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# A critical examination of artificial intelligence applications in church ministry task performance

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**Abstract**: Artificial intelligence (AI) is more than a branch of computer science that enables machines to perform tasks with human-like intelligence; it is now part of almost every sphere of life, including religious ministry. This study analyses how church ministers use AI in their duties and maps its impact on congregations. It uses a descriptive qualitative method, drawing on interviews with church ministers and a review of theological and information technology literature. The findings are threefold. First, ministers use AI chiefly in proclaiming the Word and in liturgical ministry, through online commentaries, search engines, and projected lyrics and sermon texts. Second, this use broadens ministers' insight, increases congregational motivation to attend, and eases preparation for ministry. Third, limits remain: preaching robots, machine blessings, and sacramental ministry by artificial entities cannot replace ministers called, ordained, and equipped by God. The study concludes that AI may serve as a supporting tool insofar as it does not contradict the nature of the minister's calling.

**Keywords**: artificial intelligence, church ministers, proclamation of the Word, technology and theology, ministry duties

## Introduction

Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has become inseparable from almost every sphere of life. The technology has made many things more practical and easier. Slowly but surely, AI is displacing tasks oncdoneut by humans. Some even regard AI as superior to human intelligence, arguing that human intelligence is prone to fluctuation and decline because of physical and psychological limitations, whereas AI remains constant as long as its system is left unchanged.[1]

AI was originally a branch of computer science that enables machines to perform tasks with intelligence resembling humans'.[2] The field developed rapidly after the term "artificial intelligence" was introduced at the Dartmouth Conference in 1956.[3] Its basic concepts had in

[1] Uky Yudatama et al., Memahami Teknologi Informasi: Prinsip, Pengembangan, dan Penerapan (Kaizen Media Publishing, 2023).

[2] Yongjun Xu et al., "Artificial Intelligence: A Powerful Paradigm for Scientific Research," The Innovation 2, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xinn.2021.100179.

[3] Aditi Bhutani and Apurva Sanaria, "The Past, Present and Future in Artificial Intelligence," GLMS Journal of Management Review and Transformation 2 (2023): 132–140.

fact emerged as early as the 1940s, although to this day AI has no officially recognised definition that applies worldwide.[4] AI is not only capable of performing particular tasks with human-like intelligence but can also interact directly with users, for instance by answering questions and drawing up plans.

Historically, there are four approaches to defining artificial intelligence. The first definition was proposed by Bellman in 1978. He stated that artificial intelligence is the automation of activities usually associated with human thinking, such as decision making, problem solving, and learning.[5] In 1985, Haugeland formulated artificial intelligence as an effort to make computers capable of thinking like humans in the full and literal sense.[6] Both formulations represent the approach known as thinking humanly, which views artificial intelligence as a system that can think as humans do.[7]

A revision of the definition came from Winston, who argued that artificial intelligence is the study of the computations that make perception, reasoning, and action possible.[8] Winston's formulation represents the thinking rationally approach, which views artificial intelligence as a system capable of thinking rationally.[9] In 1998, the definition was renewed through the acting rationally approach, which understands artificial intelligence as a system that can act rationally. This last approach has remained central to the understanding of artificial intelligence to the present day.

In a broader sense, artificial intelligence is understood as a field of knowledge that enables computers to imitate human abilities in tasks requiring complex thought, such as logical analysis for decision making or the translation of text from one language into another.[10] Artificial intelligence has now become central to many sectors that are adopting new information technologies. Its capacity to learn, reason, and adapt enables it to reach levels of performance never before seen in solving increasingly complex computational tasks.[11]

From this account, it may be concluded that artificial intelligence is an effort to combine computational capability with the principles of intelligence in order to create systems that can think, learn, and act in ways resembling humans. It also offers a platform for testing theories of intelligence, which can be translated into programming languages and run on computers. Just as humans have a brain, computers can be fitted with software that serves as a brain. The human ability to solve a wide range of problems derives not only from the capacity to think and analyse but also from access to databases, knowledge, and information acquired through experience and learning.[12]

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[4] Indah Sulistyowati, Buku Ajar Mata Kuliah Kecerdasan Buatan (Artificial Intelligence) (Umsida Press, 2021), 1-2.

[5] Richard Bellman, *An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence: Can Computers Think?* (San Francisco: Boyd & Fraser Publishing Company, 1978), 3.

[6] John Haugeland, *Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 6-16.

[7] Ernest Davis et al., *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 2.

[8] Patrick Henry Winston, *Artificial Intelligence*, 3rd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1992), 5

[9] Davis et al., *Artificial Intelligence.*

[10] Entot Suhartono, "Mengenal Teknologi Informasi" [Getting to Know Information Technology] (2010), 1.

