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Prayer and AI: Exploring the Impact on Orthodox Romanian Youth in a Confessional High School Context

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Abstract: The study's main objective is to identify and analyze the attitude toward prayer of teenagers in a denominational school in Romania and the need to use AI-assisted tools. To find a satisfactory answer, we considered it necessary to identify how they pray, i.e., freely or by calling on the prayer book, and whether they questioned whether artificial intelligence could be an agreeable support. The research also takes into account the documents of the Romanian Orthodox Church from which the attitude of the Hierarchy towards new technologies in general and artificial intelligence in particular emerges. How attentive is the Church to these realities, and how open is it to incorporate them? Does it have any good reason to consider tools like e-rosary in the Catholic world or Alexa Pray in the Anglican world in the near future? The introduction addresses Romania's socio-political, educational, and theological context, and the discussion focuses on how the literature on digital religion and its subchapters is received in the Romanian theological landscape. The research method includes qualitative, questionnaire, and textual analysis; it is an interdisciplinary approach, namely practical theology and the study of digital religions. The questionnaire was administered to 216 respondents, respecting all research ethics requirements. The results reveal that young people prefer to pray freely, use the prayer book moderately, and have not gathered information regarding artificial intelligence that could help them. However, they are open to a future offers from the Romanian Orthodox Church, including AI-assisted tools.

Keywords: digital tools; youth orthodox; prayer; artificial intelligence; Romanian Orthodox Church



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1. Introduction

In the introduction to this study, we considered it essential to paint a picture of the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) integrated into the greater Orthodoxy. A contextualization of the interest of some international authors in the work of the BOR follows the general aspects. The last part focuses on one of the IA definitions and the objectives of the present research. The results present the research questions posed to the sample and the expression of some synthetic ideas extracted from the answers obtained. The discussion focuses on the role of prayer in Orthodoxy and on the literature circulating in theological circles in Romania on new technologies. Finally, we draw some conclusions, including intentions for future research.

1.1. The Romanian Orthodox Church—A Significant Part of Global Orthodoxy

The Orthodox Church is one of the world's most significant Christian communities, with over 260 million believers ([Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century 2017](#)). Like Catholicism and Protestantism, it is trying to judiciously manage the pressures of the technological revolution, new media, and, more recently, the general public's access to artificial intelligence. The Orthodox Church stands out among the national churches by its declared synodality and national specificities. Therefore, apart from the dogmatic perspective, talking about the Orthodox Church in general is a mistake. When analyzing it from a practical and contextual point of view, it is vital to refer specifically to the local Church's reality, as in this study's case, that of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In other

words, the facts in the Russian Orthodox Church differ from those in the Greek, Romanian, or Ethiopian Church. Going further, the challenge of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Europe or America significantly differs from that of the country of origin. The Orthodox Churches with the most significant number of believers are in Eastern Europe, and the Russian Orthodox Church accounts for most people who declare themselves Orthodox. After the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1990, the Orthodox Churches, which had operated under Communist, obviously dictatorial, political regimes, opened up to the world through everything that the authoritarian regimes did not allow them to do: print media, radio, television, and nowadays the Internet (Turner 2019; Guglielmi 2022; Suslov 2016). It is just that the Orthodox Churches have acted according to local interest and not by reference to the great mass of Orthodoxy. In this sense, as A. Vitullo lucidly argues (Vitullo 2014), subtly touching on one of the weaknesses of generalizing and leveling approaches, what is appropriate in one context is not necessarily appropriate in another, or as T. Hutchings says that some technologies are more relevant in some cultural and religious contexts than in others (Hutchings 2015).

In Romania, a country with a wide Western opening that was Francophile in the interwar period and is now Anglophile, a NATO member, part of the European Union (Romania 2023), with an Orthodox majority (84%) (Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte and Academia Română 2023) significant political, social, cultural, and educational changes have taken place over the last three decades. New technologies have penetrated all institutions, including the Church (Guglielmi 2022; Dascălu 2012; Vidican-Manci 2020; Marion 2000; Nadoleanu et al. 2023).

