



Research ARTICLE

Theology of Pneumatology under the Global Tide of the AI Revolution



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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly impacted theological discourse, particularly in the realm of religious services and spiritual guidance. AI's ability to process data has enabled contributions to psychological counseling and religious teachings. However, AI lacks the fundamental attributes of human spirituality—soul and spirit—which are essential for engaging in an interior dialogue with God. Theology recognizes that human beings, created in God's image, possess a unique spiritual connection through the Holy Spirit that AI cannot replicate. This paper examines the theological essence of Pneumatology by analyzing Pauline epistles and their linguistic and rhetorical aspects. Additionally, it explores the influence of AI on theological development, considering both its utility in religious studies and its limitations in spiritual experience.

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Panel 4. Tools

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of AI has been influencing many aspects of theological development in recent years. The AI robot can contribute to the performance of religious services, engaging in psychological counseling and Sunday sermons via data processing. However, what distinguishes AI from humans is the historical sense and interior dialogue between God and man. Historically speaking, man is created in God's image. Man's outer appearance is like God, and man's soul embraces God's nature, that is, light, love, holiness and righteousness. As the name caller of all creatures, man consists of body, soul, and spirit. By contrast, the scientific investment of AI lacks soul and spirit, despite its reasoning capacity. Accordingly, AI cannot be redeemed by Jesus's precious blood and be saved in eschatology, namely, the new heaven and earth. Secondly, in absence of *rhema* (spirit), AI cannot conduct any interior dialogue with the Holy Spirit. It cannot be anointed, moved, inspired by God's spirit. So theology can use AI to process the religious data but is not likely to be replaced by AI, for AI is confined in its original design, lacking the organ to communicate with God, Who believers experience in the Holy Spirit (Henrickson & Meroño-Peñuela, 2023).

In light of this, this paper aims to discuss the essential theology of the Holy Spirit, pointing out the essence of pneumatology via an introductory exploration of Pauline epistles in terms of language analysis and theological thoughts. The epistles of Apostle Paul consist of certain linguistic and rhetorical features, and his central theological thoughts lay in Pneumatology, that is, the Spirit, which is the general consensus of theologians for generations (Alter & Kermode, 1987).

Furthermore, this paper also aims to explore the theological development

of pneumatology under the global tides of the AI revolution, and the possible implementation of AI for pneumatological study.

1. SPIRIT AND SOUL OF THE HUMAN BEING

As revealed in the Bible, there are three parts to man: the spirit, the soul and the body, and the spirit is the main organ through which man communicates with the Holy Spirit. The concept of the human spirit is almost unheard in other religions. However, the concept of the soul can be found in other religions, and the concept of the soul varies significantly across religions, reflecting diverse theological and philosophical perspectives. The following is the understanding of the soul and spirit in each religion.

1. Christianity: The soul and spirit are distinct yet interconnected. The soul represents human emotions, intellect, and will, while the spirit is the divine connection enabling communion with God. Christians believe humans are created in God's image, possessing an immortal soul that can be redeemed and saved.¹²

2. Hinduism: The soul, or *Atman*, is eternal and divine, representing the true self. It is distinct from the physical body and mind. Hindu philosophy emphasizes the soul's journey through cycles of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*) until achieving liberation (*moksha*) and unity with the ultimate reality, *Brahman*.

3. Buddhism: Unlike many religions, Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent soul (*anatman*). Instead, it views human existence as a combination

1 Christianity.com. "Soul vs. Spirit: What Is the Difference?" Last updated December 16, 2024. <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/salvation/difference-between-a-soul-and-a-spirit.html>.

2 Zondervan Academic. "What Is the Soul? Is It Different from the Spirit?" Last updated May 15, 2018. <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/what-is-the-soul>.

of impermanent elements (*skandhas*). Liberation (*nirvana*) involves transcending attachment and realizing the impermanence of self.

4. Islam: The soul (*ruh*) is a divine gift from Allah, granting life and consciousness. It is immortal and accountable for actions in life. Islamic teachings emphasize the soul's purification and its ultimate return to Allah on the Day of Judgment.

5. Judaism: The soul (*nefesh, ruach, neshamah*) is multifaceted, encompassing physical life, emotional vitality, and divine connection. Jewish thought emphasizes the soul's moral responsibility and its relationship with God.

6. Ancient Chinese Beliefs: The soul is dualistic, comprising the *hun* (rational principle) and *po* (sensitive soul). The *hun* survives death and is honored through ancestor worship, while the *po* dissipates.³

These interpretations highlight the unique ways religions understand the soul or spirit, contrasting with Christianity's emphasis on divine redemption and eternal communion with God. Each perspective offers profound insights into human existence and spirituality. Which of these resonates most with your curiosity?