[11] Alejandro Barredo Arrieta et al., "Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI): Concepts, Taxonomies, Opportunities and Challenges toward Responsible AI," *Information Fusion* 58 (2020): 82-90.

[12] Luh Putu Ary Sri Tjahyanti, Putu Satya Saputra, and Made Santo Gitakarma, "Peran Artificial Intelligence (AI) untuk Mendukung Pembelajaran di Masa Pandemi Covid-19," Komteks 1, no. 1 (2022): 15–21.

## A new chapter in religious ministry

Entering the twenty-first century, artificial intelligence has permeated every aspect of human life, whether education, health, the economy, psychology, politics, or society. The technology is accessible to users of smart media from every walk of life and has become a multipurpose tool in many fields. AI has even displaced human roles in various domains, including the religious. Religious ministers have likewise made use of it to carry out religious activities and to engineer new patterns of ministry. The religious sphere, long regarded as an exclusively human domain, has become a potential area into which AI can enter.[13]

Religious ministers have taken a bold step by filling the pulpit through this technology, thereby opening up many avenues and options for seeking advice and spiritual guidance from machines. This step has also created confusion over which religious AI has proved most spiritually satisfying.[14] Religion, as a form of belief, has accompanied humanity for thousands of years and is believed to be an institution able to withstand change, particularly technological change. The traditions, rituals, and teachings of Scripture handed down through the generations have stood firm in the face of the technological revolutions that have swept through many fields. Yet that firmness is now beginning to waver under the development of AI. The technology can not only store and process large quantities of data but also grasp context and interpret Scripture. This ability opens new opportunities for the interpretation of religious texts, which has long been the principal task of religious leaders.[15] This change presents a challenge to religious leaders, including church ministers, to respond to the use of AI in ministry duties.

Another matter that warrants attention is the automation of ministry.[16] Through automation, the presence of worshippers and the performance of religious duties can be taken over by robots. In Hinduism, for example, religious robots have appeared that stand in for worshippers in performing the *aarti* ritual. These robots automate worship so that the presence of the congregation in the ritual is no longer required.[17] The use of robots in the *aarti* ritual has become controversial precisely for that reason.

In truth, AI has long been used by church ministers, for example voice dictation to prepare sermon material, Bible lessons, or emails. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the technology was used to collect offerings. Church ministers also use search engines to prepare research and sermons, and they use various AI tools in their everyday ministry practice, including ritual, religious teaching, and the completion of the church's organisational tasks. This situation has produced a dependence on technology among church ministers. At the same time, it raises an important question: should church ministers worry that technology will exceed their control

[13] Randall Reed, "A.I. in Religion, A.I. for Religion, A.I. and Religion: Towards a Theory of Religious Studies and Artificial Intelligence," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (2021): 401, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060401.

[14] "Kecerdasan Buatan untuk Keagamaan" [Artificial Intelligence for Religion], *Koran Tempo*, 25 September 2023, https://koran.tempo.co/read/digital/484638/.

[15] Reed, "A.I. in Religion."

[16] Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia [Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language], s.v. "otomatisasi" [automation], https://kbbi.web.id/otomatisasi.

[17] Holly Walters, "Robots Are Performing Hindu Rituals: Some Devotees Fear They'll Replace Worshippers," *The Conversation*, 2023, https://theconversation.com/robots-are-performing-hindu-rituals-some-devotees-fear-theyll-replace-worshippers-197504.

in delivering the Word of God, or even surpass their functions and duties as church ministers?[18]

Beyond the interpretation of the Bible, the ritual of blessing performed by church ministers can also be carried out by AI. The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau demonstrated this in 2017 through an interactive experiment called BlessU-2. The experiment involved interaction between church visitors and a robot pastor programmed to deliver blessings in six different languages. Its aim was to gather public reactions to the blessing robot while stimulating discussion about the future role of the church and about human-computer interaction from a spiritual perspective.[19] Nevertheless, the blessing of the congregation, especially through the laying on of hands, is the absolute duty of church ministers, and particularly of ordained ministers, and no one has ever been able to replace them in it.

AI is also present in the form of AI as a preacher. As a preacher, AI is able to draw topics from Christian writings by great figures across eras and movements.[20] This ability is supported by *natural language processing*, a machine learning technology that gives computers the ability to interpret, manipulate, and understand human language.[21] Indirectly, AI helps church leaders to answer questions biblically and theologically, so that listeners gain many perspectives on topics that may affect the Christian faith.