Among the 27 Member States of the European Union, Romania ranks 12th in GDP expressed in EUR in 2022. With experience specific to countries that have emerged from communism, it is undergoing an accelerated process of Westernization. The capitalist economy is dominant, and the founding states of the Union are faithfully followed in state, economic, educational, and military policies. Regarding internet access, Romania has 85.7% household internet coverage, 89.8% in urban areas, and 80.3% in rural areas. In total, 98.6% of the population aged 16–34 will access the internet in 2023. In Eastern Europe, it ranks first in internet speed with 112 Mbps, followed by Moldova and Poland, and is among the top five countries worldwide. The dominant religion in Romania is Eastern Orthodox Christianity, with more than 85% of believers declared in the last census 2021 and published in 2023.

As far as the Romanian Orthodox Church is concerned, since 1925, it has been autocephalous, with its synodal leadership and Patriarch His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea. Romanians are the most religious nationality in the European Union. (Evans and Baron-avschi 2018). All these introductory figures are intended to summarize the context in which we conducted and analyzed the present study.

It is known that the Orthodox Churches have as their main characteristic the richness of worship and of ritual, that they emphasize the Holy Mass, the prayer of the heart, and prayer in general. On the other hand, they are characterized by a conservatism not specific to Western Protestant or even Catholic thought. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church is particularly open to dialogue, being part of the World Council of Churches, participating in its working meetings, and seeking to present relevant points of view. Regarding Orthodoxy's emphasis on prayer, it is important to see the statistical study carried out by the Romanian Academy and the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs on the religiosity of Romanians (Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte and Academia Română 2023).

1.2. Digital Generations and the Church's Motivation to Be "Open-Minded"

As in other European countries, young people in Romania are supporting and challenging the new and novel. For more than two decades, the literature has talked about "digital natives" (Prensky 2001) or the 'net generation,' who have an insatiable appetite for technology, accept it, and know it very well.

Democratic governments encourage the consumption of technology as something revolutionary and beneficial by seeking to modernize school premises with the latest technology: smart boards, computers, tablets, graphic tablets, etc. Young people, the digital generation, are immersed in an ocean of technology and information that does not stop at the school walls but becomes a continuum through their tools (laptops, smartphones, PCs, etc.). This, obviously, also creates enormous pressure on the Orthodox Church in its relationship with young people.

Referring to the “net generation”, especially the teenagers in Romanian Orthodox denominational education, we ask ourselves what their relationship is to the encounter between artificial intelligence and the exercise of prayer. Why artificial intelligence, and what is artificial intelligence? Because it is a reality, and it is on everyone’s lips. Some see it as a savior; others as a real danger. In this study, it is seen as a new technological means that could be used to bring young people closer to the Church. Many definitions are given to AI, and this study does not intend to retell them (Mitchell 2019; *Ce Este Inteligența Artificială Și Cum Este Utilizată?* 2023). We have stuck to the one in the Oxford Dictionary: “The capacity of computers or other machines to exhibit or simulate intelligent behavior; the field of study concerned this. In later use also: software used to perform tasks or produce output previously thought to require human intelligence, esp. by using machine learning to extrapolate from large data collections. Also, as a count noun: an instance of this type of software; a (notional) entity exhibiting such intelligence. Abbreviated AI (*Artificial Intelligence n.d.*)” So, we are talking about one of the most brilliant human inventions, which, used sensibly, can be of significant benefit. For now, the superior “machine learning” depends on the information with which humans load it. If it is correct, it works correctly; if not, it acts approximately (Dorobantu 2023).

This study falls within the research area of digital religion (Campbell and Evolvi 2020; Campbell 2023; Evolvi and Giorda 2021) but is approached from a multidisciplinary perspective: practical Orthodox theology, the study of digital religion, and digital theology.

The hypothesis of this research is that young people in denominational education are very open to the use of AI-assisted digital tools in their prayer program. Based on this hypothesis, we also outlined the exact areas of interest, namely: 1. whether the younger generation of teens working in denominational schools are practicing in the act of faith, and therefore praying; 2. if they pray, how often and what tools they use; 3. what is their attitude towards digitally enabled prayer by artificial intelligence; 4. how open they would be to an offer from the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding AI-assisted prayer; 5. what is the official attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church towards new digital tools in general and artificial intelligence in particular.

