



THE INTEGRATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN PASTORAL CARE FOR NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS: PROSPECTS AND PITFALLS

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Abstract

This work, "The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Pastoral Care for Nigerian Christians: Prospects and Pitfalls," explores the impact of AI in Nigerian Christianity. Technological innovation always plays a role in shaping religious beliefs and practices. For example, the invention of the printing press, which made the Bible more accessible to many people, subsequently triggered a reformation in Christendom when some Christians exposed the inconsistencies between Church doctrines and practices, leading to the birth of new denominations. This experience points to a possible similar outcome of the interaction of AI with Christianity. Using the secondary sources of data gathering, the researchers who are participant-observers surmise that the use of AI in pastoral care could be both good and bad as it applies to the peculiarities of Nigerian Christianity. While appreciating the utility value of AI in religion, the work opines that the pitfalls of its overuse in Christian pastoral care outweigh the advantages. AI has possibilities that can greatly enhance pastoral care and still intrinsically depreciate the depth and power of beliefs and practices. This work challenges Christian caregivers to think critically about how emerging AI technologies can best be used without compromising the essence of religious faith. This cautious approach requires that limits be set on the use of AI in Nigerian Christianity.

Keywords: Prospects and Pitfalls, Artificial Intelligence, Pastoral Care, Nigerian Christians.

Introduction

Technological innovation has always played a significant role in religion. One of Gutenberg's major motivations for inventing the printing press, for example, was to make the Bible more accessible to people. That accessibility, which was achieved, triggered a fundamental shift in how Christianity was understood and practiced. The availability of printed Bibles and religious texts subsequently instigated religious reformation movements in Christendom. With ordinary people able to read the Bible for themselves, they began to notice inconsistencies between Church practices and biblical teachings. Print technology also became a powerful tool for reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli, who used it to challenge the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The theological disagreements that followed led to the birth of new Christian denominations that now exist and give Christianity its identity and shape in the world.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) is both the theory and the development of computer systems that are able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence. This includes visual perception, speech recognition, decision making, and translation between languages. Consequently, it is the simulation of human intelligence by machines, the applications of which include expert systems, natural language processing, speech recognition, and machine vision. Generally, AI places the ability in a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings (humans). The term refers to the project of developing systems endowed with human intellectual processes of reasoning, discovering meaning, generalizing, and learning from past experiences.

Copeland (2024) states that Artificial Intelligence, in the limited sense, is found in apps as diverse as medical diagnosis, computer search engines, voice or handwriting recognition, and in chatbots. AI has revolutionized life in modern times by driving innovation, automating tasks, and creating new possibilities and methodologies across all fields of human endeavour, serving as a modern utilitarian reality rather than a futuristic concept. AI's growing integration into daily life also raises crucial questions in modern society regarding ethics, bias, personal privacy, the future of employment (as it engenders both job creation and job displacement), among other concerns. Salhab and Aboushi (2025) assert that AI influences various aspects of human life beyond just the computer industry, and this makes it essential for everyone to embrace and understand AI, which makes AI literacy an essential skill that everyone should acquire in response to this new era of technological advancement in the modern world.

The Origin of Artificial Intelligence

AI-generated information surmises that the earliest substantial work in the field of Artificial Intelligence was done in the mid-20th century by the British logician and computer pioneer, Alan Mathison Turing. He gave considerable thought to the issue of machine intelligence, and one of his colleagues, Donald Michie, later founded the Department of Machine Intelligence and Perception at the University of Edinburgh. Later in 1948, he introduced many of the central concepts of AI in a report entitled "Intelligent Machinery. One of his original ideas was to train a network of artificial neurons to perform specific tasks, an approach described as "connectionism. Turing also experimented with designing chess programs, which resulted in the Deep Blue Chess Machine that can compete with human chess players, coming into existence in 1997.

How Artificial Intelligence Works

Artificial Intelligence systems work by ingesting large amounts of labelled training data, analysing the data for correlations and patterns, and using these patterns to make predictions about future states. Lakowski (2024) states that in this way, a chatbot that is fed examples of text can learn to generate life-like exchanges with people, or an image recognition tool can learn to identify and describe objects in images by reviewing millions of examples. Lakowski further intimates that AI programming focuses on cognitive skills that include the following:

1. Learning – acquiring data and creating rules for how to turn it into actionable information. The rules are called algorithms.
2. Reasoning – this focuses on choosing the right algorithm to reach a desired outcome.



3. Self-correction – designed to continually fine-tune algorithms and ensure they provide the most accurate results possible.
4. Creativity – the use of neural networks, rule-based systems, statistical methods, and other AI techniques to generate new images, new texts, new music, and new ideas.