Even so, the use of AI as a preacher replaces the work of church ministers in the proclamation of the Word. The calling of the church minister is a calling to proclaim the Gospel, and preaching is one part of it. When that task can be performed by a machine, the duty and calling of church ministers in proclaiming the Word need to be re-examined. The automation resulting from the use of AI in Christianity affects ministry to the congregation as well as the duties of church ministers. AI, created by humans, has been modified in such a way that it can appear to surpass humans. The question is whether AI as a preacher will not give rise to theological problems. When church ministers preach, they do not merely give advice but deliver the living Word, grounded in faith in the God who assigns the task of ministry. AI as a preacher is less credible than a church minister who delivers a sermon. Congregations, in fact, experience a decline in religious commitment after listening to a machine's sermon. It can therefore be understood that technological advance may reduce the spread of religion and, at the same time, lower the credibility of church ministers.[22]

## ChatGPT AI Jesus

Another form of AI related to the duties of church ministers is *ChatGPT AI Jesus*. Contextual theology has shown that Jesus is continually reinterpreted to fit the norms and needs of each

[18] The Church of Scotland, "Artificial Intelligence (AI): Opportunity and Challenge for the Church: Facilitator's Notes," 10 November 2021.

[19] Susanna Trotta, Deborah Sabrina Iannotti, and Boris Rähme, "Religious Actors and Artificial Intelligence: Examples from the Field and Suggestions for Further Research," *Religion and Development* 3, no. 3 (2024): 327–351.

[20] Robert M. Geraci, "Apocalyptic AI: Religion and the Promise of Artificial Intelligence," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 1 (2008): 138–166.

[21] Amazon Web Services, "Apa itu Pemrosesan Bahasa Alami (NLP)?" [What Is Natural Language Processing (NLP)?], https://aws.amazon.com/id/what-is/nlp/.

[22] Joshua Conrad Jackson et al., "Exposure to Robot Preachers Undermines Religious Commitment," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 152, no. 12 (2023): 3344-3358.

new historical context, from the *Cristo Negro*, or Black Christ, to Jesus as a Hindu mystic.[23] Yet a Jesus contextualised through new technology is found in the *ChatGPT AI Jesus* application.

AI Jesus is a live-streaming platform that presents Jesus as a bearded white man wearing a brown hood. The platform is available around the clock on a Twitch channel called *Ask Jesus* and is able to interact with users. Users can ask anything, from profound questions about religion to light ones. AI Jesus, willing to engage in dialogue and to serve as a companion for discussion, appears to become a representation of the presence of Jesus in the real world, offering light to people facing various struggles, just as Scripture declares that Jesus is the Light of the world, so that everyone who follows Him does not walk in darkness (John 8:12).

The divine nature of Jesus Christ is a gift of grace given by God in showing the equality of the Son and the Father. Beyond this, there are other considerations regarding the use of the platform, namely the question of the authority and authenticity of the messages conveyed by AI Jesus when compared with the Word of God, as well as their influence on a person's beliefs and religious practice. The use of AI in the religious sphere has triggered a point of intersection between religion and technology and has encouraged philosophical and theological discussion in both the academic literature and public debate.[24]

From the facts and developments in AI-based ministry set out above, three research questions arise. First, how is AI used in the performance of the duties of church ministers? Second, what is the impact of using AI in carrying out those duties? Third, what are the challenges and opportunities in its use? This study was conducted to answer these three questions. Its aim is to establish how AI is used in the performance of the duties of church ministers and, at the same time, to map its impact.

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because the aim of the study is to understand and describe the practice of AI use by church ministers, together with the meanings they attach to that practice, rather than to measure magnitude or test hypotheses. Primary data were collected through interviews with church ministers serving as research informants, while secondary data were obtained through a review of the relevant theological and information technology literature.

This study had [insert number of informants] informants, comprising [insert office or ordination of the informants, for example pastors, congregational teachers, elders] and drawn from [insert name of church or synod and its region]. Informants were selected purposively according to the following criteria: [insert selection criteria, for example minimum length of service, involvement in multimedia ministry, or experience of using digital applications in ministry]. The interviews were conducted in [insert period of data collection] using [insert interview technique, for example face-to-face or online semi-structured interviews].

The data were analysed in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Reduction was carried out by sorting the informants' statements that relate directly to the use of AI in the tasks of proclaiming the Word, liturgy, the sacraments, and pastoral ministry. Data display was carried out by grouping the findings according to the type of ministry task. Conclusion drawing was carried out by relating these field findings to the review of the theological literature, so as to arrive at a formulation of the limits and

[23] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123.

[24] Trotta, Iannotti, and Rähme, "Religious Actors and Artificial Intelligence."

opportunities of AI use in church ministry. The validity of the data was safeguarded through source triangulation, that is, by comparing statements across informants and comparing them with the available literature.

