

# Re-reading the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: A New Testament Perspective on the Transformation of Christian Education

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Institut Agama Kristen Renatus Pematangsiantar; [bolontoni04@gmail.com](mailto:bolontoni04@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to reread the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 within the context of artificial intelligence and to examine its implications for the transformation of Christian education from a New Testament perspective. This study employed a qualitative approach using library research and theological hermeneutics. A rereading approach was applied to bring the theological message of Matthew 28:19-20 into dialogue with contemporary developments in artificial intelligence and digital education. Data were collected from the Greek New Testament, biblical commentaries, theological literature, and recent scholarly studies concerning artificial intelligence, digital culture, and Christian education. The analysis involved historical-exegetical interpretation, theological synthesis, and contextual reflection. The study reveals that the Great Commission primarily constitutes an educational mandate centered on disciple-making rather than mere information transmission. The imperatives of teaching and obedience emphasize spiritual formation, relational discipleship, and character development, dimensions that cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence. AI may function as a supportive pedagogical instrument by facilitating learning and expanding educational accessibility, but it remains subordinate to the Christ-centered mission of forming mature disciples. Furthermore, the command to “go” can be understood more broadly in the digital era, encompassing online and AI-mediated educational ministries while preserving authentic Christian community and human relationships. This study contributes to contemporary discussions on theology and technology by providing a New Testament framework for understanding educational transformation in the age of artificial intelligence. It demonstrates that technological innovation should serve, rather than redefine, the enduring mission of Christian discipleship.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20, Christian Education

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought profound transformations to nearly every aspect of human life, including education,

communication, and religious practices. Artificial intelligence technologies such as generative AI, machine learning, adaptive learning systems, and conversational agents are increasingly integrated into educational environments, creating new opportunities as well as ethical and theological challenges. In the field of education, AI has been recognized as a tool capable of enhancing personalized learning, improving accessibility, and facilitating knowledge acquisition through intelligent systems (Luckin et al., 2016). However, beyond technical efficiency, the emergence of AI raises fundamental questions regarding the nature of teaching, human formation, and the role of spiritual values in an increasingly digitalized society.

Within Christian education, technological developments have always required theological reflection. Campbell (2013) argues that digital culture does not merely provide new communication tools but also reshapes religious practices, authority, and community formation. Likewise, Campbell and Garner (2016) emphasize that the digital age challenges churches and Christian educational institutions to reconsider how faith communities engage with technological realities without losing their theological identity. Consequently, the rise of artificial intelligence should not be viewed merely as a technological phenomenon but as a cultural and epistemological shift that requires renewed biblical and theological engagement.

At the same time, contemporary learners are increasingly immersed in digital ecosystems characterized by algorithmic information, instant communication, and AI-mediated interactions. Generation Z and Generation Alpha have grown up in environments where knowledge is accessible within seconds, reducing dependence on traditional forms of instruction. Such changes affect not only learning habits but also the ways individuals understand authority, truth, and interpersonal relationships (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). These developments present significant implications for Christian education, whose primary purpose extends beyond knowledge transmission toward spiritual formation, character development, and discipleship.

From the perspective of the New Testament, discipleship constitutes the central mission entrusted by Christ to His followers. The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19–20 represents one of the most important texts concerning the church's educational mandate. Rather than focusing exclusively on evangelistic expansion, the passage emphasizes the formation of disciples through teaching and continuous obedience to Christ's commands. According to France (2007), the command to "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε) constitutes the principal imperative in the passage, indicating that Christian mission fundamentally involves a process of education and spiritual formation. Similarly, Keener (2009) argues that the Great Commission presents a comprehensive vision in which teaching occupies a central role in cultivating faithful communities across generations.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly explored the relationship between theology and artificial intelligence. Herzfeld (2023) observes that AI challenges traditional understandings of personhood, wisdom, and human uniqueness, requiring theological responses rooted in biblical anthropology. Likewise, Cortez (2024) contends that Christian theology should neither reject emerging technologies nor embrace them uncritically but should discern their implications in light of God's purposes for humanity. Such perspectives suggest that AI should be approached as a tool that may support human flourishing while remaining subordinate to the moral and spiritual responsibilities entrusted to human beings. Within Christian educational discourse, however, most existing studies have concentrated on the practical utilization of digital technologies, online learning environments, and media ministries (Campbell & Garner, 2016; Hutchings, 2017). Research concerning artificial intelligence has predominantly focused on technological efficiency, ethical concerns, or digital literacy. Relatively limited attention has been given to the reinterpretation of biblical texts, particularly the Great Commission, as a theological framework for understanding educational transformation in the age of AI. Consequently, the relationship between New Testament theology and AI-assisted Christian education remains insufficiently explored. Many discussions

