

The Question of Liturgical Celebrations And Artificial Intelligence (ai) In Africa Today: Strange Bedfellows?

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Abstract

Anchored on recent human technology, questions are agog whether liturgical celebrations and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can co-exist or not. These questions emanate from myriad standpoints of convergence and divergence premised on many assumptions. For instance, AI refers to computer systems that can perform tasks that historically required human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, worshipping, and problem-solving on their subject matters. Admittedly, AI learns from extensive data and experience. However, AI prevents the public nature of the liturgy that requires physical presence from happening. Celebrants and participants rely on automated machines for worship from their church premises and comfort zones. When one is physically present at the liturgy, it is expected that one responds to the parts of the liturgical celebrations as designated. For AI, the sense of physical contact, ethical concerns, faith, and obligations might be lacking and one's participation might end up being more of a spectator than a worshipper. Accordingly, the writer is not unaware of these dangers of over-reliance on AI, as well as the possible compatibility of liturgical formation with AI-powered devices. This is the task of this paper: to establish whether mutual relationship exists between both, or, that they are acts of strange bedfellows.

Key words: Liturgy, Celebrations, Worship, Artificial Intelligence, Africa

Introduction

Digital revolution, which resonates in pixels and bytes, has reached a gargantuan stage, such as electronic planes driven by digital computers or computer-controlled robots, automated-driven electronic cars, robots serving as waiters in restaurant, traffic wardens, receptionists, to mention but a few. These and more digital advancements have raised some theological, pastoral and liturgical concerns: "What kind of theologico-liturgical celebrations are we hoping for, in the future, with AI?" Accordingly, this paper is very timely, relevant and urgent, especially as hope is gradually waning. era. It explores how theological insights can form, inform, and enhance our understanding of the emerging trend of technologies of AI, moving at a lightning speed. It interrogates the interface between Catholic liturgical celebrations and Artificial

Intelligence (AI), since the past three decades have seen revolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), with AI as the latest digital revolution to access data or information quickly and easily. Admittedly, we may have become overwhelmed with digital blitz; hence, liturgical media literacy and concerns are only emerging. Pope Francis' concerns are echoed in the 2020 "Rome Calls for AI Ethics," a document signed by various religious and technological leaders, including the Holy See (Accessed on 6 April 2025).

While exploring the mystical algorithm in liturgy, the paper attempts to expose the question of liturgical celebrations, and digital innovation of human technology in AI, and the dangers of over-reliance on AI. It portrays the potentials and risks of AI while highlighting the possibilities for improving communal worship of the faithful. Since theological enterprise enriches technology and sets science and technology towards a path that leads to human development, it is hoped that this paper advocates for responsible AI applications guided by liturgical norms, ensuring that AI-driven machines and platforms uphold the dignity and freedom of the human person for the Church in Africa, and the universal Church. Before then, as can be seen from the topic under study, there are two key terms (Liturgical celebrations and Artificial Intelligence) that should be explicated to follow the gist of this study.

Nature of Liturgical Celebrations

From the venerable tradition of the Roman rite, liturgy is the official worship rendered to God through Christ in the spirit by the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 33). Liturgy is different from devotion. Whereas devotion is a private pious activity which is done to honour and respect Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and the saints, liturgy is a public worship rendered to God alone, through Christ. It is never a private affair even when it is celebrated by one person, for instance, when a priest celebrates Mass alone. Though celebrated by a priest and alone, it is done in the name of the Church. In the liturgical celebration, the Church prays for all her children or what Aime G. Martimort, in his celebrated books, in four volumes, calls *The Church at Prayer* (1987). In liturgical worship, Christ is both the priest and the victim especially the Eucharistic liturgy. In every liturgy, Christ is present there and must be celebrated according to the mind of the Church and Christ and not a time for experimentation and "I don't care attitude" that have found their way into the Catholic liturgy, thereby obscuring the very essence of the liturgy.

Liturgy is rightly described as the celebration of a mystery. It embraces the whole reality; divine and human, heavenly and earthly, living and non-living. The liturgy becomes the *locus* of divine-human enterprise. In the liturgy, there is an upward trend of humanity calling out to God known as the *anabatic* and a downward trend of God to humanity called the *Katabatic*. The former (anabatic or upward trend) is humanity offering up to God their adoration and petition through the priest who acts as the mediator between God and humanity. The latter is the reality of God sending down his graces of redemption upon the

members of his Church in the liturgy. God the Father is acknowledged and adored as the source and the end of all the blessings of creation and salvation (CCC, no. 1082). God is, therefore, the source and goal of the Church's liturgy. For this reason, the liturgy is the highest form of prayer and remains more efficacious than any other form of prayer. As an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is, the Church, liturgy designates "a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its effectiveness by the same title and to the same degree" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7).