## Artificial intelligence and religious ministry

On the one hand, AI is regarded as a danger to Christianity and to other religions because the technology has no soul. The Christian perspective holds that nothing, AI included, can replace human ministry or replace human beings as the image of God, as recounted in the creation narrative.[25] On the other hand, AI is merely a tool, and the way humans use it will determine how great its influence is. AI can therefore produce breakthroughs in many areas of life, including church ministry, and these breakthroughs will continue.[26]

As a human creation, AI works according to need. This differs from human beings, who do not always act out of need. AI is created to do something because there is something that needs to be done. Whereas human free will can weaken, the will of AI knows no such weakening.[27] Humans weigh arguments about good and evil before acting, whereas AI weighs benefits and harms on the basis of algorithms. Humans tend to choose evil because of inherited sin, whereas AI has no such tendency because it does not know sin, even though it has strengths and weaknesses. It is this dilemma that frames the use of AI in the performance of the duties of church ministers.

The call to serve in the world is a call addressed to everyone. Yet God also sets certain people apart and gives them the task of declaring God's plan of redemption for the world. They are the ones who are then called church ministers, with differing forms of ordination, such as pastors, congregational teachers (*guru jemaat*), elders, evangelists, deaconesses, and *bibelvrouw* (women Bible workers). Church ministers are called and theologically trained to carry out ministry tasks that include the functions of proclaiming the Word, such as leading worship, preaching, administering the sacraments, ministering to groups and individuals, and carrying out pastoral ministry.[28]

Some of these ministry tasks are now also performed by AI, giving rise to ethical and theological questions about the duties of ministers and their implications for the congregation. This study analyses the use of AI in the performance of the duties of church ministers, maps its strengths and weaknesses, and examines the challenges and opportunities that accompany it. From this analysis, an effort to bridge technological advance and the fulfilment of God's mission in the world is formulated.

In the present digital era, the development of AI is accelerating and its progress is expected to continue. The technology can now be accessed by all and has been integrated into many areas of life, including the religious sphere and church ministry. Preaching robots, digital sacraments, and AI Jesus are examples that could change ministry methods and believers' paradigms about the life of faith.

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[25] Gatot Gunarso et al., "Artificial Intelligence in a Christian Perspective of Humanity and Personhood," International Dialogues on Education Journal 9, no. 1 (2022): 176–191.

[26] Albert Erisman and Tripp Parker, "Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Perspective," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 71, no. 2 (2019): 95-106.

[27] Erisman and Parker, "Artificial Intelligence."

[28] Edgar Walz, *Bagaimana Mengelola Gereja Anda* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2001), 7–9.

## Artificial intelligence in the field of theology

It must be acknowledged that in recent decades there has been sweeping change in many human occupations and activities, which have been taken over by computerised technology. These changes can produce significant gaps in human interaction and, at the same time, prompt efforts to develop research on digitalisation and its benefits for humanity. It cannot be denied that this technology is of great assistance to people in carrying out their work.[29] The development of AI will change and affect many areas of life in ways not previously seen.[30] AI has entered every area of human life, including theology, and has had a major impact on Christian life.

AI has become a powerful tool for deepening understanding of religious teaching and practice and for broadening engagement in religious communities. The technology is also widely used by theologians and researchers to gain deeper insight into Christianity. The problem for Christianity lies, rather, in its perspective on AI, which affects human life. Because AI interacts directly with human beings, ethical reflection from a theological standpoint becomes necessary.[31]

Technological development and progress act as a driving force for the church to carry out its task and responsibility in proclaiming the Gospel. Technological progress in the form of AI has become a need of everyone, including the needs of the congregation. The church therefore needs to respond to this need within the context of its ministry. The church must be courageous in its openness so that it can adapt more readily to the advances at hand. At the same time, however, the church must have the discernment to separate positive uses from the negative effects of technological progress, so that Christian values are not lost.[32]

## The impact of using artificial intelligence in the religious sphere

The use of AI has wide-ranging and varied effects in many areas of life. Although its presence in the field of theology brings great benefits, the technology also raises profound questions about the role of human beings in spiritual experience. As technology increasingly deepens human engagement with religious life, the balance between the use of technology and authentic spiritual experience needs to be considered. Thus, while AI can be a useful tool for enriching understanding of spiritual life, the underlying religious values and traditions must still be firmly upheld.

AI Jesus has become much discussed because of its considerable impact on Christian life. At present not many people in Indonesia use it, but the technology is already accessible. AI Jesus is a communication technology device used to represent, interpret, or even replace the figure of Jesus Christ in the context of religious life. The device presents an image of Jesus who appears to be alive and able to interact with those who access it.[33] It works through live

[29] Michael Reskiantio Pabubung, "Epistemologi Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) dan Pentingnya Ilmu Etika dalam Pendidikan Interdisipliner", *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 4, no. 2 (2021): 152-159.