surrounding artificial intelligence tend to frame technology either as a threat to human spirituality or as an inevitable instrument of progress. Such polarized perspectives often overlook the possibility that AI can function as a supportive medium within a Christ-centered educational paradigm. The New Testament understanding of discipleship suggests that technological innovations should serve the broader purpose of nurturing faith, cultivating obedience, and forming mature believers rather than replacing human relationships and spiritual mentoring. Therefore, the essential question is not whether artificial intelligence should be utilized in Christian education, but how its implementation can remain faithful to the theological vision embedded in Christ's command to make disciples.

Responding to this gap, the present study seeks to reread Matthew 28:19-20 within the context of artificial intelligence and to examine its implications for the transformation of Christian education from a New Testament perspective. Specifically, this study aims to explore how the theological principles of the Great Commission can provide a framework for integrating AI into educational practices without compromising the relational, spiritual, and formative dimensions that characterize authentic Christian discipleship. In doing so, the study intends to contribute to contemporary discussions on theology and technology by demonstrating that educational innovation in the age of artificial intelligence should ultimately remain grounded in the mission of forming disciples who know, obey, and faithfully follow Jesus Christ.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

A qualitative approach using library research and theological hermeneutics was implemented to reread the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 within the contemporary context of artificial intelligence and Christian education. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring meanings, interpretations, and conceptual relationships rather than measuring variables statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the purpose of this study is to reinterpret a biblical text and examine its

implications for educational transformation, the investigation focuses primarily on theological reflection and textual analysis.

The research adopted a re-reading approach, which seeks to revisit classical biblical texts in light of contemporary realities without disregarding their original meaning and historical context. Re-reading does not imply altering the authority of Scripture but rather engaging in a contextual interpretation that allows biblical teachings to speak meaningfully to new cultural and technological circumstances. According to Thiselton (2009), hermeneutical interpretation involves a dialogical process between the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text. Accordingly, the present study attempts to bring the message of Matthew 28:19-20 into conversation with the emergence of artificial intelligence and its implications for Christian education in the twenty-first century. The primary source of data consisted of the biblical text of Matthew 28:19-20 in the Greek New Testament (Nestle-Aland 28th edition), accompanied by several English translations to facilitate comparative interpretation. Special attention was given to key expressions such as *μαθητεύσατε* (make disciples), *διδάσκοντες* (teaching), and *τηρεῖν* (to obey or keep), since these terms constitute the theological core of the Great Commission. Lexical and grammatical analyses were supported by standard New Testament lexical resources and exegetical commentaries.

Secondary data were obtained from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theological commentaries, and scholarly publications concerning New Testament studies, Christian education, digital theology, and artificial intelligence. Major theological sources included works by France (2007), Keener (2009), Carson (2010), and Wright (2004), while discussions concerning digital culture and theology were informed by Campbell and Garner (2016), Campbell (2013), and Hutchings (2017). Contemporary conversations regarding artificial intelligence and theology were examined through the works of Herzfeld (2023), Cortez (2024), and other recent studies on AI ethics and educational transformation. Data collection was conducted through systematic literature review procedures. Relevant literature was identified, classified, and critically examined

according to its contribution to three major themes: the theological meaning of the Great Commission, the impact of artificial intelligence on education, and the relationship between digital transformation and Christian discipleship. Sources were selected based on scholarly credibility, theological relevance, and their contribution to contemporary discussions on technology and education. Data analysis followed the interactive process of theological interpretation proposed by Osborne (2006) and Thiselton (2009). The first stage involved historical-exegetical analysis to understand the original meaning of Matthew 28:19–20 within its first-century context. This stage examined the literary structure, grammatical features, and theological emphasis of the text. The second stage consisted of theological synthesis, in which the central themes of discipleship, teaching, and obedience were identified and integrated into a broader New Testament understanding of Christian formation. The third stage involved contextual interpretation, whereby the theological principles derived from the text were brought into dialogue with contemporary developments in artificial intelligence and digital education. Through this process, the study sought to formulate a theological framework capable of guiding the transformation of Christian education in the age of AI.