Artificial Intelligence is important for its potential to change how human beings live, work, and play. It has been effectively used in business to automate tasks done by humans, including customer service work, fraud detection, and quality control, and can perform these tasks much better than human beings in a number of areas. This is particularly when it comes to repetitive, detail-oriented tasks such as analysing large numbers of documents to ensure that relevant fields are filled in properly. AI tools are known to often complete jobs quickly with relatively few errors. Because of the massive data sets it can process, AI can also give enterprises insights into their operations that they might not have been aware of.

Artificial intelligence refers to the whole system of computers as well as their programming, which perform mental work that typically involves tasks that rely on the intelligence of man, including acting or making decisions based on rational thinking processes. Aspects of AI manifest in mobile applications – programs or software that are made to operate in mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets. This also includes chatbots, which are apps that a user can use to engage in a conversation with AI that responds synchronously in real time. In the field of religion, there are examples of mobile apps with which one can chat with “divine figures” which include AI God Chat, AI Jesus, Ganesh GPT, Gita GPT, Hadith GPT, Historical Figures, and Text with Jesus, and Jewish Prayer Chatbots.

Risks Associated with Artificial Intelligence

AI poses certain risks in terms of ethical and socio-economic consequences. As more tasks become automated, especially in areas like marketing and healthcare, many workers are poised to lose their jobs. Although AI may create some new jobs, these may require more technical skills than the jobs AI has replaced. It has certain biases that are difficult to overcome without proper training. Example predictive policing algorithms used to predict where crimes are most likely to occur may lead to over-policing in such areas. As humans are inherently biased, algorithms are bound to reflect human biases.

Privacy is another aspect of AI that raises concerns. AI often involves collecting and processing large amounts of data. There is the risk that this data will be accessed by the wrong people or organizations. With generative AI, there is the possibility of manipulating images to create fake profiles. AI can also be used to survey populations and track individuals in public spaces. Usman (2023) notes an unfounded fear about the AI Apocalypse – a myth that the AI system will develop to a stage of super intelligence, which would eventually decide to become the master of the earth and lead to machines dethroning humanity. This superstitious inclination emanated mainly from the circles of religion by people opposed to the prevalence and growing popularity of AI in the modern world.



Artificial Intelligence and Religion

As noted in other fields of human life, AI has the potential to influence and reshape how individuals engage with religious and spiritual practices. With its ability to process vast amounts of data and simulate human-like interactions, AI presents intriguing possibilities within the realm of religious experience. Alkhouri (2024) postulates that AI can assist individuals in finding personalized spiritual guidance, provide virtual companionship, or even simulate encounters with divine figures, though questions may arise about the authenticity of and ethical implications of AI-driven religious experiences. It is noteworthy that while AI does not inherently enquire about the fundamental essence of spirituality, belief formation, and the human experience, it prompts discussion on how it might influence or impact these aspects of religion. While spirituality, belief-formation, and the human experience are distinct from one another, they are interconnected with yet separate from religious experiences. The challenge generated is how technology, through AI, can enhance or potentially depreciate the depth, authenticity, and transformative power of religious beliefs and practices. Alkhouri (2024) surmises that as researchers delve into the influences of AI on the psychology of religion, they must explore the ethical considerations, potential biases, and unintended consequences that may arise, noting the need to strike a crucial balance between technological advancements and preserving the fundamental aspects of spirituality, personal growth, and genuine human connection.

In his own contribution from the viewpoint of African traditional religion, Ariyo (2024) states that AI is influencing religion by providing new tools and perspectives on age-old beliefs and practices. In the African context, where spirituality and tradition play major roles in daily life, AI's impact on religious practices is profound and multifaceted. AI techs like machine learning, natural language processing, and robotics should be integrated into the different aspects of African religious practices to allow new ways to communicate with the divine, ancestors, and spiritual forces. He postulates that communication is an area where AI will influence religion, as AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants will be used by religious leaders and practitioners to offer guidance, answer questions, and deploy spiritual counselling to devotees who need it, as these techs enable more personalized interactions and can serve a larger audience that transcends physical boundaries and time constraints.

Ariyo further notes that AI can help in the preservation and dissemination of traditional knowledge and practices in the aspect of helping to digitize ancient texts, oral traditions, artifacts, and rituals, and making them more accessible to younger generations and scholars, arguing that such digital preservation ensures that the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of Africa is not lost to time. In this scenario, robotics can help in performing intricate and potentially dangerous rituals, lowering an over-reliance on human practitioners and also ensuring consistency and accuracy in the ritual processes. This implies that artificial intelligence is a significant aspect of Africa's embracing of modernization and the new challenges it presents, among which is the preservation and revitalization of traditional religious practices, which are important aspects of Africa's cultural heritage and identity.