Completing the research helps us illustrate why, even though we are studying “digital natives” (Dingli and Seychell 2015), when it comes to the internalization of the religion of prayer in a denominational school, the results carry nuances that are hard to anticipate without field research.

2. Results

The seven questionnaire questions yielded results, as shown in the graphs below, that help to better understand how teens in a denominational high school project their relationship with AI in the prayer program.

To the first question, “1. Were you aware that you could pray with artificial intelligence?”, 79.6% of teens said they had no idea that AI could support prayer (Table 1).

Do you think prayer is important to your life?”, for 67.1%, prayer is very important; for 19%, it is important; and 10.6%, it is quite important; for 2.8%, it is a little important; and 0.5%, it not at all important (Table 2).

To the question “3. Do you pray?” 47.7% pray daily, 25% weekly, 17.1% monthly, 8.8% a few times a year, 1.4% never (Table 3).

Table 1. AI and the prayer program.

Question	Yes	No
1	20.4%	79.6%
5	98.1%	1.9%
6	85.2%	14.8%
7	61.1%	38.9%

Table 2. Significance of Prayer in the Lives of Teenagers.

Not at All Important	Slightly Important	Quite Important	Important	Very Important
0.5%	2.8%	10.6%	19%	67.1%

Table 3. Adolescent prayer frequency.

Never	Several Times a Year	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
1.4%	8.8%	17.1%	25%	47.7%

To better understand the attitude towards a digital medium, we wanted to test how much we have a positive attitude towards the most handy tool, the prayer book. To the question: “4. Have you ever used the prayer book to pray?” it was found that 27% used it often, as opposed to 22% very often, 19% always, 16.2% rarely, and 14.4% never (Table 4).

Table 4. Adolescent prayer program and Prayer Book.

Never	Rare	Frequently	Very Often	Always
14.4%	16.2%	27%	22%	19%

Regarding the level of awareness, which may also betray a low or high level of interest in AI-assisted digital tools, to the question “5. Have you ever thought about using artificial intelligence to pray?” 98.1% said they have not heard of Alexa Pray (Table 1).

On the question “6. Have you ever thought about praying with Artificial Intelligence?”, 85.2% said no. Of the respondents, 14.2% said they have thought about praying this way (Table 1).

To the last question, “7. Do you think the Orthodox Church should also promote prayer through digital tools supported by artificial intelligence?”, of the respondents, 61.1% think no, while 38.9% think yes (Table 1).

These results need to be discussed.

3. Discussions

3.1. A Brief Overview of the Study of Digital Religion in the Theological Environment in Romania

A glance at the Western literature, made so rich thanks to renowned scholars such as Heidi A. Campbell, Ruth Tsuria, Stephen Garner, Oren Golan, Tim Hutchings, Christopher Helland, Alessandra Vitullo, Giulia Evolvi, Knut Lundby, Mia Lövheim, and others (the list could go on and on) (Campbell and Tsuria 2022), we find that research has reached a maturity that allows one to speak of the field of digital religious studies itself (Campbell and Evolvi 2020). In the Romanian area, things are different. In what follows, I will illustrate, on the one hand, the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards new digital technologies, and on the other hand, the relevant research on this field, and then discuss the research results.

3.1.1. The Romanian Orthodox Church and New Digital Technologies

“New digital technologies” is a broad term. From hardware to software, everything that supports communication and any form of interaction between humans and technology falls under this umbrella. If the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Europe and America had felt the “mission field” (Campbell 2006) since the early years when the Internet was also accessible to the general public (Poe 2011) and set up research centers or, in the case of the Catholics, involved the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in drafting documents such as *La Chiesa e Internet* or *Etica in Internet* (Vidican-Manci 2020, pp. 97–108), the Romanian Orthodox Church was adapting from the start to conditions guaranteeing free expression and access to the media arsenal for all institutions (Guglielmi 2022). It must be emphasized from the outset that it did not have a utopian but neither dystopian position, at least at the institutional level, as seen below.

