

Christians Disagree on Validity and Virtue of AI in Worship Services

Sometimes people in the church will surprise you, and that's exactly what Jay Cooper, pastor of the LGBTQ-affirming Violet Crown City Church in Austin, Texas, appears to be doing.

While many might think Cooper might agree with the use of an artificial intelligence-generated worship service to be a good thing—perhaps to distort the Word of God and its true meaning to fit their social agenda—Cooper's decision to introduce an AI-generated service has drawn criticism from his congregation and deems it “uninspiring.”

The incident reflects a broader sentiment among Christians who question the efficacy of AI in meeting the spiritual needs of a diverse and dynamic community.

“The idea to create an admittedly unorthodox AI-generated worship service came from my belief that the church should not only be aware of the most pressing issues of our world, but also to actively engage in them,” Cooper told the Christian Post. “In short, it was boring.”

Cooper explained that even though ChatGPT did not “generate anything overtly heretical,” it's not a “thinking sentient being,” he told CP.

“It is a program that we have created and it's doing what we've programmed it to do,” Cooper said. “Therefore, in many ways, what it generates is a reflection of who we are, meaning it's often wrong, misguided, prejudiced and broken.”

However, a recent survey by Barna exposes a significant divide among Christians regarding the compatibility of AI with the

sacred space of the church. The majority of respondents express skepticism, challenging the idea that AI can enhance the spiritual experience, which many churchgoing people claim.

As pastors experiment with AI-generated sermons, Barna's survey reveals a discord within church leadership. Conflicting perspectives on the role of AI in religious practices emerge, sparking debates on the appropriateness of integrating technology into the sacred realm.

Barna's survey exposes a fundamental disconnect between Christians and AI-generated content in the church. The findings suggest that believers prioritize a genuine, spiritually resonant experience over technologically mediated sermons, pointing to concerns about the depth and authenticity of AI-generated worship.

The Barna survey not only reveals skepticism, but also raises ethical and moral concerns within the church regarding the integration of AI. Congregations grapple with questions about the implications of relying on technology for spiritual guidance, prompting a broader conversation on the intersection of faith and innovation.

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The survey, conducted online in collaboration with Gloo and encompassing 1,500 U.S. adults from July 28 to Aug. 7, paints a nuanced picture of Christian attitudes toward AI. A majority, 51%, disagreed with the statement, "AI is good for the Christian church."

Of this, 30% strongly disagreed, and 21% somewhat disagreed. Only a mere 6% strongly agreed, while 16% somewhat agreed. The remaining 27% admitted to being uncertain about the role of AI in the church.

Interestingly, the general public's familiarity with AI seems to be a factor influencing these opinions. A majority of U.S. adults surveyed were still in the process of getting acquainted with AI, with only 10% claiming to use it often for work or personal business. Skepticism prevailed, with 29% expressing outright distrust, 35% displaying curiosity and 21% expressing fascination about AI.

A previous survey by Gloo earlier in the year examined the perspectives of ministry leaders on AI and the church. While 63% of leaders felt comfortable with their understanding of AI, 28% admitted to being only slightly or not knowledgeable at all. A mere 9% considered themselves very knowledgeable. Additionally, 62% of leaders confessed to rarely or never using AI in their work, indicating a gap between knowledge and practical application within church leadership.

Savannah Kimberlin, associate vice president at Barna Group, commented on the survey, noting the split opinions among church leaders. A substantial 43% admitted feeling uncomfortable or anxious about AI in churches, and 25% even suggested that the church should resist or condemn its use. On the flip side, 33% expressed enthusiasm, believing that AI could improve efficiency and effectiveness.

"The data reveals that church leaders are quite split in their opinion on the role of AI in the church and how they are ready the terrain," Kimberlin says.

"Forty-three percent of respondents admitted to feeling uncomfortable or anxious about AI being used in churches, and one in four went so far as to say the church should resist or condemn the use of AI," Kimberlin says. "However, one in three enthusiastically shared they believe AI will improve their efficiency or effectiveness. Stats like these show that the time is right to come together and have meaningful conversations on the topic."

As the Barna survey and Cooper's experiment stir conversations within religious communities, the church finds itself at a crossroads, grappling with the potential benefits and pitfalls of integrating AI into its sacred practices. {eo}

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