Ariyo postulates that the future of AI in African religious practices will help improve how people engage with spirituality and culture. This is in terms of continued integration of AI-powered techs in religious rituals and ceremonies, incorporating the use of AI chatbots for spiritual guidance, virtual reality, immersive religious experiences, and AI algorithms for the interpretation of religious texts and teachings. Another possible area of influence is the trend of the growing digitization of religious practices, with more religious organizations embracing online platforms, social media outreach, and community engagement. This shift towards digital platforms should lead to a more inclusive, globally-connected religious community transcending geographical boundaries. In this regard, AI could open up and democratize access to religious knowledge, allowing individuals to deepen their spiritual practices independently of pastors, and thereby allowing a more tailored and meaningful connection to spirituality. However, this goes with an underlying concern that AI will negatively affect human-to-human interactions in religious spirituality, and equally diminish the role of traditional religious leaders in a digitized religious landscape, and these fears are not unfounded.

The multi-faceted usage of AI has also made it possible for it to be used as a new frontier in religion and spirituality, as it has its effects on both religious and non-religious individuals. On this premise, Tsuria and Tsuria (2024) state that understanding how AI re-presents religion and spirituality can help scholars, policy-makers, and religious leaders to make sense of what information the average user of generative AI is exposed to. This is because, as AI becomes a prevalent communication technology tool and a new frontier for knowledge acquisition, the usage of AI will inevitably inform and construct people's worldviews and faith. AI is known to understand different religious languages and traditions and can construct prayers in different religious traditions, respecting subtle differences and biases between religions.

Ingber, cited in Tsuria and Tsuria (2024), surmises that when considering AI as a new frontier for the representation of religions in the "marketplace of ideas," it can be noted that when compared to "cold media" such as encyclopaedias or even web browsers, the AI responses to prompts tend to lack sources or references, which weakens its credibility. Ty (2023) posits that religion, which has been a vital component of human life, is part of AI and has influenced it, especially in the aspect of morality and ethics. This is in line with the adjustments and at times, compromises that humanity has been constrained to make throughout the ages, with each technological advance recorded in human history. AI in this sense has affected man's religious practices and ethical sense cum orientation. The exponential rise in the usage of AI-powered tech has grave implications and poses quandaries about the meaning of life, the purpose of religion, the connection between human beings and robots, as well as the integrity of traditional practices in religious observances as we know them. Ty (2024) asserts that mankind has reached an "Anthropocene Age" in which humankind transforms nature itself and human beings themselves. Going further to describe this new age, Ty refers to the seeding of the clouds to artificially produce rain at will, the ability to implant all kinds of things in the body, disruptive techs such as robotics, the Internet of Things (IOT), virtual reality, and other things now exponentially transforming how man lives and operates in his daily life.



AI technology has made it possible for new forms of religious expression and community building. Social media platforms, for instance, have become virtual spaces where believers can share their faith, connect with like-minded individuals, and participate in online religious community activities. This has not only improved the reach of religious messages but also offered a platform for African religious leaders to reach a global audience, just like other religions. As AI becomes a prevalent communication technology tool and a new frontier for knowledge acquisition, the use of AI is bound to inform, construct, and influence people's worldviews and faith in the modern world.

Christianity and Artificial Intelligence

Christians are tasked with the imperative to reflect on the implications of AI through the lens of their faith. Gonzalez (2024) states that Christianity has areas of common interest that it shares with AI. These include the sanctity of human life, which AI technology promotes through its advanced medical diagnoses, patient care, and life-saving treatments, and AI's ability to automate repetitive tasks, which frees up human energy and time for more meaningful pursuit which aligns with the Christian calling of the wise stewardship of time, talents, and resources. However, AI raises ethical questions surrounding privacy, data security, and decision-making processes, as Christians are called to protect the dignity and rights of individuals, ensuring fairness and justice. Excessive reliance on AI can also lead to a devaluation of human interaction, empathy, and compassion, in direct negation of the Christian call to love one's neighbours as oneself, which genuine care technology should not be allowed to replace.

Gonzalez (2024), in a significant way, refers to the incarnation of Christ in the Christian teaching as God's preference for originality over artificiality, pointing out that God sent His Son to become fully man to relate with mankind, instead of sending a hologram of Himself to let humanity know what he was like. He surmises that artificial intelligence is a human creation, and like all things about man are blighted by the reason of man's imperfection, and hence, true spirituality will never be found through artificial intelligence. All the highpoints of Christian spirituality, like love, inner peace, and joy, cannot come from a computer algorithm, but through intimate personal connection with God and his human agents. Also, the healing of broken souls can hardly be achieved through any software machine programming, no matter how high-tech it is.

Another Christian approach is that AI aligns with biblical stewardship principles by harnessing tech to enhance and care for God's creation. This viewpoint sees AI as a tool God gives to better the world and aid people, which is in line with the Christian duty to use talents and resources wisely. However, the Christian community has raised concerns about AI's ethical implications, including privacy, autonomy, and the risk of employment displacement. Many Christians urge strict ethical norms and restrictions to guarantee that AI is utilized in a way that respects human dignity, promotes equality, and serves the community.