It follows that every liturgical celebration, as an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; "no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7). Evidently, liturgy is the celebration of the universal Church. The reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council states that:

The prayers addressed to God by the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ are said in the name of the entire holy people as well as of all present. And the visible signs used by the liturgy to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or by the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 33).

Common practice is to use approved rituals, liturgical texts, sacred arts and symbols because liturgy is the public action of the Church, guided by the liturgical norms. Catholic worship is meant to be well-ordered, flowing from the fact that liturgy is public worship performed by the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, by the Head and His members. Laws and norms abound for celebrants and participants, and, in filial obedience, they are expected to respect these provisions as contained in the *General Instructions of the Roman Missal*. As the centuries rolled by, the Church has necessarily developed them according to which, her public worship is to be expressed. They help the liturgical assembly to know the boundaries of their actions and operate within acceptable standards. Accordingly, the place and importance of liturgical renewal and reorientation need to be emphasized anew. Our time is agog with digital tools for communication and information, AI is the latest development.

Delineating Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been variously described and explained; yet each clarification falls short of sufficiently capturing the profundity and depth of what it entails within a few lines of a delineation. Suffice it here to present the most outstanding ways of understanding AI. AI is a combination of two words: "Artificial" and "Intelligence." Artificial means a substitute, makeshift, alternative, temporary, fake or ornamental. This is usually opposed to human intelligence. On the other hand, Intelligence means a set of technologies that enable computers to perform a variety of advanced functions, including the ability to see, understand and translate spoken or written language, analyse

data, and make recommendations and more like human intelligence (“What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?” Accessed on 3 April 2025). AI connotes a measurable level of understanding, expertise, innovation, or the ability of proper discernment. When joined together, Artificial Intelligence could mean the digital ability or innovation to build up ideas, systems, information, and means of communication into certain application that stores, produces and processes them better, efficient and faster for use. It has the ability of a make-shift, alternative or substituting things already in existence, both human beings and objects. Accordingly, AI refers to computer systems that can perform tasks that historically required human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving on their subject matters, but involves data whose scale exceeds what human beings can analyse. Admittedly, AI does not rely on explicit programming for specific tasks; instead, they learn from extensive data and experience. Utilizing methods such as machine learning, deep learning and natural language processing, these systems can autonomously enhance performance without the need for human intervention.

Historically, the notion of AI derives from a Conference in Dartmouth, New Hampshire, in 1956, where John McCarthy, quoted by Larry, coined the term. It has now become a global phenomenon and has become one of the most fascinating themes of our times (Larry, 2024, p.1). As instruments of social communication, like other ICT, they have as their aim "unity and advancement of men living in society...." (*Communio et Progressio* no.1). In the context of this study, AI is understood as a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly with intelligent beings. Using such computer-controlled machines, they can perform multiple tasks at a controlled and exceeding speed to arrive at a result. Admittedly, AI has emerged as a significant aspect of liturgical worship in the digital age. It expands the frontiers of potential audience for Catholic liturgy and evangelization. Thus, the Church insists on liturgical celebrations that are dignified, orderly and devotional (*digne, attente et devote*). Liturgical celebrations are never to be turned into shows, and extraneous activities should be excluded from the ecclesial celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals. Pastors must, therefore, assist the participants in making the celebration a truly ecclesial and sacred one. The nature of the liturgy needs to be understood in order to be properly celebrated. M. Virgil rightly says: “Through the liturgy rightly celebrated, understood and lived out, all our life is centred in Christ and the Christ-life radiates out into every action be it politics, religion, economy and social of the day” (Virgil 1973, p. 60-61).