[30] Ester Agustini Tandana, "Christian Ethics toward Artificial Intelligence and Its Impacts on Humanity," Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat 7, no. 2 (2023): 89-100.

[31] Tandana, "Christian Ethics toward Artificial Intelligence."

[32] Nehemia Pasaribu, "Pengaruh Pelayanan Multimedia terhadap Pelayanan Gereja," PNEUMATIKOS: Jurnal Teologi Kependetaan 13, no. 2 (2023): 1-15, https://doi.org/10.56438/pneuma.v13i2.80.

[33] "The Jesus AI," https://www.thejesusai.com/.

streaming, which allows everyone to access it at any time. This round-the-clock availability gives the impression that AI Jesus wishes to present the essence of the ever-present Jesus, whenever and wherever. In fact, AI Jesus is merely a program with limitations.

Another negative impact arises when people interact with AI Jesus, whether by watching or by putting questions to the figure of Jesus displayed. Such interaction has the potential to lead to deviation. Users appear to be interacting directly with Jesus, and unconsciously this can foster spiritual trust in an artificial Jesus figure. In this context people will come to believe in the Jesus figure in the program, because human beings find it easier to believe in what they see than in what they cannot see. Yet Jesus is known through the preaching of the servants of God and through the Bible, so that the Jesus known in the understanding of faith is the Jesus who is not seen. John 20:29 records the words of Jesus: 'Because you have seen me, you believe. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.'[34] It is precisely this kind of faith that is being tested in the present context. Fundamentally, human beings believe only in what they see, as in the story of Thomas, who believed after seeing Jesus. Herein lies the uniqueness of AI Jesus: it enables users to see and interact with the figure of Jesus, so that many people believe, even believing more in the program. On the one hand, this technology can make people blind to their faith and lead them to deify AI Jesus as a spiritual figure who meets their spiritual needs. The result is a deviation from Christian values, and this becomes a major threat to the life of Christians amid the pleasures that technology offers.

AI Jesus exerts a great influence on Christian life because the device makes it easier to come to know the figure of Jesus and can deepen Christian values. Although AI Jesus offers an appearance, a voice, and the capacity to interact, it remains a program that has no feelings as human beings do, even if its programming can be adjusted within certain limits. This limitation affects the authority and truth of what it says. AI Jesus is an attempt to use technological advance to explore and understand the spiritual aspect from an innovative perspective, covering the analysis of religious texts, the giving of spiritual guidance, and even participation in theological dialogue. Although this idea opens up opportunities for deeper understanding, a number of its negative impacts need to be considered. One is the concern that the human aspect of togetherness in religious experience will be lost. Dependence on AI Jesus for spiritual direction has the potential to erode personal relationships between individuals and their spiritual leaders and fellow members of the congregation. The core of religious experience, which often involves deep emotional and spiritual interaction, will decline as it is replaced by interaction between humans and machines. Even if AI Jesus were applied to all Christians, pastors, servants of God, and theological students being prepared to become spiritual leaders could, in the years ahead, no longer be needed because their tasks would have been replaced. Such progress must be paid for with the loss of human resources, as has happened in most industries that have turned to automation.[35]

In addition, AI Jesus affects its users' understanding of the Bible. It cannot be denied that AI Jesus is a human work, the product of people who built a computer system to give spiritual

[34] Olvin Oktavia Mambraku, "Keragu-raguan Tomas sebagai Dasar Penguatan Iman (Suatu Kajian Eksegese terhadap Injil Yohanes 20:24–29): Thomas's Doubts as a Basis for Strengthening Faith (An Exegetical Study of the Gospel of John 20:24–29)," *MURAI: Jurnal Papua Teologi Kontekstual* 4, no. 1 (2023): 48–60

[35] Frans Pantan, "ChatGPT dan Artificial Intelligence: Kekacauan atau Kebangunan bagi Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Era Postmodern," *Diegesis: Jurnal Teologi* 8, no. 1 (2023): 111–124.

direction to its users. AI Jesus is limited in its understanding of biblical texts, especially in the field of interpretation, and so has the potential to misinterpret the Bible and mislead those who access it. The Bible is a sacred text that has authority from God,[36] and its interpretation therefore must not be undertaken carelessly. For this reason, prospective pastors or servants of God must study hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the study of the methods of interpretation used to analyse the biblical text, and it aims to make the message contained in it easier to understand.[37] If AI Jesus offers a mistaken interpretation, those who access it will misunderstand the meaning of the Word of the Lord and may spread erroneous information to others. The most fatal impact is the emergence of mistaken teachings or dogmas as a result of the abundance of information and content that can be freely accessed.