The concept of "Jesus AI," which comprises AI systems meant to mimic or portray religious figures such as Jesus, elicits conflicting reactions from Christians. Many see it as a valuable



instrument for evangelization or religious instruction, making Christian teaching more accessible in a modern digital manner. Others are sceptical or dismissive of the concept, fearing that it devalues or distorts fundamental components of their faith. Christians are concerned that such techs are going to contribute to misunderstandings about the divine nature of the teachings of Jesus, particularly if AI-generated content differs from orthodox Christian doctrine. Ministry Brands (2025) points out that the Vatican highlighted this mindset in 2020 with the call for AI ethics, which urged a global commitment to an ethical approach to AI. This implies that AI must not be given autonomy in making judgments with serious ethical implications, particularly in human rights and social justice. The role of human pastors serves as a foundation for the suggested ethical paradigm, which calls for the regulation of AI apps to prevent unfavourable outcomes, including loss of privacy, inequity, and job displacement.

Other major aspects of AI tech that are available for Christians include:

TurboScribe – An AI-powered transcription service that instantly turns audio and video recordings into precise text. TurboScribe allows churches to transcribe sermons, lectures, and meetings, providing written content for websites, newsletters, or study guides.

Bible Answers AI – This is an AI platform that uses advanced tech to answer Christian-related inquiries. Bible Answers helps a church improve its educational and outreach capacities by responding quickly and accurately to congregational questions regarding faith, scripture, and doctrine.

Clearchat - This is an AI-powered chatbot created to help visitors to websites by answering inquiries and giving guidance. This helps to promote digital hospitality by making church websites more interactive and responsive to new or prospective members, particularly during initial contact and interactions.

Church Loom – This is a content creation tool employing AI to convert sermons and spoken messages into usable multimedia formats. It helps churches swiftly generate high-quality content for social media, websites, and marketing materials.

Bible.ai – This is a platform that provides millions of AI-powered responses rooted in biblical knowledge. Bible.ai assists pastors and educators in offering thoroughly researched, scripturally sound responses and materials for the dissemination of Christian knowledge.

Christian Pastoral Care and the Role of Artificial Intelligence

In Christianity, pastoral care typically involves the practitioner (normally a priest, pastor, or other trained personnel) and their client sitting together, with the client sharing personal details. The practitioner listens attentively, keeps the information confidential, and offers the appropriate guidance and counsel. It is a Christian approach to cure mental and spiritual distress and has been in place since the beginning of the Christian religion. It is also an easy and often preferred contact point for religious people seeking help with psychological problems or personal issues.

Pastoral care in Christianity is rooted in the biblical metaphor of a pastor or shepherd looking after the flock under his care, involving guidance, encouragement, and care through all circumstances. This care aims to help believers grow in their faith, deepen their relationship with God, and support one another through a variety of practices like prayer, counselling, teaching,



and visitation of those in need. The provision of pastoral care occurs in various contexts, including handling congregations, hospital chaplaincy, crisis intervention, telephone help-lines, caring for the aged and the physically-challenged, end-of-life care, grief support, etc.

In Christianity, the role of pastors encompasses a multifaceted set of responsibilities driven by a commitment to spiritual leadership and community service. The duties of a pastor revolve around guiding church congregations in matters of faith, providing pastoral care, and ensuring the spiritual well-being of the members. Pastors lead worship services, deliver sermons, and oversee various church ceremonies like baptism, weddings, and funerals. The role extends beyond these visible activities as they are deeply involved in the personal lives of their congregation, offering counselling, support, and guidance in times of need. Religious leaders argue that tech, no matter how advanced, must not be viewed as a source of religious inspiration or spiritual understanding, pointing out that AI lacks fundamental human characteristics such as empathy, moral judgment, and the ability to engage in profound ethical and theological reasoning. AI does not take the role of human leaders in pastoral care and spiritual leadership, even while it processes information and offers data-driven insights.

Allen and Chat GPT (2023) aver that one significant concern regarding AI in Christian religious settings revolves around 'playing God'. Critics argue that the creation of advanced AI systems with human-like intelligence can be viewed as an attempt by humans to assume God-like powers, potentially challenging divine authority. The concept of playing God raises questions about the boundaries of human agency and the limits of human creativity in relation to God's sovereignty. As religious communities hold specific biblically founded moral and ethical values that guide their practices and beliefs, the introduction of AI may introduce conflicts between principles encoded within the AI systems and orthodoxy (beliefs), and orthopraxy (practices) upheld by Christians.