Just like the digital media, most times, influence people's opinions; shape their choice-making, actions, etc., AI has the same potentialities. The effects pervade the society like a mist; not only in matters concerning public opinion or political issues but in matters of the development of personal lifestyles and tastes; possible inducements to violence, and influences upon consumer behaviour and the sensibilities and dispositions of the people. In short, they have become

an indispensable part for the global common good, the society and for religious activities. Examples include robot AI, a digital computer or computer-controlled device, ChatGPT, etc. This innovative drive has the potential to develop artificial general intelligence, capable of super-intelligent autonomous agents, capable of sophisticated intellectual work and likely surpassing human performance. In today's digital age, AI has become a powerful tool for connection, creativity, communication, formation, and even evangelization. While AI has the potential to enhance accessibility, engagement and personalization in worship, it also raises the question and challenge of liturgical participation.

The Question of Liturgical Participation and Artificial Intelligence

The question of liturgical participation is crucial in scholarship as it is with its relationship with AI. Its significance arises mainly from the inter-link with the type of results one expects to achieve. Liturgical participation is one of the major landmarks of the Second Vatican Council which calls for active, conscious, full and socio-communitarian participation (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14). The Council Fathers advocated that it is the right and duty of every baptized Christian since they are a chosen people, a royal priesthood called by God to offer him sacrifice. Their liturgical participation is to be all-involving, demanding all the faculties God has given at their disposal. In the Roman liturgies, the mantra is very much orchestrated in order to encourage uniform gestures, postures and rapt attention, listening, responding, singing, (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 30) and the use of vernacular, provision of liturgical ministries (for lectors, acolytes, ushers, etc.), to be gender free and indeed, an open cheque given for the evolution of the cultural values and genius of the people, following the laid down guidelines and procedures for liturgical inculturation (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37-40). It would seem that the same liturgical participation is promoted with AI through praying, singing, responding, listening, movement, silence, to mention but a few.

Nonetheless, an honest assessment cannot but affirm that a lot of bottlenecks are still there to realize fully the potentialities of liturgical participation. The unique nature of Catholic liturgy is the action of Christ the Priest and of His Body the Church, as a sacred action surpassing all others. With AI, some faithful would still see themselves as spectators and passive observers, watching and imagining the wonders of mechanical precision and algorithmic simulations of AI instead of praying and being in communion with God. AI-powered liturgical enactment propels the argument between virtuality and reality. The freedom and dignity of the human beings would also be threatened by algorithmic and conditioning. AI prevents the public nature of the liturgy that requires physical presence, ritual symbolism and communal engagement, as pillars of authentic liturgical participation. When one is physically present at the liturgy, it is expected that one responds to the parts of the liturgical celebrations as designated. For AI, the guiding principles include mimicking, simulating, enhancement of human cognitive capabilities, and one's

participation might end up being more of a spectator than a worshipper. Some specific pastoral and liturgical issues that amplify guidelines and set limits for the use of AI in Catholic liturgy are hereunder examined:

AI Robots for Liturgical Ministers

In a wild viral video, the small, unadorned church of St. Peter in Lucerne, Switzer installs AI-powered Jesus. Though liturgically wrong, she uses an AI-powered hologram of Jesus to hear confessions from Catholic worshippers. Worshipper can voice their liturgical concerns and questions and get a response of redemption from the digitally rendered face (*The Guardian* accessed on 6 April 2025), which has main servers from where any information that has passed through them can be retrieved; hence, completely not permissible in liturgy and totally discouraged (Anagwo, *The Nexus Between ICT and Liturgy*:...69). Although, this is an experimental project of which it was reported that "...if it was popular, similar chatbots could one day permanently take on some of the responsibilities of pastors" (*New York Post* accessed on 6 April 2025). This is because with the aid of computer-controlled devices, AI robots can be programmed to take over the liturgical ministries as chief celebrants, Mass servers, sacristans, acolytes, lay readers, cantors, choristers, band group, ministers of hospitality, security agents, commentators, catechists, presenters of the gifts, presenters of the prayer of the faithful, ministers of liturgical environment and Eucharistic ministers, choristers, ministers of hospitality, to mention but a few. It is obvious to witness the accuracy, effectiveness and efficiency of such AI robots and machines in executing such functions with increased productivity, data analysis and image recognition.

Nonetheless, if something goes wrong with the programming, it can cause distraction and confusion in the solemn liturgy and sacramental celebrations. Undeniably, it can develop system and mechanical faults; thus, it leaves everyone in the dark, disorganized and perplexed. Above all, how do you justify the recommendation of the Council Fathers that liturgical ministers are to carry out all and only those parts which pertain to their offices by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy? Indeed, they are "to discharge their offices with the sincere piety and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God's people" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 29).

