

# Religion & Webinar Teaching Resources/ Study Guides

## Religion & the A.I (Artificial Intelligence) – October 2023

### [YouTube Video](#)

#### **Overview:**

While discourses around religion and Artificial Intelligence have been with us for decades, the exponential growth of models such as GPT-3 (the basis of Chat GPT) and the ascendancy of Open AI as a company has accelerated the conversation at both philosophical and practical levels. This panel seeks to address the question of how religious studies as a discipline can serve as a fruitful conversation partner for both perennial and emerging questions around AI. For instance: to what extent are such historically determined concepts as “soul” and “real” helpfully informed by religious studies? As the academy wrestles with incorporation of AI into both student work and scholarly research, how might religious studies as a discipline be affected? Will the landscape of the practice of religion be altered significantly by AI, or are such prognostications premature? Join us as we explore these and other salient questions surrounding this timely topic.

#### Host:

**Robert Saler** Associate Professor of Theology and Culture, Christian Theological Seminary  
Prior to coming to CTS, Robert Saler was a pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church in Gary, IN and taught at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (from which he received his Ph.D. in 2011). His first book, *Between Magisterium and Marketplace*, deals with issues of ecclesiology and theological creativity, while his second book (*Theologia Crucis*) examines how the theology of the cross impacts’ global theological literature. He is also the author of *All These Things Into Position: What Theology can Learn from Radiohead, Planning Sabbaticals: A Guide for Congregations and Their Pastors*, and *Sounding the Sacred: Arvo Part and Spirituality* (co-edited with Peter Bouteneff and Jeffers Engelhardt).

#### Panelists:

**Katherine Schmidt** Associate Professor at Molloy University in New York. She teaches a variety of courses in religious studies and ethics at the University. Her research focuses on the relationship of theology and culture, specifically digital culture, and technology. She is the author of many chapters on the subject.

**Jon Ivan Gill** Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Gustavus Adolphus College and Cross-Community Coordinator at the Center for Process Studies. He has written on Afrofuturism, religion, Hip-Hop, philosophy, poststructuralism, atheism, and creative writing. He is co-owner of Serious Cartoons Records & Tapes in San Bernardino, Ca. and Tijuana, Mexico. He is also a solo Hip-Hop artist using the moniker “Gilead7”.

**Kristel Clayville** holds a PhD in Religious Ethics from the University of Chicago’s Divinity School and completed Fellowship training in clinical medical ethics at the MacLean Center, where she continues as a Senior Fellow. Currently, she teaches ethics in the Computer Science Department at UIC, where she also serves on the hospital ethics committee, and the medical school ethics education committee. Her research interests encompass the ethics of emerging (bio)technologies, organ transplant ethics, the role of religion in medical education, AI and religion, and the function of ethics committees in hospitals and tech companies.

## Sources from Panelists

### Sources Mentioned in Video:

People:

[Dr. Andrew Whitehead](#) – “Secularizing Religion”

- Mentioned in the webinar, [Religion & the Public Intellectual](#)

Terms Mentioned

- A.I Hallucinations: content generated by A.I that is unfaithful or illogical based on the provided content. Happens when A.I “starts to make things up” and provides fabrications or inaccuracies.
  - o [“When A.I Chatbots Hallucinate”](#)
  - o [“What are AI Hallucinations”](#)
- Escapism: a tendency or push to find distractions in forms of entertainment from unpleasant realities.
  - o [“Investigating TikTok as an A.I User Platform”](#)

### Show Notes:

**Introductions: 00:00-8:45**

**Mainline questions:**

- To what extent are metaphors taken from religious studies helpful in illuminating what is at stake in the growing presence of A.I, where might it include over exclude?
- Does a religious studies class have a particular case study for how A.I might be present in scholarly and student experience?
- How does terminology, like the soul, factor into precise analysis of A.I and its futures?

**Question 1: 8:45-19:35**

Historical from Rob: There are two modes of thinking one being, “nothing new under sun” becomes dismissal, or an overexuberant, every generation thinks it is the end of the world. The answer might be somewhere in-between. How do we describe where we are with the new technology? Ideas on precedence and continuity.

**Question 2: 19:45-33:00**

What does religious studies academia bring to this society wide debate? The talk of ai and the discourse around it often function as invitations to employ language that religious studies scholars are familiar with, talk of the soul, human distinctiveness, etc. To what extent are religious language helpful in illuminating what's going on or what's at stake here, and when can the language that is most familiar to us religious studies scholars or practitioners, when does that run the risk of obfuscating over illuminating?

### **Question 3: 36:00-47:00**

As educators, researchers and more, what are thoughts on A.I in the classroom, student use of A.I, or teacher use of A.I.

How the panelists use, or do not use, A.I in the classroom, and teaching:

- Katherine G. Schmidt: Put forward a model of education that is not purely utilitarian. The use of ai and things like ChatGPT is just a logical conclusion of how we have been talking to students about what college is for. We have been framing it in capitalist terms, and we are then somehow surprised when they try to find the most efficient way to get through college to get the job. In some ways the students cannot be blamed because they have been told education is a particular kind of thing. Open a discussion about what we are doing here and what we are doing when we are learning.
- Jon Ivan Gill: Open to using devices and technology in the classroom when it's there for what we are there for. Use our resources like A.I to find ideas, encouragement, or inspiration, but not to create laziness. Use it to create interests and help you find ideas.
- Kristel Clayville: Try to have my class be a space to discuss what education is for. Don't necessarily want them to use ChatGPT but the department is more computer based so it has accepted it as a tool. Now that this tool exists, you must be better than it is, writing is harder now. Have them use ChatGPT to answer a question and then respond to it, to see the differences and challenge it.

### **Question 4: 48:00-53:00**

Opinions on the potential impact of these systems on propagation of religious messages. Typically, human subjectivity has played a huge role in this. Can A.I supply or provide a more comprehensive and objective perspective, reducing human subjectivity, what are the potential positives or negatives of using A.I in this context?

## **Teaching Resource 1 – Assignment**

The panelists mention their ideas and uses of A.I in the classroom, Kristel offers us a valuable idea to use in the classroom. Have your students send a question to an A.I source like ChatGPT. After they get a response, have your students respond in a way that correlates with class material.

## **Teaching Resource 2 – Discussion or Debate**

After watching the video, use the conversation and ideas they mention to discuss or debate the pros and cons, uses or other aspects of A.I in the classroom.

Some ideas to consider:

1. The humanness or lack thereof in A.I (the therapist example)
2. By submitting teachers “intellectual property” into A.I programs they are making them better with the teacher's property and against their consent
3. Education as a data processing machine.
4. What does A.I provide for us as researchers, students, educators, learners or more?

## Teaching Resource 3 – Assignment and Question Ideas

Based on the video and other resources, explore the following questions.

1. How does A.I privilege certain material or ideas, continually, how do our definitions of religion privilege certain material, people, ideas or more?
2. What religious language do we see at play in conversations about artificial intelligence?
3. How are our education systems like data processors?
4. How can students using A.I platforms like ChatGPT be a “logical conclusion” of our education systems?

Other Resources

[Religion and Science](#)

[Digital Projects in the Classroom](#)

[Religion in the Digital Age](#)

[New Religious Movements, Popular Media, and Violence in American History](#)

[The Binary between Science and Religion](#)

[The Link Between Black Studies and Technology](#)