The use of AI-powered chatbots for religious counsellors raises concerns about the authenticity and meaningfulness of the counsellors' experience. Human counsellors provide unique, empathic, and spiritual guidance, which AI systems cannot authentically replicate. While AI tech can enable virtual religious ceremonies and rituals, allowing individuals to participate remotely, the substitution of physical presence with virtual experiences may raise questions about the authenticity and spiritual significance of such practices. Furthermore, AI's ability to process vast amounts of data and make connections may lead to theological distortions due to misinterpretation that would create theological confusion, resulting from a lack of contextual sensitivity necessary for accurate theological analysis. This could invariably lead to heresy that is usually precipitated by wrong interpretation and application of religious texts. Allen and Chat GPT (2023) surmise that these misinterpretations can lead to apostasy, leading some to wonder if Satan uses AI to distract humans from God, as charged by some Christians who are reluctant to adapt AI technology wholly in the formulation and shaping of Christian spirituality. This means that the failures and shortcomings of AI can have eternal consequences. AI may be an avenue to challenge traditional theological concepts and interpretation, and undermine the rich tradition of theological scholarship and the human capacity for discernment and interpretation of sacred texts.



If not employed with caution, AI tech can easily contribute to the devaluation of human life and the erosion of authentic human connection. This may undermine the significance of human relationships and diminish the value of fellowship and community, which are highly regarded in religious contexts. Using AI tech in prayer reaches a living person down the virtual chain, but relief to the supplicant gained through physical Christian fellowship intercession is much more effective and authentic. The increased reliance on AI may seriously impact one's perception and value placed on human life within church settings, because treating AI systems as a replacement for human interactions potentially dehumanizes individuals.

Stoddart (2023) states that love is a vital ingredient in human pastoral care, but doubts whether there can be artificial kenotic (self-emptying) love. In his submission, while there is the possibility of programming a form of kenosis into an algorithm, pastoral care is not a case of merely imparting information, but of fixing someone's problems through interpersonal relationships, where the value of being cared for is reflected in the costliness of the attention given. When attending to a person, a caregiver is not concurrently available to another person. Presence, in this sense, is not a connection into a system but a connection to another human person. Tech-assisted activities are not substitutes for human care.

Stoddart (2023) surmises that Christians should remain alert to the robotic mimicry of emotions that might lure them into substituting costly biological and empathetic presence of the human pastoral care giver with artificial non-biological systems. This cautious approach aligns with the contention that AI-driven pastoral care becomes a do-it-yourself pastoral care, which rules out the distinctiveness of both the human and divine otherness. This also downplays the second outstanding feature of pastoral care, which is the strong emphasis placed on the worth of human persons. Wilks, cited in Xu (2025), avers that the term 'artificial companion' is coined to refer to all computational artefacts that are designed to 'get to know their owners' by offering aspects of personalization.

Xu (2025) poses the other pertinent questions about the application of artificial companions to religious pastoral care. As pastoral care is one of the major pillars of religious communities, AI-driven pastoral care puts religious ministers on edge and perplexes and disrupts some religious communities. Pastoral care is inherently relational in the sense that ministers and other caregivers benefit from the practice through establishing or strengthening human-human and/or human-God relationships. In other words, care receivers benefit from pastoral care because the ministers assist in developing their relationships with other people and with God. On the other hand, ministers who engage in pastoral care stand to gain by growing spiritually through the process, deepening their own understanding of their relationship with the care-receivers and with God, and learning from their clients' life experiences. This cannot be said of the AI-driven pastoral care systems because the relationship between AI ministers and human users is, by nature, the relationship between self and an artificial self. Xu surmises that this basically makes it a self-pastoral care that rules out both the divine and human otherness, which features prominently in inter-personal human pastoral care.



The Prospects of AI in Christian Pastoral Care

McDonald (2015) defines pastoral care as the emotional, physical, and spiritual duties that a pastor supplies to the religious community under their jurisdiction. This practice exists in many spiritual and religious faiths and is often considered inclusive of religious and non-religious forms of support, found in both secular and religious communities. Pastoral care is a Christian approach to improve mental distress and has been practiced since the formation of the Christian Church, an easily and often preferred contact point for religious people seeking help with spiritual and psychological problems or personal issues. According to Postman (1993), in the modern world, technological advancements increasingly shape people's lives, in a culture that seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes orders from technology. Artificial intelligence has started to make its mark in the religious communities, offering new possibilities and opportunities for pastors to enhance their ministry. Howard (2023) explores the areas in which AI can be advantageous to pastors and pastoral care as follows:

Preparation of Sermons

AI-powered tools can aid pastors in researching and organizing relevant content, scriptures, and the historical context of biblical passages for their homilies. With the assistance of AI, pastors can access vast databases, theological texts, and commentaries to enhance their biblical knowledge and ensure reliable interpretations. AI can even help generate sermon outlines based on chosen themes or biblical passages, providing valuable insights and fresh perspectives.