AI Driven Machines for E-Liturgical Books

This digital galaxy constitutes an array of computer-generated applications (apps) and other digital format products of Liturgy of the hours, the Roman Missal, Roman Ritual, Lectionary on ipad, e-readers like Kindle, tablets, and even mobile phones. These chatbots and virtual assistants like Magisterium AI, and Vulgate AI, owned by the Catholic Church, can be useful for research, study, formation, evangelisation, spiritual guidance, discipleship, etc. However, AI-powered devices cannot also stand the test of time like hard copies of the Book of Gospel, Lectionary or Roman Missal. This is because as compatible devices, they are susceptible to virus attack and power failure

(Anagwo, *The Nexus Between ICT and Liturgy*:...67). At the time of use, one may unfortunately observe that the particular document is corrupt or vulnerable to cyber threats, highlighting the need for robust security measures to protect against hacking, malware, and other forms of cyber-attacks. They can also easily be deleted and discarded which is not the case with hard copy of liturgical books. Again, the same AI device used to read the Gospel or preside at Mass can be used to do social networking, downloading videos, watching good and bad movies, making useful and 'useless (mundane/profane) calls,' etc. Under extraordinary conditions, emergency and as the last resort, the gadgets of AI are good and may be used, especially by the lay faithful, for liturgical celebrations.

However, they cannot replace liturgical books because they cannot be given the due reverence for the liturgical books. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) is clear that: "In a special way, care must be taken that the liturgical books, particularly the Book of the Gospels and the Lectionary, which are intended for the proclamation of the word of God and hence enjoy special veneration, really serve in a liturgical action as signs and symbols of heavenly realities and hence are truly worthy, dignified, and beautiful" (2002, no. 349). Accordingly, Bulletins and Missalettes, and by extension AI-powered gadgets, have no place on the pulpit or altar of sacrifice to be used by lectors or the clergy. Pastors of souls must endeavour to provide liturgical books for proper liturgical celebrations according to the mind of God and the Church (Anagwo, *Hundred Questions and Answers on the Mass* 2013, 75-77).

AI Device for E-Songs

AI powered tool can facilitate E-Songs (E-choir, E-music), whereby a choir records songs to be used in different occasions during the liturgical worship and stored and retrieved for such occasion. In e-choir, the songs used at liturgical celebrations are recorded songs played with the aid of musical machines. Although the songs may be relevant to the celebration, the context, situation, season and even purpose for the song may defeat its being used for another celebration. AI for E-choir does not envisage the active participation of the congregation. Accordingly, the song recorded in the evening may be conveniently used in the following morning. The worshippers become more of listeners instead of encouraging active participation in the songs. The e-choir does not involve physical person leading in singing instead, an electronic device or computer-controlled programming is used. Besides, e-choir requires the use of electricity to reproduce songs. In the event of power outage or failure, the prepared/recorded songs could be disorganised. Again, with e-choir, it is possible that a particular song recorded for a funeral liturgy may inadvertently be played during the reception of the Holy Communion. Accordingly, with e-choir, a wrong song may be played/intoned against the one planned because of the absence of the person who should operate the system (Anagwo, *The Nexus Between ICT and Liturgy*:...70-71). This dampens the spirit of the liturgy at each celebration. Songs that belong to a particular season may be played in the Church in a different season. Hence, it is strongly recommended that where

possible, the physical presence of the choir for a liturgical celebration, even if they are few, should be encouraged.

Speech Recognition, Language and Translation

AI-powered communication tools can foster the resolution of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council who gave permission for translation of the liturgical texts and rites to vernacular language for the greater understanding of the people and their active participation at Mass. This included printed materials or digital resources. What we should know about language is that, it is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds combined into words which later graduates into science. Ndimele rightly describes language as an essential communication system in the sense that it associates meaning (message) with a set of signs. He believes that all linguistic units of expression such as sounds, words and sentences are signs of objects, entities, or states of affairs that they represent (1999, p. 20). Language is innate and exists in a speech community. For a language to be functional, it must perform a communicative role; hence, its communication and identification functions. Admittedly, language is used for any communication that must be meaningful in order to give understanding to the listener and reader, otherwise communication has not taken place (Anagwo, "Language and Eucharistic Liturgy:...2018, pp. 42-59). AI can automatically convert spoken speech into written text. Also, with text-to-speech functionality, AI can translate from one written or spoken language to another language. This novel technology can serve as an interpreter that would be of tremendous help towards active participation of the faithful and homily delivery by the minister.

