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AI Shepherds and Electric Sheep

Leading and Teaching in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is taking the world by storm, well, the developed world anyway. The impact of AI on humanity should not be underestimated. This book by Sean O’Callaghan and Paul A. Hoffman is a timely resource. *AI Shepherds and Electric Sheep* engages in the needed conversation on how Christians should interact with AI. O’Callaghan and Hoffman start introducing the topic of AI with a brief history and defining AI. While there is a simple definition, the book shows the complexity of this topic including various definitions drawing on the implications of AI on humanity. In showing the implications to humanity the authors provide an overview on thirteen domains of American society, including educational, political, and religious. They show AI’s influence in all these domains discussing both positive and negative impacts.

After introducing the reader to AI and its influence on human society, O’Callaghan and Hoffman provide a theological chapter on “What Does It Mean to Be Human from a Biblical Perspective?” They propose “the most helpful and faithful way to evaluate AI is by fashioning a robust biblical anthropology” (61). Their biblical anthropology is developed through a

metanarrative interpretation. Rather than drawing upon existing biblical narrative methods, the authors develop their own—creational narrative. They set out “six movements: creator, creation, disintegration, liberation, reclamation, and glorification” (62). While they use their words, this model follows closely with other biblical narratives of the Scriptures. In proposing this narrative, they argue for the valuing of the *imago Dei*.

From this biblical foundation, *AI Shepherds and Electric Sheep* explore the impact of technology on being human. Drawing from the work of Stephen Kline, they discuss two categories of technology use—methodology and social usage. From this they conclude technology is not neutral. Often the developers provide the agenda of technology. The authors explore the concept of techno-humanism and transhumanism asking, “What does it mean to be *human* in a technological age?” (91) While there is a little overlap with some previous discussion on the implications of AI on humanity, this chapter goes into more detail and focuses on the agenda of AI on humanity. O’Callaghan and Hoffman provide an intriguing discussion on transhumanism and Gnosticism. Knowledge is of value and the goal is to rid oneself of their “frail and weak” body. Delving into topics on singularity, medicine, and genetically engineered humans, the authors argue all are “turbocharged” by AI.

The book then turns to the topics of teaching and formation. While they use the word “andragogy” as the practice of teaching adults, I found this unnecessary, as pedagogy is accepted as the practice of teaching. They do note, teaching practice with AI should include children, using the term pedagogy. Here the authors address education issues of truth, human flourishing, and family. Formation, being formed into the *imago Christi*, involved a discussion about discipleship and sanctification. While they acknowledge the importance to not be naive, they do lean to what

Albert Borgmann has labelled “hearth habits” (141). These practices for teaching and formation do not specifically require, and could possibly ignore, AI.

O’Callaghan and Hoffman conclude with recommendations for ministry leaders and teachers. They propose three categories of ideas; “Don’t Do This,” “Proceed with Caution,” and “Consider Moving Ahead.” Their suggestions were practical and thought-provoking.

AI Shepherds and Electric Sheep is a worthwhile resource for church leaders and teachers to consider the impact of AI in education and formation. The authors provide a solid theology. In proposing their own narrative theology method, I did not see the need, as there was no specific connection to their unique movements. While being aware of AI and how technology is being used, and can be used to help human flourishing, I felt at the end of the book affirmed in my position that humans are time-bound, space-positioned, connected, and embodied persons.