Writing/Editing

Besides sermon preparation, most pastors write newsletter articles, blog columns, devotionals, reference letters, emails, and social media posts. AI can assist in generating ideas, doing research on specific topics, providing templates for correspondence, finding relevant illustrations, and proof-reading of one's work.

Pastoral Care and Counselling

Virtual assistants driven by AI algorithms can quickly locate and generate resources to assist the pastor in ministering to those seeking spiritual guidance and counselling. Such may include scriptural references, prayers, and counselling services, and grief support. These resources can be made accessible even when the minister is not physically available. AI enhances how churches reach out to and connect with their members. For example, AI chatbots provide 24-hour assistance by answering questions and providing spiritual counsel outside of typical church office hours. It broadens the church's reach and guarantees ongoing participation with the community.

Community Engagement and Outreach

AI can be crucial in connecting pastors with their congregations and facilitating community engagement. Social media monitoring tools can help pastors understand the concerns, interests,



and questions of their community members, enabling them to tailor their messages and programs to address these needs effectively.

Data Analysis and Decision-Making

With AI's capacity to analyse vast amounts of data, and by examining demographic information, attendance records, and engagement metrics, pastors can gain insight into the needs and preferences of members of their congregations.

Language Translation and Interpretation

In an increasingly multi-cultural world, AI-powered language translation tools can assist pastors in presenting their sermons (written or oral) in multiple languages. These translation tools can also help pastors communicate effectively with speakers of other languages during counselling sessions or hospital visits, ensuring that no one is deprived of pastoral care due to language limitations.

Administrative Assistance

Employing AI to accomplish routine administrative tasks can free up a pastor's time to focus on other meaningful interactions and activities within their communities. In some churches, whether due to budget cuts or personnel realignment, administrative support has shifted from administrative staff to the minister himself. A virtual assistant can enable pastors to minimize these tasks, cut costs, and still be prominent and effective in their ministry activities.

The Problems Involved

While the utility value of AI in the Christian religion is high and appreciable, it is pertinent to state that, like in other human inventions, technology is not infallible. Cofield (2023) postulates that it is possible AI can pull and disseminate incorrect information, and without proper Bible study, a preacher may be conveying an incomplete or, at worst, an incorrect message. Authenticity comes more from the preacher's own spiritual discernment through personal study, where God speaks directly to the person. For example, when AI-generated copied and pasted messages are used, the preacher runs the risk of losing originality and sounding like a machine. Other negative impacts of the use of AI in the church include:

Reduced Human Interaction

Using AI-powered communication tools and platforms in church settings has reduced face-to-face contact between worshippers. Digital tools expand the reach of church events and programs, but they decrease the human interaction that is the key to creating a vibrant and encouraging church community.

Privacy Concerns

The danger of data breaches and improper use of personal information rises as churches use AI tech for improved data management and customized offerings. Data breaches are concerning, considering the sensitive nature of data commonly handled by churches, such as personal,



financial, and spiritual information. Privacy is threatened seriously, for example, when one makes a confidential confession about one's sins to an AI 'priest'. No one knows to what extent the information given out would travel, and into how many wrong hands it would get, thereby defeating the spiritual purpose of the religious act.

Dependency on Technology

An over-reliance on AI and digital tools leads to churches relying on tech for fundamental operations such as administration, service planning, and community participation. This reliance jeopardizes the church's ability to function independently of technology, perhaps exposing it to disruptions in technological services or changes in tech policy.

Ethical and Moral Issues

Challenges occur when AI systems are utilized, when important ethical concerns are involved, perhaps leading to conclusions that contradict established moral or religious norms. This could also result from misalignment with religious values. AI's ability to misinterpret or wrongly depict religious teachings poses a huge risk. Congregants become confused about religion if AI-driven information or decisions conflict with doctrinal truths, and this factor can disrupt the established moral orientation of Christians.

Job Displacement

Using AI to automate administrative work and certain parts of pastoral care results in job displacement inside churches, which contributes to a hike in the unemployment problem. The transformation affects career prospects and volunteer roles, which are needed for engaging community people in meaningful ways. However, AI invariably creates new roles that may lead to a productivity boom. The only problem involved in this regard is the management of the transition. When the re-training of workers to acquire new skills in the use of AI is unavailable or inadequate, the backlash from job losses is readily compounded in ways that adversely affect productivity and output.

De-personalization of the Pastoral Ministry

In the pastoral care of Christians, the priests have a central role to play as the human intermediaries between God and man. AI presents a rare fusion of faith and technology that claims the ability to fill the gaps that can exist in the priest-worshipper relationship. Some AI chatbots have AI priests that one can freely chat with for counselling and guidance in spiritual matters. Many Christians see this as a spiritually dangerous trend. An intelligent but soulless machine cannot really do much in deep spiritual matters that aim for the profound spiritual results desired in the religious experience. The robotic AI priest has no personal faith in the Christian salvation message and cannot believe things the way human beings do, though 'he' is programmed to retain and dispense information about religious beliefs. This cannot effectively fit into the role of a human priest with a real human touch in religious counselling, and cannot offer guidance from personal experience. The AI priesthood is limited in other broader areas of the priestly work and pastoral care in that it cannot administer the church's sacraments, among other roles.