II. THE RHETORICAL THEORY OF PAULINE EPISTLES

Apostle Paul likely had no formal knowledge of rhetorical theory and was not directly influenced by school rhetoric; yet analyzing his epistles through this lens remains valuable. Understanding Paul's writings within the Greco-Roman cultural context is crucial, as oratory played a fundamental role in both legal proceedings and entertainment. Rhetorical theory was deeply embedded in advanced education,

shaping communication and persuasion in the ancient world. Given its dominance, examining how Paul's epistles interact with rhetorical principles helps clarify both his approach and his reception in antiquity.

While Paul may not have consciously structured his writings according to rhetorical conventions, his epistles can still be analyzed through this framework. Rhetorical theory reflects societal expectations and linguistic norms, offering insights into argumentation and style. Ancient literary criticism operated within rhetorical circles, allowing us to better grasp the impact of Paul's rhetoric on his audience. By comparing his works to established rhetorical guidelines, we gain a clearer picture of how his messages resonated in his time. Even if the findings are limited, rhetorical analysis enhances our understanding of Paul's writings and their historical significance. (Anderson, 1999)

Epistles were a key part of Jewish tradition, used by national leaders to communicate with Diaspora communities about calendars, decisions, and innovations. Luke, in Acts 9:2, suggests Paul himself carried such letters from the high priest to Damascus. Examples from 2 Maccabees 1:1-9 and 1:10-2:18 show Jerusalem authorities urging Egyptian Jews to adopt the new feast of Dedication, reflecting a six-part epistolary structure that Paul may have drawn upon.

This structure includes a salutation, thanksgiving, a prayer for recipients, an account of the situation, encouragement to follow instructions, and a pious conclusion. Acts 15:23-29 also reflects this pattern in an apostolic council letter. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians follows a similar format: greeting the church, expressing gratitude and prayer for their faith, describing his concern and joy at their steadfastness, providing instructions

³ Britannica. "Soul | Religion, Philosophy & Nature of Being." Last updated February 25, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/soul-religion-and-philosophy>.

on Christian sanctity, and concluding with a blessing.

Paul's writing conveys deep warmth, care, and joy in the faithfulness of his audience, suggesting that while his epistles were influenced by Jewish traditions, they carried his personal touch. By understanding these structural influences, we gain insight into Paul's method of communication and the emotional depth within his epistles.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul continues the familiar structure of his epistles: salutation, thanksgiving, discussion of the Church's situation, practical holiness, and a concluding blessing. His thanksgiving hints at themes that unfold later—he praises the Corinthians for being “enriched in all knowledge” (1:5), but later criticizes their arrogance and reminds them that “knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” (8:1). His early warmth shifts into sharp rebukes, especially regarding ethical concerns.

Paul foreshadows discussions on spiritual gifts (1:7) and critiques the belief that the kingdom had already begun (4:8). Ethical anxieties emerge in Chapter 5, where he addresses sexual immorality, using cases of scandalous behavior to reprimand the church. Despite his stern corrections, Paul's pastoral tone is affectionate, relying on parental imagery to emphasize his deep care. He likens himself to a nurturing nurse, a father guiding his children, and even a mother in labor, as seen throughout his epistles.

By intertwining tenderness with admonition, Paul's writing reflects his commitment to shaping a faithful and morally upright community. His rhetorical approach balances encouragement with correction, reinforcing his role as a spiritual leader invested in his followers' growth.

Paul's pastoral style is marked by catchphrases and rhetorical reversals. His

greeting, “grace and peace,” merges Greek and Hebrew salutations. He frequently quotes slogans, such as “All things are lawful unto me” (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23), only to counter them with moral considerations—“but all things are not expedient.” Similarly, he first dismisses worldly wisdom (“the foolishness of God is wiser than men,” 1:25) before redefining wisdom as divine knowledge (2:6-7). He also critiques claims to knowledge, asserting that God's recognition of individuals matters more than their own understanding (1 Cor. 8:2-3).

Paul's writing is rich with biblical imagery. He likens sin to leaven that must be purged (1 Cor. 5:7-8) and defends apostolic rights using Old Testament references—priests sharing sacrifices (9:13) and oxen treading corn (9:9; Deut. 25:4). Agricultural metaphors abound: the church as God's farm (1 Cor. 3:6-9), sowing spiritual seeds for a harvest of faith (9:11; Gal. 6:7-9), and the resurrection of Christ as the first-fruit of a greater harvest (1 Cor. 15:20-23). His famous parable of wild olive branches grafted onto the cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11) further illustrates his theological depth. These images reinforce Paul's teachings, blending rebuke with encouragement to shape his audience's spiritual understanding.