Dangers of Over-Reliance on AI Devices

Despite the obvious advantages which AI usage presents, there are palpable fears that this digital revolution could also be used for dubious reasons, concretised as aberrations in the liturgy. In an era where the miasma of meaningless aberrations looms, liturgical celebrations are found leaning on a fragile clasp, in imminent danger of collapse. Yes, aberrations on the use of digital gadgets in the liturgy of the Church are gradually becoming common place. As AI continues to redefine global realities, this liturgical enquiry seeks to bridge the gap between faith and technology in our liturgical celebrations today. Admittedly, over-reliance on AI devices has great potential of making the faithful to become spectators and observers in the liturgical celebrations they are expected to be an integral part of. In fact, it could lead to making them look at the parts of the Eucharistic liturgy as the sole work of the AI while they are mere spectators. AI worship prevents active participation that requires physical presence from happening. It allows celebrants and participants the opportunity of relying on automated machines. For an effective and integral liturgical participation to evolve, it is expected that one participates and responds to the parts of the Eucharistic celebration as designated. But in the case of AI worship, that sense of physical contact and obligation might not be there and one's participation might end up being more of watching instead of

worshipping. Let us briefly concretize some theological and liturgical issues on the dangers of over-reliance on AI devices.

Dehumanization of Liturgy

With AI technology, there is always the risk of degrading the dignity of the human person made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1: 26-27) which liturgy raises through *anabasis*. The human being, composed of body, soul and spirit, is a unity. Recognizing this unity, it engages the whole person, body, spirit and soul, as liturgy admits of conscious, full and active participation (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14). The human person is not just a composition of material destiny; the spiritual constitution, explored in the nature and dignity, places one on high pedestal to be viewed upon. The human person is thus called to seek greater basis for one's existence as a being created in the image and likeness of God. Richard Onwuanibe prophetically surmised: "The essential freedom of the human subject is transcendent, and it is predicated on the metaphysical concept of the dignity of human subject which has imponderable value" (1995, p. 71). The watchword on the influence of sacred liturgy here is to raise awareness and develop respect for the dignity of God's image in every human being at worship.

When downplayed, the danger of AI over-reliance could lead to the dehumanization of liturgy. This can be seen where human beings are replaced with internet sources or driven robots. Invariably, it will undermine human and rational aspect of the liturgy as well as the communal aspects of worship. Liturgy is not a performance but a communal act of worship. Liturgical celebration is where the Word of God is broken and shared for the believers. Through this means, they are instructed, nourished and sustained in the journey of faith. The celebrant in the liturgical celebration always exercises the function of bringing people together like Christ did and in the unity of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the assembly becomes ever more the people of God, the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The actual assembly of Christians makes visible the gathering of humankind that Christ has redeemed. The grace that affects this gathering is mysteriously at work in every liturgical celebration.

Amidst the danger of the dehumanization of liturgy, AI can never replace the heart, soul and spirit that worshippers bring in the liturgy. The real 'divine algorithm' share with your fellow worshippers lies within their attention, devotion and dignified celebration. In an era of artificial minds, we cannot forget the necessity of authentic hearts. After all, celebration is not just gathering the faithful for worship into faceless community but also to foster strong commitment to liturgical life and personal solidarity with the events and activities of the local Christian community who believe in communal life and reaching out to their needy members and groups within their neighbourhood. The true strength lies in the bonds worshippers form and active participation they gain together for the spiritual and liturgical catechesis of the faithful. They

will go a long way to help and enhance an integral and effective participation in the liturgy of the Church.

Bias, Discrimination and Privacy Concerns

Before digital revolution of AI, members pray in common (community prayer), “where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst” (Matt 18:20). Prayer is first a personal encounter with God who calls the faithful unto a private relationship with Him. The divine worship, which involves people, as seen at the Last Supper, is a worship of communion. It is a communion of pilgrims who, with one voice, lift up their prayers and petitions to God our loving Father. The Church is a holy place, and everything has its rightful place, so also the worship. Worship centres involve the personal journey of the faith of the pilgrim people who will gather and call upon God. Often, this personal encounter is vitiated as their privacy is invaded and breached. Some worshippers would prefer practising their faith and worshipping God privately. The introduction of AI-generated tools could worsen and raise privacy concerns, anchored on surveillance, misuse of personal information, bias, prejudice, stereotyped knowledge, and discrimination. This situation raises significant privacy concerns and highlights the necessity for well-defined policies that guarantee worshippers' privacy and prevent unauthorized access to the usage of data. Indeed, AI as divine gift must work securely and respect the privacy of users at worship.