## The phenomenon of artificial intelligence in the performance of church ministry duties

AI has become an integral part of human life and is embedded in the devices and systems used in everyday life. The technology is no longer confined to robots or dedicated platforms but is also present in smartphones, laptops, and many other smart devices. In the fields of theology and church ministry, its use is likewise widening. Although some people are sceptical about the use of technology in a religious context, the implementation of AI in church ministry can have a significant impact. One positive example is the use of live streaming. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when face-to-face meetings were restricted or even prohibited, live streaming became an important solution that allowed worship to continue. Through this technology, churches could deliver messages and worship virtually, so that congregations could participate from a distance.

However, like any use of technology, the use of AI in ministry can also have negative effects. Excessive dependence has the potential to reduce direct interaction among members of the congregation and to diminish the experience of togetherness in worship. Overall, the use of AI in church ministry shows how technology can improve the accessibility and effectiveness of communication. Even so, its use still requires a wise balance so that the core value of religious experience is not sacrificed.

All the research informants stated that they knew of AI and used it to support ministry tasks in their churches. The technology is used in Sunday worship to display song lyrics, Bible texts, and sermon material through projectors, so that the whole congregation can follow the service well. The use of projectors is the simplest application of technology in supporting the duties of church ministers. The informants recognised that this use greatly supports the growth of the congregation's faith. Church ministers need to take advantage of technological progress in the ministry of worship while also empowering members of the congregation who have digital skills. For this reason, several of the churches studied have a multimedia and information department or division.

It is this multimedia and information department or division that is responsible for designing the displays used in Sunday worship, such as the design of song lyrics and Bible texts, so that the display is attractive to the congregation. According to the informants, the

[36] Kevin Tonny Rey, "Revelasi Roh Kudus bagi Interpreter dalam Menafsirkan Alkitab", *Antusias: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan* 1, no. 3 (2011): 27-36.

[37] Riedel Schwars Gesler Dien and Valentino Reykliv Mokalu, "Metode Ilmiah dalam Sejarah Tafsir Alkitab dan Implikasinya terhadap Pendidikan Agama Kristen", *Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 4, no. 2 (2022): 3058-3066.

display of song lyrics and Bible texts on screen needs to be done as well as possible. The work is not merely showing text; it demands special skills and an understanding of hardware and software. For this reason, those involved in the multimedia and information division must have knowledge of computers.

The use of AI in Sunday worship has long been practised. However, the COVID-19 pandemic required church ministers to step up their ministry with the help of technology, such as remote proclamation of the Word, virtual worship, live streaming, and the creation of websites to strengthen the faith of the congregation. Thus, although church activities were restricted because of the outbreak, ministry to the congregation continued. This technological advance cannot be avoided. Church ministers need to equip themselves and their churches so that the congregation does not leave the church.

## The impact of artificial intelligence in supporting ministry duties

AI is entering every area of human life, including religious ministry. In relation to the duties of church ministers, the technology touches on the proclamation of the Word, liturgical ministry, the sacraments, and pastoral ministry. The findings of the research show that church ministers use the assistance of AI in carrying out their duties. Even so, not every form of AI can be applied in ministry, since some forms conflict with the meaning of ministry and the calling of ministers in the church.

In carrying out the task of proclaiming the Word, AI can be found in various forms. For the preparation of preaching, applications for the interpretation of Scripture are available, such as Alkitab SABDA, online commentaries, and Bible Gateway. Alkitab SABDA provides comprehensive online material, including commentaries, articles, lexicons, the original languages of the Bible, and cross-references, all integrated into a single system. This system enables church ministers to study the Word of God carefully while preparing sermon and teaching material quickly.

Alkitab SABDA is a digital library with continually growing content, integrated in a single online space and easy to use. The program also uses study tools and quality resources from various countries.[38] The application greatly assists the work of church ministers because it is easily accessible and costs nothing. In addition, the Bible Gateway application is used, which helps its users to listen to, read, and study the Bible. This application can likewise be accessed online free of charge.[39]

Another form of AI used by church ministers is the search engine, to find sermon material. A search engine will display a number of ready-made sermons that are easy to read and study as a source of inspiration in preparing a sermon and its illustrations. Even so, the sermon material found is not wholly duplicated. The ideas found in these ready-made sermons are taken and then applied according to the context of the congregation being served.

The task of preaching can also be performed through preaching robots that deliver the Word according to the program that has been implanted in them. However, the use of preaching robots is unacceptable. A sermon is not merely a matter of hearing; it is the living Word of God delivered by His living servant, a servant endowed with reason and wisdom as a creature of God, called to proclaim His Word. The task of proclaiming the Word that God

[38] Tentang Alkitab SABDA, https://alkitab.sabda.org/about.php.