Paul frequently uses the metaphors of planting and building, both rooted in Old Testament imagery. In 1 Corinthians 3:9-17, he describes believers as “God's building,” with Jesus Christ as the foundation. The Church, seen as God's temple, must be built with enduring spiritual materials, just as Solomon's temple was constructed with precious stones, gold, and silver. Paul warns against using weak, impermanent materials—wood, hay, and straw—that will be destroyed on Judgment Day, leading to punishment.

Building, equated with spiritual edification, is a recurring theme in Paul's

writings. He encourages believers to “edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11), cautioning that “knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” (1 Cor. 8:1). He reminds them that not all things lead to spiritual growth (1 Cor. 10:23). By reinforcing the significance of a strong spiritual foundation, Paul underscores the importance of faith and virtue in constructing a lasting and righteous community.

Paul’s metaphor of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:5 highlights the Church’s unity and interdependence, with each believer as a “member.” In Colossians, Christ is described as the “head of the body, the church” (1:18), emphasizing His supreme authority. The epistle also refutes the idea that Christ is merely one of many heavenly powers, affirming His role as the beginning and head in every sense. Though the body metaphor evolves in Colossians, with Christians represented as all parts except the head, this shift does not disprove Pauline authorship, but rather shows a different application of the concept.

Paul introduced the metaphor of a law court in Galatians and Romans to argue against justification by the Law of Moses, emphasizing that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not works. He likened God to a judge and Christ to a counselor who intercedes for believers (Romans 8:31-38). In 2 Corinthians, Paul’s writing is marked by intense emotion and rhetorical repetition, reflecting his passionate defense of his message and a progression from self-justification to decisive action.

Paul saw the Cross as central to Christian faith, teaching that Christ died for humanity’s sins (1 Cor. 15:3). While 1 Corinthians 1-2 presents the paradox of the Cross, Galatians 3 offers a theological explanation: Christ became a curse to redeem believers (Deut. 21:23). 2 Corinthians expands on this, emphasizing

reconciliation—Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin so that believers might become righteous (2 Cor. 5). Romans 5-8 further develops the concept, interpreting “becoming a curse” and “made sin” through sacrificial imagery—Christ as a sin offering (Rom. 8:3) and an expiation (Rom. 3:25). Despite this, Paul remained uneasy with certain sacrificial metaphors, using them sparingly.

Paul also resisted framing the Cross as a triumph over spiritual powers, though this idea emerges later in Colossians 2:15. In Romans, the Cross primarily serves to make believers righteous, securing their acquittal at the Last Judgment through Christ’s intercession (Rom. 8:31-39). Paul’s appeal for Onesimus in Philemon mirrors this advocacy—just as Christ pleads for humanity before God.

Sacrificial imagery also shapes Paul’s portrayal of his own ministry, comparing himself to a sweet offering to God (2 Cor. 2:14-15) and likening his service to a sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). In Philippians 2:17, he likens his life to a drink offering poured over the faith of his converts, reinforcing his deep commitment to the Gospel and the suffering it entails. (Alter, 1987)

III. THE CENTRAL THEOLOGICAL THOUGHTS OF PAULINE EPISTLES

Pauline theology centers on the eschatological presence of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul was profoundly transformed by the revelation that, through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, God had fulfilled His ultimate plan for humanity’s salvation. This singular event redefined history and reality, compelling Paul to reinterpret God’s actions—past, present, and future—through the lens of Christ’s return. He understood the Parousia as the decisive moment in God’s plan, with the Holy Spirit guiding its unfolding. Paul’s theology thus balances embracing the new

reality of salvation while making sense of the past. His eschatological framework highlights God's saving will, Christ's return, and the transformation of humanity into a spiritual existence with God. In essence, Paul's thought reflects both the radical shift brought by Jesus and a deep continuity with God's redemptive history. (Schnelle, 2003)

Paul's pneumatology is foundational to his theology, integrating doctrine, Christology, soteriology, anthropology, ethics, and eschatology. Through the Spirit (pneuma), God's presence and life-giving power are revealed, bringing salvation and transformation. The Spirit, which raised Jesus from the dead, is also Christ's ongoing presence and active force in the world. For believers, it represents freedom from sin and death and is a direct gift from God. Paul saw the Spirit's universal work as central to the present age of salvation, marking God's activity in Jesus and His followers. However, the Spirit is never an independent force but remains tied to its divine origin. In all of Paul's teachings, theology proper—his doctrine of God—underpins his pneumatology, emphasizing that God's Spirit is inseparable from God Himself. This perspective allowed Paul to systematize the history of Jesus Christ within the unfolding divine plan. (Schnelle, 2003)

Paul saw the outpouring of God's Spirit, prophesied for the last days, as already fulfilled. The Spirit's presence among Gentiles confirmed the dawn of a new age and anticipated its completion. For Paul, all believers possess the Spirit and must be guided by it.