Ideological (Theological) Manipulation

With its rising popularity and wide acceptability across the globe, AI is taking on more of an autonomous kind of identity where it can almost think for itself, as well as think for consumers who rely on it. However, the pertinent question on the mind of those who care to ask is who controls AI? Carpenter (2023) postulates that many of these programs are controlled by people who are definitely ideologically on the left, who are, in many cases, hostile to Christianity, or at least theologically pseudo-Christians. Then, on the other hand, atheist scientists who may be significant stakeholders in the AI field can make a lot of input in the programming of AI apps. These people may not have the kind of theological guardrails, morals, and ethics that obtain in the Christian religion, potentially leaving some dangerous implications for Christians who use AI apps in an uncensored manner. Liberal theologians and biblical revisionists who are entrenched in the AI tech industry might use their vantage point to gradually and subtly reshape the theological landscape of Christian theology in modern times.

Factors in the Nigerian Christian Experience

Okpanum and Omehie (2024) posit that Nigeria, as a developing country, boasts a large, young, and tech-savvy population – a prime demographic factor for AI development and adoption. Additionally, the presence of global tech companies with their expertise in AI research and development can further accelerate AI innovation in Nigeria, coupled with the country's presence and participation in the international endorsement of the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety in the Summit held in November 2023 in the UK.

Commenting on Nigeria's progress in the adaptation of AI, Effoduh (2021) posits that Nigeria is one of the first countries in Africa to establish a national centre for artificial intelligence, dubbed the National Centre for AI and Robotics (NCAIR), commissioned in Abuja 2020 as a response to the directive for all agencies under the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy to formulate practical strategies for enhanced implementation of the digital economy. Additionally, Effoduh surmises that Cross River State is the first state in Nigeria to have set up a Ministry of Robotics and AI in 2019 to enable the state to empower and equip the youth to be players in the emerging 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'. As of September 2021, there are about seventy-five private organizations in Nigeria (businesses, start-ups, etc.) that are using, creating, or adopting AI systems in their work, also stating that there are presently seven major ministries, departments, and agencies that have mandates to advance and/or regulate the use of AI across the country.

The influence of AI on the Christian religion in Nigeria is clearly growing, and its usage is, in some cases, unavoidable. Kabah (2024) states that for Bible study in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches opted to minimize their in-person attendance to church events and gatherings, including group Bible study groups and prayer meetings. Churches responded to such reduced attendance by using AI-powered tech. In a similar vein, the AI systems can also help to keep Christian fellowships and pastoral care flowing in times of extreme insecurity when freedom of human movement is seriously impeded. Nigeria is a country known for a plethora of terrorist acts, insurgencies, political instability, ethnic agitations, and religious fundamentalism,



all of which aggravate the insecurity problems from time to time across various regions of the nation. AI can help keep the Church going when it is forced to go underground, or when physical attendance at church activities is impeded by prevailing unfavourable circumstances.

Generally, the use of AI systems by pastoral care-givers in Nigerian Christianity will lead to improved access to teaching aids, enhance the availability of relevant materials, better preparation and delivery of Bible study and sermons in churches, and expanded evangelization and discipleship training activities across many Christian denominations for the teeming population of the Christian faithful in the country. In terms of the multiplicity of languages and dialects in the country, AI-powered systems can go a long way in facilitating quicker translations of the Bible and other Christian documents for the languages of the over 250 ethnic groups in the country, thereby enhancing the growth of the religion in Africa's most populous country. The same goes for the automatic translation and transcribing of campground and retreat messages for the benefit of participants from different ethnic cum language backgrounds. AI could also be used to create digital content and online religious broadcasts (and podcasts) that make for a wider reach to inaccessible areas due to poor roads and mobile communication networks, among other impediments.

It is pertinent to note that the literacy and poverty level of Nigeria's population constitutes a problem in that the uneven distribution of wealth favours a minority of the privileged class who have easy access to the nation's resources. Consequently, the number of the citizenry that can afford Android phones and other gadgets to access AI technology is not as high as in the developed countries of the world. This obviously is a limitation to the harnessing of the advantages of the use of AI systems in the country, which also applies to Christian leaders and their members.