To ensure interpretive trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation by comparing various biblical commentaries, theological perspectives, and contemporary scholarly discussions. The analysis adhered to the principle of hermeneutical coherence, ensuring that contextual applications remained consistent with the original intention of the biblical text and with broader New Testament theology. Rather than treating artificial intelligence merely as a technological phenomenon, this study approaches it as a contemporary context that requires theological discernment and educational reflection. Through this methodological framework, the study aims to provide a biblically grounded and contextually relevant reinterpretation of Matthew 28:19–20, demonstrating how the Great Commission can serve as a theological foundation for understanding and guiding the transformation of Christian education in the era of artificial intelligence.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rereading of Matthew 28:19-20 reveals that the Great Commission is fundamentally an educational mandate rather than merely an evangelistic instruction. Although the passage has traditionally been interpreted within the framework of missionary expansion, a closer examination of the Greek text demonstrates that the central command is μαθητεύσατε (matheteusate), commonly translated as “make disciples.” According to France (2007), this imperative constitutes the theological center of the passage, while the participles “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” describe the means through which discipleship is accomplished. Consequently, the Great Commission should not be understood merely as a command to increase the number of believers but as an invitation to cultivate mature followers of Christ through intentional processes of instruction and formation.

This understanding becomes particularly significant in the age of artificial intelligence, where access to information has become increasingly democratized. Traditionally, teachers were perceived primarily as transmitters of knowledge. However, AI technologies now enable learners to obtain information almost instantaneously. Generative AI systems can explain concepts, summarize texts, answer questions, and even simulate conversations. Such developments challenge conventional assumptions regarding the role of educators. If knowledge acquisition can be facilitated by intelligent technologies, what remains the distinctive mission of Christian education?

The Great Commission offers an important answer to this question. Jesus did not command His disciples merely to distribute information but to make disciples who obey His teachings. Keener (2009) argues that the phrase “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” indicates that Christian education involves transformation rather than mere cognition. Therefore, the rise of artificial intelligence does not diminish the significance of Christian educators. Instead, it highlights the continuing importance of spiritual mentoring, character formation, and relational discipleship, dimensions that

cannot be fully replicated by technological systems. Theological reflection on Matthew 28:19-20 suggests that authentic Christian education is inherently relational. Knowledge alone is insufficient without spiritual maturity and practical obedience. In this sense, artificial intelligence may serve as an educational resource, but it cannot replace the interpersonal and spiritual dimensions embodied in Christian discipleship. This distinction becomes increasingly important in a digital age characterized by abundant information but often lacking wisdom and moral discernment.

### *The Meaning of "Teaching" in Matthew 28:20 and Educational Transformation*

Another important finding emerging from this rereading concerns the significance of the participle *διδάσκοντες* (*didaskontes*), translated as "teaching." In the New Testament, teaching does not refer merely to intellectual instruction but encompasses the formation of a way of life. According to Carson (2010), the educational model envisioned by Jesus differs significantly from modern concepts of information transfer. Teaching in Matthew 28:20 aims to cultivate obedience, commitment, and conformity to Christ. This insight challenges contemporary educational paradigms that prioritize cognitive achievement while neglecting moral and spiritual development. Artificial intelligence has demonstrated extraordinary capabilities in facilitating personalized learning, generating instructional materials, and enhancing educational accessibility (Luckin et al., 2016). Adaptive AI systems can provide immediate feedback, recommend learning pathways, and support differentiated instruction. Such capabilities offer significant opportunities for Christian education institutions seeking to improve teaching effectiveness.

The theological meaning of teaching in Matthew 28:20 reminds educators that Christian formation extends beyond knowledge acquisition. Palmer (1998) emphasizes that authentic teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher rather than from techniques alone. Human educators embody values, compassion, empathy, and spiritual maturity that cannot be reduced to algorithms or machine-generated responses.

Consequently, AI should be understood as a pedagogical assistant rather than a substitute for teachers.

This perspective corresponds with the arguments of Campbell and Garner (2016), who maintain that technological developments require faith communities to negotiate their practices without surrendering their theological identity. The integration of artificial intelligence into Christian education should therefore be guided by the purpose of nurturing disciples who embody Christlike character. Educational innovation must remain subordinate to the broader mission of spiritual transformation.