J. Christian Becker highlights the genius of Pauline thought by identifying its balance between contingent interpretation and a coherent gospel core. His "coherence-contingency method" mediates between sociological analysis and rigid dogma,

portraying Paul as an interpreter rather than a systematic theologian. Paul's hermeneutic dynamically applies the gospel to diverse contexts, maintaining both human mediation and spiritual immediacy. This interaction allows wide-ranging interpretations without losing the gospel's central message. Becker sees this adaptability as Paul's most striking trait, demonstrating his ability to engage varying perspectives while preserving theological integrity. Paul's originality lies in interpretation rather than doctrinal rigidity. (Munzinger, 2007)

IV. THE STUDY OF PAUL'S PNEUMATOLOGY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF AI

Traditionally, the study of theology (such as Paul's pneumatology) is done through a great accumulation of reading and judgement, so to be honest, it is time-consuming and may still be unconvincing. Besides, traditional methodologies in the study of pneumatology, which is the theological exploration of the Holy Spirit, face several challenges: (1) Doctrinal rigidity: traditional approaches often emphasize strict adherence to established doctrines, which can limit the exploration of new perspectives and interpretations. (2) Cultural disconnect: these methodologies may not resonate with contemporary audiences, especially in increasingly secular societies where empirical evidence is prioritized over spiritual beliefs. (3) Limited interfaith engagement: traditional pneumatology often focuses exclusively on Christian perspectives, potentially missing opportunities for enriched dialogue with other faith traditions that have unique views on spirituality. (4) Over-reliance on historical context: while historical foundations are essential, excessive focus on past interpretations can hinder the adaptation of pneumatology to modern societal contexts.

On the other hand, AI could influence pneumatology in several ways: (1) Textual analysis - AI can examine Paul's writings to find recurring themes, words, and phrases related to the Holy Spirit. By comparing these across different Pauline epistles, scholars can identify trends in his pneumatology and see how his understanding evolved. (2) Historical contextualization - AI can analyze historical documents and philosophical works from Paul's era, comparing them to his teachings. This can highlight how Paul's pneumatology was influenced by Jewish, Greco-Roman, and early Christian thought. (3) Theological interpretation - AI can assist scholars in mapping different interpretations of Paul's pneumatology across time. By synthesizing various theological viewpoints, AI can present arguments from different denominations and traditions. (4) Linguistic insights - AI can perform semantic and syntactic analyses on Paul's use of terms like "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) in Greek. This can help determine whether Paul emphasizes the Spirit's personhood, power, or divine activity in different contexts. (5) Comparative studies - AI can compare Paul's pneumatology with other biblical authors, such as Luke or John. This comparison can show how different biblical authors conceptualized the Holy Spirit and whether Paul's views were unique or aligned with broader early Christian beliefs.

V. EXPLORING PNEUMATOLOGY IN THE ERA OF THE AI REVOLUTION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The field of theology is continually shaped by advancements in human understanding and technology. Among its branches, pneumatology, the study of the Holy Spirit, offers a unique lens through which to examine the sweeping transformations brought by the rise of

artificial intelligence (AI). The AI revolution is reshaping societies worldwide, raising profound questions about spirituality, ethics, and humanity's role in creation. This paper explores how the theology of pneumatology intersects with the AI revolution, focusing on key aspects such as ethical challenges, spiritual practices, and theological reinterpretations. By examining these intersections, we hope to foster a deeper understanding of both theology and technology.

A. The intersection of theology and technology

Theological reflection on technological advancements is not a new phenomenon; for centuries, religious thought has responded to shifts in societal paradigms. The AI revolution, however, presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities. As AI systems become increasingly autonomous and capable of decision-making, they confront fundamental theological concepts such as divine omniscience, free will, and creativity.

From a pneumatological perspective, the Holy Spirit is often understood as the source of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance. AI's ability to mimic human intelligence raises questions about the nature of wisdom and its divine origins. Can AI, created by human hands, serve as a channel for spiritual insights, or is it limited to the simulation of understanding without the essence of true wisdom?

