogs. I've seen the highly produced videos that go along with these series. 'Sermon mill' companies are in business to make money and there are enough of them out there to tell me business is apparently pretty good. But there's more.

‘Artificial’ Sermons

Artificial Intelligence has taken ‘ghost writing’ sermons to a new level. I’ve been writing recently about how [AI is impacting journalism](#). Here’s how it’s beginning to impact sermon preparation –

Pastors and rabbis have recently discovered that ChatGPT, an AI language learning model that can spit out passable prose with just a few prompts, is not that bad at creating sermons – a cornerstone of worship services across many religions.

Historically, these orations are based on generations of knowledge, keen textual analysis and scholarship, combined with the unique charisma and experiences of each worship leader. Sermon writing is considered an art. A divine calling, even.

Seeing a computer approximate similar works in mere seconds has led faith leaders to wrestle with an intriguing problem: Can AI replicate a truly human, spiritual message? And if it can, is the computer just that good, or does the human message need some work? CNN – April 2023

Well, you say, maybe some preachers might use AI to write a sermon – but mine would never do that! Are you sure? If you read the entire CNN article, you'll see that a rabbi in the Hamptons did an interesting experiment with his audience several months ago. In December 2022 a rabbi in East Hampton, New York, presented a sermon and told his audience that he didn't write it. He asked them who did. After guessing many other rabbis and Hebrew scholars, the rabbi told them the entire sermon had been written by AI (ChatGPT). The audience clapped, but the rabbi said – "You're clapping, but I'm terrified!"

Every Christian should be terrified at the idea of Christian pastors, teachers, and authors turning to Artificial Intelligence to produce sermons and Bible studies. Church theology is bad enough now with humans producing the content for sermons. Can you imagine how much worse it will be when pastors and teachers rely on Artificial Intelligence to spit out their sermons and lessons each week?

Not Pleased

Personally, I am not pleased with what's happening to the preaching and teaching of God's Word in churches today. However, none of this is about me or my not being pleased. It is about whether God is pleased with what's going on in His Church. I know from studying God's Word that while He is long-suffering, God is angry with what's going on in today's churches. **False preachers and teachers abound**, while many others are too lazy to care whether they study and preach God's Word "rightly divided" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Spend a few minutes reading Revelation chapters 2 and 3, and you'll see how angry Jesus Christ was with five of seven churches in Asia centuries ago. What do you think Jesus thinks about churches today? Keep in mind as you read these words from our Lord that He was speaking to pastors and other leaders of Christian churches at the end of the 1st century AD.

- “Repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place— unless you repent.”
- “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”
- “... you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”
- “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead ... Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”

- I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be ^[m]zealous and repent.”

Pastor Hershael York, a dean of theology and professor of Christian preaching, said that Artificial Intelligence “lacks a soul.” I agree. AI is based on “machine learning.” Machines don’t have ‘souls.’ York went on to say that while lazy pastors might be tempted to use AI, “the great shepherds, the ones who love preaching, who love their people,” will not.

Jason Thacker is an assistant professor of philosophy and ethics, and also the chair of research in technology ethics and director of the research institute at The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. Thacker has been monitoring AI developments in Christian circles for several years. He believes that “wise, virtuous pastors” won’t give into AI sermons. However –

*‘Some young pastors may become overly reliant on these machines ... and not see the imperfections of these tools’ ... ‘Many pastors are overworked, exhausted, filled with anxiety... One can see why a pastor might say, ‘I can’t do everything I’m supposed to do,’ and start passing ideas off as their own.’ **U.S. News***

That is my concern as well. Young pastors are coming out of today’s seminaries, some of which offer poor instruction in the areas of theology and preaching. If young pastors see pastoring as just another career track, or they get overwhelmed with all the responsibilities of pastoring and miss what’s really important, (feeding God’s people), they

may give in to the supposed convenience of AI sermon writing. What they should be thinking about is pleasing God –

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. James 3:1

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