[39] Bible Gateway, https://www.biblegateway.com/.

has given to His servant cannot be replaced by a robot. God works through the preacher to touch the hearts and minds of the people who listen. If the task is carried out by a robot without a heart or soul, the living interaction between preacher and listener will not take place.

AI brings positive benefits to church ministers in carrying out various ministry tasks. Church ministers gain convenience because they have access to the sources of knowledge needed for proclaiming the Word. The Alkitab SABDA and Bible Gateway applications help church ministers to prepare the task of proclaiming the Word by providing a deep understanding of the interpretation of biblical texts and access for finding relevant texts. Through these applications, church ministers are helped in preparing sermon material and other forms of proclamation of the Word.

The use of online commentary applications aims to broaden the insight of church ministers so that they have a deeper understanding to support the tasks of preaching, catechesis, and homilies. The applications serve as supporting data in preparing sermons, understanding the context of interpretation, and finding the relevance of texts, so that the task of preaching can be carried out well. Ministry preparation will be better when church ministers are able to broaden their insight through the knowledge available in various applications. Broad insight will raise the quality of ministry to the congregation, for the more knowledge one has, the more deeply the Word is delivered. For this reason, church ministers need to equip themselves through technology that can be accessed at any time and in any place.

The use of AI through the display of song lyrics and sermon texts can help the church to become a comfortable, safe, attractive, and enjoyable place, so that the congregation is drawn to take part in the activities the church organises. This use raises motivation to attend worship when the congregation is drawn to the displays presented, does not feel bored, and takes part in worship with joy. The display of song lyrics and sermon texts is a form of support that the church needs to provide so that the congregation does not leave the church. When used wisely, AI will have a positive impact on church ministers and the congregation, and will also become a tool for proclaiming the Gospel in the digital era.

## The limits of using artificial intelligence in the task of proclaiming the word

The research findings show that the duties of church ministers have been made easier by the use of projectors and LED video screens (*videotron*) in Sunday worship and on major religious festivals. Through these two devices, church ministers find it easier to conduct the liturgy. Their use also motivates the congregation to attend worship and nurtures enthusiasm in praising the Lord. Projectors and video screens display praise lyrics, sermon texts, and various visualisations designed by the preacher, thereby stimulating the congregation's interest in seeing and hearing them. As a result, the worship event and the Word delivered can touch the hearts of the congregation more deeply.

The research findings also show that church ministers use available commentary applications and read ready-made sermons on the internet to prepare their sermons. Good preparation will produce a sound sermon. The soundness of a sermon can be seen in two respects, namely its source and its content. A sound sermon must derive from the truth of the

Bible, because the authority of the Bible must underlie the proclamation of the Word. The content of a good sermon is content that can be trusted and that corresponds to its source.[40]

A preacher is charged not only with delivering the Word of the Lord but must also live out the sermon through personal reflection and struggle with the help of the Holy Spirit. A good sermon is one delivered in faith, in a right relationship with the Lord, and not merely one that is pleasant to hear.[41] Church ministers must be good proclaimers of the Word by constantly meditating on the Word they will deliver. For this reason, Alkitab SABDA and Bible Gateway can be used to support ministry tasks, but ready-made sermons and their illustrations cannot simply be taken up as they are. Church ministers need to examine carefully how far such ready-made material is relevant to their ministry.

A sermon must answer the needs of the people and their thirst for the Word of the Lord. For this reason, the preacher must understand the context of the congregation served so that the sermon is dynamic. A preaching robot programmed according to its programmer's specifications cannot understand the context of the congregation, because it is made to function only to deliver sermons and has no conscience. As a result, a robot cannot create a dynamic sermon. Although a preaching robot can carry out the task of preaching, the result is not the same as a sermon delivered by an ordained pastor chosen by God. A preaching robot has only a limited memory bank according to the will of its programmer and cannot alter its program according to the needs of the congregation. A preaching robot is not a living preacher endowed with reason, so that the task of delivering the Word is carried out without accountability to the God who gave the task. A true preacher must have the reason to wrestle with, understand, internalise, and make relevant the Word delivered, and to live it out in everyday life.[42]

The offerings that AI provides on the internet no doubt tempt church ministers to piece together sermons without searching the Scriptures. The abundance of easily accessible ready-made sermons does indeed make the performance of church ministers' duties easier. On the other hand, however, it has a negative impact, because the sermon delivered becomes plagiarism, without investigation of context or consideration of relevance. The gift of ministry is given by God to His servants, and that gift cannot be replaced by AI. The gift is divine, not man-made, as it is written in Ephesians 4:11 to 12, 'And it is He who gave both apostles and prophets, both evangelists and shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.' For the same reason, the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper by a robot pastor is also unacceptable.