### *Artificial Intelligence and the Renewal of Pedagogical Paradigms*

The emergence of artificial intelligence has accelerated a shift from teacher-centered education toward learner-centered environments. Students increasingly interact with digital resources, intelligent tutoring systems, and conversational AI platforms. Such transformations have encouraged educators to reconsider traditional instructional methods and to adopt more flexible approaches to learning. From the perspective of the Great Commission, these changes should not be viewed as threats but as opportunities. Historically, Christianity has demonstrated remarkable adaptability in utilizing communication technologies for the advancement of the gospel. The early church employed Roman roads and the Greek language to spread Christian teachings. The invention of the printing press facilitated the dissemination of biblical knowledge during the Reformation. Radio, television, and the internet later expanded the possibilities of evangelism and education (Campbell, 2013). In a similar manner, artificial intelligence represents another stage in the continuing interaction between faith and technology.

However, the present study indicates that technological innovation must be accompanied by theological discernment. Herzfeld (2023) argues that artificial intelligence raises important questions concerning human uniqueness and moral responsibility. Although AI systems can imitate certain cognitive processes, they lack consciousness, spirituality, and the capacity for moral accountability. Consequently, they cannot function as disciples

in the biblical sense, nor can they participate in the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. This distinction reinforces the anthropological foundation of Christian education. Human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), possessing spiritual, moral, and relational dimensions that transcend computational capacities. Therefore, while AI may assist in delivering content, organizing information, and facilitating communication, it cannot replace the formative role played by communities of faith, teachers, and mentors.

### *From Information Transmission to Spiritual Formation*

One of the most striking implications of rereading Matthew 28:19-20 concerns the distinction between information and transformation. Contemporary society often equates education with access to information. Yet the New Testament consistently presents discipleship as a process of transformation involving the mind, heart, and behavior. Wright (2004) notes that the Great Commission emphasizes lifelong obedience rather than temporary intellectual achievement. This understanding contrasts sharply with contemporary digital culture, which frequently values efficiency, speed, and instant gratification. Artificial intelligence excels in producing rapid answers, but discipleship requires patience, perseverance, and relational investment.

The findings of this study suggest that AI-assisted Christian education should not focus exclusively on technological efficiency. Instead, educational practices should prioritize spiritual formation, ethical discernment, and character development. Technologies should support rather than dominate pedagogical processes. This perspective resonates with the broader biblical understanding of wisdom. Throughout Scripture, wisdom involves not merely possessing knowledge but living according to God's purposes. The distinction between knowledge and wisdom becomes especially relevant in an era when information is abundant but moral guidance is often fragmented. Christian education therefore carries the responsibility of helping learners interpret information through the lens of biblical truth.

### ***Reinterpreting “Go” in a Digital and AI-Mediated World***

The participle *πορευθέντες* (poreuthentes), commonly translated as “go,” has traditionally been associated with geographical movement and missionary expansion. Nevertheless, contemporary realities invite a broader interpretation. In a digitally connected world, geographical boundaries have become increasingly permeable. Educational interactions now occur through online classrooms, virtual communities, and AI-assisted learning environments. According to Noll (2011), Christian mission has always adapted to changing cultural circumstances while preserving its essential message. Consequently, “going” in the twenty-first century may include digital presence, online discipleship, and technologically mediated educational practices. Artificial intelligence enables Christian educators to extend learning opportunities beyond physical classrooms and to reach diverse communities through innovative platforms.

However, digital accessibility should not be confused with authentic community. Bonhoeffer (1954) emphasized that Christian fellowship involves embodied relationships characterized by mutual responsibility and love. Virtual interactions, although valuable, cannot entirely replace the richness of face-to-face discipleship. Therefore, AI-assisted ministry and education should complement rather than eliminate human community.

Based on the rereading of Matthew 28:19-20, this study proposes a Christ-centered approach to educational transformation in the age of artificial intelligence. Such a model recognizes the value of technological innovation while maintaining the theological priorities embedded in the Great Commission. First, artificial intelligence should function as a supportive instrument rather than an autonomous authority. Technology must remain subordinate to the mission of making disciples. Second, Christian education should preserve its emphasis on relational formation, recognizing that spiritual maturity emerges through communities of faith and personal mentoring. Third, educational practices should cultivate ethical discernment and wisdom, enabling learners to engage critically with technological developments. Finally, Christian institutions should promote

responsible AI literacy, equipping students to utilize emerging technologies in ways that honor God and serve humanity.