Loss of Tradition and Mystery

With AI, the danger of losing the Church's tradition and mystery is palpable. Some liturgical elements, symbols and rituals as well as the sense of mystery and transcendence, inherent in Catholic liturgy, may be jettisoned. Admittedly, liturgy, among others, consists of liturgies which are found in all or almost all of the great liturgical traditions of the early days which must therefore go back to earliest period of the apostles and with Christ. Such include postures like standing, sitting and kneeling. Accordingly, Francis Cardinal Arinze states, “While we may not have certain knowledge on the matter in a given case, it is a strong reason for avoiding hasty innovation or neglect” (“Liturgical Norms and Liturgical Piety” p. 2). A liturgical celebration that is worth its name must show fidelity of the celebrant and the community to the mysteries of the traditional faith received and communicated through the centuries as liturgy is never anyone's private property. Liturgy is the action of Christ re-lived in our time. Each time we engage in liturgical action, we are not doing our own bidding. Instead, we are “participating in the work of God” (CCC 1998, no. 1069) which calls for certain respect and decorum concomitant with sacred actions, tradition and mystery. Quite expectedly, liturgical norms protect the vast treasure of this Christian worship from someone's personal ideas, feelings, theories, idiosyncrasies and distortions. Indeed, worship is offering God everything including the universe and history, starting with ourselves. With AI, people may no longer perceive divine presence among worshippers because they have lost the sense of the liturgy where the mystery is encountered and tradition is maintained.

Distraction with its Constitution

AI may constitute a distraction to the congregation. The digital nature of AI may introduce distractions and reduce the level of focus during worship. Viewers may be tempted to multi-task, which is, engaging in other digital media, like ChatGPT or DeepSeek; hence, be less attentive to the worship. For instance, in churches where the readings and announcements are projected, by AI robot, attention would be shifted away from the sanctuary to the AI generated tool. Consequently, AI may promote distraction when it is used instead of actual human participation. This is because the artificial nature of its usage and application is bound to create distraction, knowing that it is not real but an artificial device programmed to imitate the original (human) source. This form of distraction diminishes the overall spiritual experience and prevents individuals from fully engaging with the worship contents.

Ethical Concerns on Journey of Faith

By ethical concern we mean the standard for determining the best behaviour in the community. Every organized ceremony that requires proper decorum establishes norms to regulate the conduct of the events. The ideal purpose of the ethical principles is not to punish but to regulate, guide, and protect those who are subject to its prescriptions. It is a set of norms that govern the actions of those who are subject to its promulgation. There is hardly any aspect of life that is not controlled by some set of principles. Humans, animals, and plants exist by responding to both natural and conventional principles of life. AI raises the ethical concerns on the validity of the assertion that a worshipper in the Church is on a journey of faith. Going to Church to worship involves the personal journey of faith of the pilgrim people who will gather and call upon God. AI is bereft of human experience like abstraction, emotions, and creativity, aesthetic, moral and religious sensibilities, along with totality of the expressions characteristics of the human being. AI will water down the essence of moral deliberation, choice or accountability, as they would create a gap between faith and technology. In fact, the ethical standards of those who developed the device could be questioned; hence, those who use them should be protected from abuse. Here, the Church should interact with the producers of AI technology.

Implications of Hope for Humanity with AI on Liturgical Celebrations

There is still a firm basis of hope for humanity in the midst of AI-generated technologies. It is true that the convergence and divergence, opportunities and challenges, are real. All hope is not lost on the negative sides for the African continent. Most Africans have goodwill to do things right as purveyors of AI inventions. Since AI has the tendency to falsify information and displace human beings, some are anxious to collaborate with ecclesiastical authorities to checkmate the excesses of these technological advancements as the future of liturgy is being shaped by digital revolution. While liturgy is ultimately a spiritual, ritual and communal activity, AI offers new possibilities for enhancing its expressions, accessibility and engagement, such as the use of acoustics, e-songs, e-fundraising, e-liturgical books. Accordingly the Church

should cautiously study and entrench the new media in more of its activities, pastoral strategies, and liturgical events. After all, we live in times of great change in the society and in the Church. We must, however, take great care that the use of AI, which by its nature is a wonder of development today, does not become a dangerous tool to lead people away from God, a source of distraction and hindrance to full, conscious participation of the faithful due to failure to follow humbly and obediently the liturgical norms set out by the Church for technology. The Church is not against AI technology, but idolizing machines or replacing human beings with technological developed machines.

