

SHAPING THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF ANGLICAN LITURGY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Introduction: The Intersection of Ancient Liturgy and Emerging Technology

We live in an era where digital technology permeates nearly every aspect of our lives, giving rise to the "4.0 member"—a congregant who carries the Bible on a smartphone, participates in streaming services, and shares theological reflections across social networks. In the Anglican parishes, a—unique multicultural and multilingual crossroads, this new reality challenges us to rethink how we engage in worship and discipleship.

When historical advancements like the printing press or the radio were introduced, they sparked similar debates about whether technology would undermine church authority or the authenticity of the gathered body. Today, artificial intelligence (AI) presents the newest version of this age-old dilemma. As we face the rapid acceleration of AI, the church must adopt a twofold stance: we must pursue innovation to speak the language of our day, while maintaining absolute faithfulness to the transforming message of Christ and the embodied communion of believers.

The Theological Framework: *Ratio* vs. *Intellectus*

To faithfully navigate AI in our liturgy, we must first understand what intelligence

truly is. The Christian tradition, particularly through medieval thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, distinguishes between *ratio* and *intellectus*. *Ratio* refers to discursive reasoning, calculation, analysis, and the parsing of sentences. *Intellectus*, on the other hand, is the intuitive, contemplative awareness and personal grasp of reality as a gift from God.

AI possesses a remarkable ability to simulate *ratio*—it can calculate, recognize patterns, and mimic language—but it entirely lacks *intellectus*. It does not have an interior life, it does not truly dwell in the world, and it cannot love. Creativity is a reflection of God's image in us; just as God filled Bezalel and Oholiab (Exodus 31: 1-11) with His Spirit to create the Tabernacle, human creativity in worship is an act of devotion. AI, as a soulless, emotionless machine, cannot experience the awe of God, making it a tool rather than a true creator.

Practical Opportunities for the Anglican Churches

When viewed properly as a tool rather than a substitute for the Holy Spirit, AI offers vast, comprehensive potential to support the mission of the church. We can think of AI as a "super-intelligent student intern" or a "study partner" that helps handle logistics, organize

thoughts, and tackle tedious tasks, freeing up human time for actual ministry.

- **Worship Planning, Custom GPTs, and Liturgical Calendars:** For Anglican priests and worship leaders, AI can serve as a powerful creative assistant. A highly practical approach is the development of a **Custom GPT** pre-loaded with the Anglican church calendar, the Common Lectionary, specific seasonal themes (e.g., Advent, Epiphany, Lent), and daily readings. Just as other denominations are creating dedicated AI databases loaded with their specific theological literature to maintain denominational identity and doctrinal accuracy, a custom Anglican AI can instantly cross-reference lectionary texts, draft personalized calls to worship, or generate thematic ideas that strictly adhere to Anglican traditions. On the musical side, AI platforms like Planning Centre and PraiseCharts can assist by analyzing past setlists, suggesting fresh chord progressions, and matching songs to sermon themes. Advanced systems can even optimize worship team rosters by analyzing the specific vocal ranges of volunteers and matching them to the appropriate songs based on team availability and chemistry
- **Administration and Church Management:** AI tools can

significantly streamline church operations by tracking attendance, predicting future attendance patterns, and optimizing church resources. Church administrators can use AI platforms like Tithe.ly or Pushpay to analyze giving behaviors and suggest optimal fundraising strategies. Tech teams can use AI to quickly automate tasks or diagnose complex sound and technology issues that arise on a Sunday morning. Furthermore, algorithms can flag individuals who have not participated recently, alerting the pastor that a member may need special pastoral attention.

- **Sermon Preparation and Discipleship:** Pastors can use tools like Logos Bible Software or Bible Gateway AI to summarize long theological commentaries, assist with deep scriptural analysis, and quickly find the historical context for difficult biblical passages. For the congregation, apps like YouVersion use AI to build personalized Bible reading plans and daily devotionals tailored to an individual's spiritual needs and reading history. Parents can leverage AI to generate age-appropriate family devotion activities, while apologetics tools can assist believers in researching and defending faith-based arguments against scepticism.

- Creative Graphics, Video Production, and Church Marketing:** Beyond text and logistics, AI is revolutionizing visual communication for churches. Studies show that a vast majority of pastors—upwards of 88 percent—are comfortable using AI for graphic design, while 78 percent embrace it for marketing. Tech-savvy parish teams can use platforms like Canva AI to rapidly design promotional materials, church brochures, and event posters tailored precisely to upcoming sermon themes. For Sunday services, AI can assist in the creation of engaging slide decks and visual presentations, transforming the aesthetic of the liturgy. Furthermore, AI simplifies video production and editing. It can be used to create powerful short films or promotional videos, generate dynamic background visuals or accurate biblical imagery, and edit sermon clips for social media sharing.
- Missional Outreach and Multicultural Integration:** In a highly diverse context like ours, AI's ability to bridge language and cultural barriers is incredibly valuable. AI translation tools like DeepL Translator or Otter.ai can provide real-time translation and subtitles for multicultural church services, ensuring diverse congregations can

participate fully. Additionally, AI chatbots can be deployed on church websites to engage online seekers with frequently asked spiritual questions, offering preliminary guidance and connecting them to local volunteers.

The Hidden Dangers and the "Acts 6 Audit"

Despite these opportunities, integrating AI into church life carries significant risks. One major temptation is the desire for the "superpower zone"—the pursuit of effortless power where we expect maximum spiritual impact with minimal personal effort or friction. Spiritual formation cannot be outsourced; it requires the very human pain, friction, and character development that AI is designed to bypass.

Furthermore, AI models are trained on internet data that frequently underrepresents majority world cultures, the poor, and ethnic minority groups. To combat this bias, Churches should consider implementing a regular "Acts 6 Audit". Just as the Early Church overhauled its system to ensure marginalized widows were not neglected, parishes must evaluate whether the AI systems they use are inadvertently excluding or misrepresenting vulnerable communities.

We must also remember that AI generates the most statistically probable answers, effectively making it a "cliché generator" that sits comfortably in the middle

of the bell curve. Jesus Christ, however, is entirely unpredictable and often challenges our expectations, reminding us that true discipleship requires sitting in the perplexing, unscripted reality of God's Word.

Keeping Anglican Worship "Human and Holy"

Worship is, and always will be, a sacred, human experience where unchangeable truth and human emotion collide. While AI promises to automate our toilsome tasks, human history shows that we often fill the time saved by technology with even more busywork. Pastors and lay leaders must intentionally invest the margin created by AI into deep, meaning-making relationships within the community.

To maintain this balance, believers should adopt an ancient Rule of Life for modern technology, such as taking a weekly "tech Sabbath" to rest from digital engagement and recalibrate our souls. We must resist the illusion that AI can provide genuine pastoral care or community.

An AI chatbot demands nothing of you, whereas true Christian community requires bearing one another's burdens, sitting in silence, and navigating the friction of human awkwardness. When a human being is ill, aging, or suffering, they need the embodied presence of a fellow human, not a generated response from a machine.

Conclusion

The test for any new technology in the church is whether it helps believers develop "allness of heart, soul, mind, and strength" in the service of loving God and neighbour. AI is a powerful instrument that can help the Anglican church in West Malaysia translate resources, streamline administration, and brainstorm liturgical themes. However, technology can only help spread the message; only God can change the heart. We must boldly use these digital tools for the Kingdom, while fiercely protecting our pulpits and altars as sacred spaces reserved for human vulnerability, Holy Spirit inspiration, and genuine, embodied love.

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