These findings demonstrate that the challenge posed by artificial intelligence is not fundamentally technological but theological. The central question is not whether machines can teach, but whether educational practices continue to reflect the mission entrusted by Christ. The Great Commission reminds believers that the ultimate purpose of education is not the production of information-rich individuals but the formation of faithful disciples who know Christ, obey His teachings, and participate in His mission.

Consequently, rereading Matthew 28:19-20 within the context of artificial intelligence reveals that technological transformation does not render the Great Commission obsolete. On the contrary, it highlights its continuing relevance. In an era characterized by rapid technological advancement, the church and Christian educational institutions are called to embrace innovation while remaining rooted in the enduring mission of making disciples. Artificial intelligence may reshape methods, but it cannot redefine the essence of Christian education, which remains centered on the formation of lives transformed by Jesus Christ.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has introduced significant changes to the landscape of education and has raised important questions concerning the future of teaching, learning, and human formation. Within Christian education, these changes extend beyond issues of technological adaptation and involve deeper theological considerations regarding the nature of discipleship, spiritual formation, and the continuing relevance of biblical teaching in an increasingly digital world. This study sought to reread Matthew 28:19-20 within the context of artificial intelligence and to explore its implications for the transformation of Christian education from a New Testament perspective. The findings demonstrate that the Great Commission should not be understood merely as an instruction for evangelistic expansion but as a comprehensive

mandate for discipleship and transformative education. A close reading of the text reveals that the central command in Matthew 28:19-20 is “make disciples,” while going, baptizing, and teaching constitute the means through which this mission is accomplished. Consequently, Christian education is fundamentally concerned not with the transmission of information alone but with the formation of individuals who live in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ.

The emergence of artificial intelligence has altered the accessibility and distribution of knowledge, challenging traditional assumptions about the role of educators. AI technologies have demonstrated remarkable capacities in supporting learning processes, generating instructional content, and providing personalized educational experiences. Nevertheless, the present study shows that the educational vision embodied in the Great Commission transcends cognitive instruction. Teaching, according to Matthew 28:20, is inseparable from spiritual growth, moral development, and the cultivation of obedience. These dimensions of formation remain deeply relational and cannot be fully replicated by intelligent machines or algorithmic systems. The rereading of the Great Commission also reveals that technological developments should not be perceived primarily as threats to Christian education. Rather, they may be understood as opportunities that invite the church and Christian educational institutions to rethink their pedagogical practices while remaining faithful to their theological foundations. Throughout history, Christianity has continually engaged with new forms of communication and cultural change. In this sense, artificial intelligence represents another context in which the church is called to exercise discernment and responsible stewardship. Technology may transform educational methods, but it does not alter the essential purpose of Christian education, namely the formation of disciples whose lives reflect the character and teachings of Christ.

This study emphasizes that the command to “go” in Matthew 28:19 can be understood in a broader sense within the digital age. While missionary movement historically involved geographical expansion, contemporary realities suggest that Christian witness and educational ministry may also occur within digital environments. Artificial intelligence

and online technologies provide new possibilities for extending educational access and supporting discipleship across geographical boundaries. However, such developments should complement rather than replace the communal and relational dimensions of Christian life. Authentic discipleship continues to require personal interaction, spiritual mentoring, and participation within communities of faith. The findings affirm that human beings retain a unique and irreplaceable role in Christian education because they are created in the image of God and are capable of moral responsibility, spiritual discernment, and covenantal relationships. Artificial intelligence, despite its impressive capabilities, remains a technological instrument rather than an autonomous moral agent. Therefore, AI should be employed as a supportive tool that assists educators and learners without displacing the human and spiritual dimensions that lie at the heart of Christian formation. This study contributes to contemporary discussions on theology, artificial intelligence, and Christian education by demonstrating that Matthew 28:19-20 provides a valuable theological framework for understanding educational transformation in the twenty-first century. The Great Commission remains profoundly relevant in the age of artificial intelligence because its ultimate concern is not technological efficiency but faithful discipleship. As educational practices continue to evolve, Christian institutions are called to embrace innovation with wisdom, ensuring that emerging technologies serve the mission of making disciples rather than redefining it. In this way, artificial intelligence can become a means of supporting educational ministry while the enduring task of forming mature followers of Christ remains the central and unchanging vocation of Christian education.

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