Like their peers all over the world, Gen Z African youths are always bubbling with media culture, high spirit, high hope, energy, enthusiasm, creativity, big dreams, aspirations, agility, virility, vigour and ideas of what their tomorrow will be and the spirit to achieve them if an enabling environment is created. AI machines will help young people gain vital skills, knowledge, and active participation (Anagwo, 2019, pp. 40). Accordingly, AI resonates more with younger generation in the world, who are digital natives and are disillusioned with traditional institutions of the Church. Accordingly the dignified and fitting use of AI is a task that must be addressed with greater urgency if the Church is to remain relevant to the digital era. St. Pope John Paul II, in his *Ad Limina Address*, exhorts the bishops to listen to the younger Catholics who were expressing desire for more reverent and dynamic liturgy of our time:

...the young are summoning the whole Church to take the next step in implementing the vision of worship which the Council has bequeathed to us. Unburdened by the ideological agenda of an earlier time, they are able to speak simply and directly of their desire to experience God, especially in prayer both public and private. In listening to them, dear Brothers, we may well hear "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev 2:11) [11 July 1980].

Obviously, it remains a good means to promote faith formation and evangelization as it will catch their attention. However, this can give rise to another pastoral issue: "what becomes of the fate of older generation, the analogue generation, who are not internet savvy, and may have an outright aversion to view AI as a form of distraction during worship?" Be that as it may, the young generations are summoning (what are they summoning?) for the next step in implementing the vision of worship.

The liturgical media literacy to ascertain the relationship between celebrations and AI seem strange bed-partners. But both can co-exist. Here, the Church, as a divine institution, needs to study how AI functions and see how each of these forms of social media operates and find ways to utilize them in evangelisation, celebration, and worship. Liturgical principles for social communication must be embraced to bear fruits of active participation and guard against the dangers of AI tools. Therefore, all Africans; the highly placed and the lowly placed; the

lay and the clergy, those on the altar and those in the congregation, to mention but a few, should know that the gift of AI technology is a testament of humanity's cooperation with God. Like every technology, God is still in charge with His message of hope. The positive light of science at the end of the tunnel is to be far from a technophobic manifesto. In its place is the advocacy for responsible use of AI, whereby the Church studies and harnesses its potentials and not to discard them. Because there is mutual relationship, the call is not to vilify human technology but to sanctify it through informed discernment. AI is a potent tool, promising, and potentially perilous if not handled with care and fidelity to liturgical norms.

Conclusion

This paper argues that new technologies, such as AI, must be researched and produced in accordance with criteria that ensure they truly serve the entire "human family," respecting the inherent dignity of each member and all natural environment, and taking into account to bridge the gap between faith, worship and technology. The extent of compatibility and dangers of over-reliance on AI indicate that the Church must domesticate liturgical norms as watchdogs to AI technologies for theologically inspired proposals for worship. Amidst the digital revolution, the Church in Africa is called to assume prophetic scholarship through advocacy for the responsible use of AI. Pope Francis 2024 message to the Diplomatic Corps accredited by the Holy See reiterated the importance of ensuring that technological development, including AI, takes place in an ethical and responsible manner, respecting the centrality of the human person. The Pontiff stressed that the inherent dignity of each human being and the fraternity that binds us together as one human family must be the guiding principles in the development of new technologies ("Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See").

In conclusion, liturgical celebrations and AI can co-exist. AI should be used as a tool to complement human beings at worship instead of replacing them. After all, the influence of worship epitomised in an understanding of liturgy involves the entirety of the human person. Admittedly, AI and liturgical celebrations can never be at loggerheads when the principles of science and worship are well spelt out, understood, and adhered to by both disciplines. These departments are complementary and are in search for truth in different realms of life, namely, natural, and supernatural. The liturgy opens a cyberspace for the intertwining of heavenly truths and earthly realities in such a way that the earthly is dynamically oriented to the heavenly realities; hence, there is a mutual relationship and not acts of strange bedfellows. They should co-exist in harmony and mutual dependence. This is the new benchmark for theologico-liturgical engagement with AI technology on the African continent, and possibly, the universal Church.

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