Furthermore, the rapid pace of AI development invites reflection on humanity's role as co-creators. Theological discourse can explore whether technological innovation aligns with the Spirit's creative and transformative work in the world. For example, some view AI as a tool for amplifying Kingdom impact, such as supporting ethical decision-making or advancing education. Yet others caution

against the potential for AI to perpetuate biases and ethical blind spots, underscoring the need for spiritual discernment in its development and deployment.

B. Impact on worship and spiritual practices

AI is revolutionizing worship and spiritual practices, offering new avenues for engagement while raising critical questions about authenticity and reliance. Virtual reality and AI-powered tools now transcend geographical barriers, enabling communities to gather for worship in digital spaces. This has been particularly evident during global crises, where technology has allowed for the continuation of religious rituals and fellowship.

Robotic priests, for example, have emerged in countries such as Japan and Italy, performing rituals and offering blessings. While these innovations showcase AI's potential to supplement traditional worship, they also challenge deeply held beliefs about the sacredness of human involvement in spiritual practices. Can a machine truly embody the Spirit's presence in worship, or is its role purely functional?

Prayer practices have also evolved in the AI age. Interactive AI systems designed to engage users in theological reflection offer a new dimension to personal spirituality. However, the convenience of digital tools risks fostering an over-reliance on technology, potentially undermining the depth and discipline of traditional spiritual practices. These developments compel theologians and believers alike to reflect on the balance between innovation and the preservation of spiritual authenticity.

C. Challenges to traditional theology

The AI revolution poses significant challenges to traditional theological concepts, particularly in pneumatology. The Holy Spirit is often associated with

divine interaction, moral agency, and the essence of the soul—concepts that are being reexamined in light of AI's capabilities.

One critical question is whether AI can possess moral agency. While AI systems can make decisions based on programmed algorithms, they lack the conscious intentionality and moral reasoning attributed to humans and, by extension, the divine. This distinction underscores the importance of human stewardship in guiding AI's development.

Moreover, AI's ability to generate interpretations of sacred texts introduces both opportunities and risks. While these tools can democratize access to theological resources, they also raise concerns about theological biases embedded within the algorithms. For instance, AI-generated sermons or commentaries may reflect the perspectives of their creators, rather than the Spirit-inspired diversity of interpretations found in traditional theology.

Perhaps the most profound challenge lies in the question of the soul. In pneumatology, the soul is often understood as the locus of divine-human connection, animated by the Holy Spirit. AI, as a creation of human ingenuity, lacks the spiritual essence that characterizes the human soul. This distinction prompts deeper reflection on the nature of personhood and the Spirit's role in shaping human identity.

D. Real-world case studies and examples

Real-world examples illustrate the tangible impact of AI on religious communities and theological discourse. In Japan, robotic priests perform Buddhist rituals, offering a practical solution to the declining number of human clergy. While some view these robotic priests as a means of preserving tradition, others question whether technology can truly capture the

spiritual depth of sacred rituals.

In healthcare, AI-powered tools have been used to create culturally sensitive care plans that consider patients' religious and spiritual needs. These applications demonstrate AI's potential to support holistic well-being, aligning with the Spirit's work of healing and restoration.

Additionally, AI is being leveraged to address linguistic diversity in religious communities. AI-driven translation tools enable the sharing of sacred texts and theological resources across languages, fostering greater inclusivity and understanding. However, these tools also raise questions about the preservation of theological nuances in translation, challenging theologians to ensure fidelity to the Spirit's inspiration.

CONCLUSION

As AI continues to reshape various fields, including theology, its role in religious studies should be carefully examined. AI's ability to process vast amounts of data offers practical benefits in analyzing scripture, supporting theological research, and enhancing religious discourse. However, its limitations become evident in areas requiring spiritual depth and divine communion, as it lacks the soul and spirit inherent in human beings. Theology, rooted in a deep spiritual relationship with God, cannot be replaced by AI. AI remains confined within its original design, unable to experience divine anointment, inspiration, or spiritual transformation.

Pauline theology emphasizes Pneumatology—the work of the Holy Spirit—as an essential aspect of faith. The epistles of Apostle Paul reveal the significance of spiritual experiences, rhetorical devices, and theological thoughts that shape the understanding of God's presence. While AI can assist in studying these texts, it cannot engage

in the spiritual realities they convey. The theological study of Pneumatology should continue to evolve, acknowledging AI's contributions while maintaining a distinction between algorithmic processing and divine revelation. In the global era of technological innovation, theology must reaffirm the irreplaceable nature of human spiritual experience and maintain its focus on the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

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BIOGRAPHY



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