Another factor that shapes Nigerian Christianity is the cut-throat competition among Christian denominations. This malady is fuelled by the proliferation of churches and the quest for more resources through getting new members. Aspects of the rivalry also extend to space and influence in the society, which leads to 'membership snatching', which prioritizes fishing from other churches' ponds instead of working to convert new believers into the Christian faith. This also makes indiscriminate building of places of worship and establishment of 'ministries' the major focus of churches and individuals, at the expense of shared mission, and this, most times, undermines Christian unity in the country. Sarumi (2024), while noting that competition is a natural part of human existence, decries the disheartening trend of competition among churches in Nigeria, which obviously lowers the standard teachings of orthodox Christianity

If Nigerian pastoral care givers are allowed to design AI systems, chances are that the prevalent competitive rather than the collaborative spirit in the mission of the church will mar the contents so produced with denominational biases, aimed at affirming group superiority at the expense of true Christian pastoral care. It will also undermine basic Christian theologies in the race for more members and influence, tending towards heretic, sugar-coated teachings designed to lure and sway people from their churches.



Another concern is that the use of AI systems can make pastors lazy by encouraging them to rely solely on them for tasks like the preparation of sermons and Bible study guides. In an economically backward country like Nigeria, where religion is exploited for money-making purposes, and the sermons of popular so-called ‘motivational’ preachers are packaged for sale, AI-powered systems can be applied to churn out such messages in large numbers without minding the theological correctness of the contents. The fear is that pastors who mimic the messages of popular pastors to achieve ministerial fame may resort to complete dependence on AI for sermon writing, thereby under-using their potentials and becoming stunted in their natural writing abilities, and in their inspiration for sermon generation, whereas life-impacting messages for spiritual renewal hardly happen without the connection to and guidance from the Holy Spirit. In the same vein, AI systems could tempt many who want a slice of the financial cake to produce and flood the ‘Christian market’ with uninspired “copy and paste” devotionals, Bible study materials, gospel music, and pseudo-Christian literature, a trend that is already on in Nigerian Christianity.

In the Roman Catholic practice of the confessional – penitential members confessing their sins privately to a priest and obtaining counsel and absolution (a declaration of forgiveness), it is obvious that few Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere can really trust an impersonal AI ‘machine priest’ with the intimacies of their moral failures. This constitutes a real danger of the loss of privacy and confidentiality required for such a deep and solemn spiritual exercise. Whereas chatbots like the “AI Jesus” and other “Chat with a Priest” systems are programmed to give audience and thereafter, provide scripturally-based advice in a virtual confessional booth, the technologies lack a personal human interactive touch and do not provide real absolution for the confessed sins that can truly lift the burden of moral guilt from the penitent person as it obtains in the case of an encounter with a human priest.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence or AI is seen by many to be a brave new frontier of technology, one that will make people’s day-to-day lives simpler, easier, and more efficient. Despite all the benefits this technological revolution promises, tech experts, legislators, and religious leaders are becoming increasingly concerned that if this technology falls into the wrong hands, the consequences can be detrimental, dire, and perhaps change the course of humanity forever.

However, each new wave of innovation has raised ethical concerns about its effect on the Christian faith. In the age of the printing press, critics feared that mass-producing the Bible would encourage inaccurate interpretations. This actually happened. Extremists and political actors also exploited the press to spread propaganda disguised in biblical language, blurring the line between truth and error to popularize their ideologies. Parallels still obtain in modern times as every technological leap brings both progress and peril. For instance, while live-streaming platforms allow people to participate in Church services from any part of the world, these same innovations can lead to distraction, diminish the authenticity of worship, promote artificial and superficial religious engagement, and expose more people to heretical teachings.



In some ways, the same concerns raised when the printing press was invented still hold for AI. While access to information has become easier, the discipline required to study, reflect, and build conviction risks being lost. In the end, the pastors conclude that technology itself is neither good nor bad—its impact depends entirely on how it's used.

The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Christianity represents one of the most significant religio-technological challenges of our modern times. This study has critically examined the implications of AI for Christian pastoral work in view of its belief systems, moral agency, and the spiritual authority and relevance of pastors in the Nigerian context. It has also interrogated how AI technologies ranging from voice-activated scripture applications to automated sermon generators and AI-driven spiritual counselling tools are not only reshaping pastoral communication but also altering the structures of the Christian religious experience itself.

From the analysis presented in this paper, and in the context of Christianity in Nigeria, the influence of AI is both promising and problematic. On one hand, AI offers unprecedented opportunities to reach wider audiences, preserve religious texts, and modernize the stale and parochial methods of religious institutions. On the other hand, it threatens to erode communal spiritual practices, replace traditional authority with technological intelligence, and 'mechanize' and 'commodify' sacred rituals for theological or denominational ends. AI's incursion into Christian pastoral care must not result in a loss of the personal touch inherent in the moral agency of the priest and his office, or spiritual authenticity being replaced by superficial spirituality. Rather, it should challenge religious scholars and clerics to consider how new technologies might be integrated into African Christian spiritual and moral landscapes without allowing machines to control the essence of religious faith.

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