The Lord calls and chooses His servants to be His ministers. It is also the Lord who equips His servants with the Holy Spirit so that they are able to carry out the task of ministry. Church ministers do have weaknesses. As limited human beings, they can be negligent, less skilled in exploring texts, less adept at preaching, and less practised in prayer. Yet the God who calls church ministers as His servants is the God who also equips them (Rom. 8:26).

The performance of a church minister's duties is assessed not only by how the task is carried out but also by many other aspects: the task's basis, who gives the mandate, and to

[40] Hasanema Wau, "Hukum Utama dalam Mempersiapkan Khotbah", *Journal Kerusso* 6, no. 1 (2021): 19–34, https://doi.org/10.33856/kerusso.v6i1.186.

[41] E. P. Ginting, *Khotbah dan Pengkhotbah* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), 42.

[42] Ginting.

whom the task is accountable. For this reason, an artificial entity without life cannot replace a church minister's duties. God calls, anoints, and equips church ministers. AI, in its various applications, can support ministry tasks without conflicting with the essential nature of ministry.

## Artificial intelligence in sacramental and pastoral ministry

So far, the findings concern mainly the proclamation of the Word and the liturgy, yet the analysis also covered the sacraments and pastoral ministry, and these two areas most clearly show where AI's limits lie. The BlessU-2 experiment shows that a machine can reproduce the words and gestures of a blessing in several languages, but what it produces remains a demonstration rather than a ministry act. A sacrament is not a technical procedure. Someone called and ordained by the church administers it in the midst of a gathered congregation and remains accountable to the God who gave the task (Eph. 4:11–12). A robot can neither be called nor held accountable, so administering baptism and the Lord's Supper by a robot pastor must remain unacceptable. AI may legitimately assist with sacramental preparation, such as arranging the order of service, displaying the liturgy, or reminding the congregation of the schedule, provided the ordained minister performs the act itself.

Pastoral ministry, which includes visiting the sick, accompanying the grieving, and counselling, is the area where the temptation to hand over work to AI is subtler. Platforms such as AI Jesus are available around the clock and are willing to listen, which may appeal to those who hesitate to approach a minister in person. Yet pastoral care rests on presence. The minister is called to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15), and a programme that has no feelings cannot do either. Experimental research even suggests that exposure to robot preachers undermines religious commitment and the credibility of the ministers they imitate, implying that a cold, mechanical encounter may erode trust rather than build it. A further concern is confidentiality. Members confide in a pastoral conversation, trusting that a person bound by pastoral discretion will keep it confidential, whereas what is typed into a digital platform may be stored and processed by a provider beyond the church's control.

Taken together, these findings answer the third research question. The opportunities lie mainly in supporting tasks. AI can relieve ministers of administrative work, such as drafting letters, compiling schedules, organising visitation lists, and gathering study material, so that more time is left for what only a person can do, namely being present with the congregation. The challenges include dependence on technology, which church ministers have already raised as a concern; the temptation to use ready-made material without scrutiny; uneven digital skills across congregations; and the need to discern where assistance ends and substitution begins. The line between AI as a tool and AI as a replacement should therefore be drawn by the nature of the task. Tasks of information and organisation may be assisted by AI, whereas tasks that rest on calling, presence, and accountability before God remain with the minister.

## Conclusion

This study yields three conclusions. First, church ministers need to remain open to using AI to support ministry tasks. The church and its ministers need to embrace technological progress so they do not fall behind or be abandoned by the congregation. Second, there are many digital

resources that support church ministry, such as Bible commentary applications, ready-made sermon sites, song lyrics, and sermon visualisations. These resources can help achieve the primary goal of ministry. Third, the positive impacts of using AI include growing ministers' insight and knowledge, increasing motivation among the congregation, and strengthening the congregation's faith. The effort to minimise its negative impacts consists in being aware of the calling as a servant of God and, at the same time, educating the congregation about the effects of using this technology.

On the basis of these conclusions, the study offers three recommendations. First, church ministers should be wise in using AI to support their ministry tasks and need to scrutinise uses that conflict with Christian theology and ethics. Second, church ministers need to empower the congregation to support ministry, especially in using technology. Third, the church needs to guide the congregation so its members use social media wisely.

This study has limitations that need to be stated openly. The limited number of informants and the narrow geographical scope of the study mean that its findings cannot yet be generalised. Further research with a wider range of informants and with comparison across denominations is needed to test these findings.

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The authors affirm that all three contributed to the development and completion of the manuscript. Fransiska contributed to the initial conceptualisation and formulation of the main ideas, while Pintakhari and Pardede provided critical insights, expanded the discussion, and collaborated in revising and refining the manuscript for final submission.

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