The first step was the establishment of the TRINITAS Cultural Missionary Institute on 26 June 1997. As a result of the mission undertaken, the first Orthodox Christian Radio station was established in Iasi the following year. On 27 October 2007, the Basilica Press Centre was established in Bucharest, comprising Radio Trinitas, Trinitas TV, three publications, the Basilica News Agency, and the Press and Public Relations Office. The opening was also in unison with the virtual environment. The first sites were created at the historic Golia Monastery in Iasi, namely www.mmb.ro (accessed on 21 August 2023) and www.golia.ro (accessed on 21 August 2023), marking the beginning of a broad mission in the virtual environment (Dascălu 2012) and the beginning of Romanian Orthodox Christianity as an online religion (Hoover 2006).

The most authoritative voice is the Patriarch of Romania, Daniel Ciobotea. He said in 2010: “The Orthodox Church believes that new means of communication, such as radio, television, internet, print media, offer new mission opportunities, but at the same time draws attention to the challenges that misuse can bring to people’s personal and community life.” (Ciobotea 2011, p. 501). This text shows that the Orthodox Church is officially open to using new digital tools and sees them as an opportunity for mission.

In other words, as Heidi Campbell would point out, the Romanian Orthodox community relates to and understands its relationship with new technologies as “bridging” rather than bounded, blending, or blurring (Campbell 2023). Since then, the Romanian Orthodox Church has opened up to YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram at the level of information and transmission of the truths of faith (Nadoleanu et al. 2023; Vidican-Manci 2022). The official Basilica channel is preferred at the level of communication on the mentioned social media channels, and social media activity is minimal to non-existent. At the level of applications, officially and institutionally assumed, the BOR has few, Basilica, Doxologia, and Renașterea. In this regard, we have carried out an analysis in which we have underlined the importance of assuming the institutional level of mobile applications if the Church is to have authority over the content of the truths of faith specific to Eastern Christianity.

I would return for a moment to the four categories of reporting outlined above to attack a problem that cannot be left in the shadows, namely, that the official vision of the Orthodox Church is not embraced by all her faithful. This causes some to find themselves in a competitive, “bounded” relationship (Larchet 2016), while others, admittedly a minority, are “blending”. Officially, documents regulating the relationship between an orthodox believer and digital tools, even artificial intelligence, are very few, quasi-absent.

3.1.2. Literature in Romanian

As far as the literature dealing with the issue of digital religion in the Romanian Orthodox space is concerned, it is at the beginning of the road. Authors are divided into two categories: those who see digital tools as an opportunity or those who see them as a threat. The 2000s were dominated by the works of Virgiliu Gheorghe, who focused mainly on the impact of television on the human mind and the spiritual program. He does not write on behalf of any institution affiliated with the Orthodox Church; he writes as a self-proclaimed Orthodox author who emphasizes the harmful effects of audio-visuals

on the human mind (Gheorghe 2006a, 2006b, 2008). The specific genre of his works is pessimistic, focusing on all the ways that technology can bring harm. Almost in the same tone, we find the book of the theologian Jean Claude Larchet, whose book is translated as “Captives in the Internet” (Larchet 2016), in French “Malades de nouveaux média”, where he also focuses on these adverse effects and even proposes that his position also includes renouncing technology. “The Virtual World between Use and Abuse” [Lumea virtuală între uz și abuz] is a work that belongs to Andrei Drăgulescu, engineer and theologian, which is an attempt to balance the views that do not see anything good in technology, discussing both the negative implications and positive effects that new technologies can have on the human mind and the spiritual life. However, the negative side dominates. Keeping in proportion, in the approaches mentioned above, we reflect a specific techno-skeptical literature of which we only mention J. Ellul (Chastenet 2005; Ellul 1987; Ellul 1965; Porquet 2003) and N. Postman, (Postman 2016), not to mention Manfred Spitzer or Nicholas Carr, our contemporaries (Carr 2012).

A work that represents the institution’s voice and not an isolated voice is by Nicolae Dascălu, who is responsible for the communications department of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Dascălu 2012). He offers an objective perspective on the new technologies, outlining what the Church has done in this regard and its plans. Also writing in a moderate tone is the professor of morality at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Iasi, Ioan Teșu (Teșu 2020, 2023). In addition to this, I have been studying at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at Babeș-Bolyai University since 2012 (Vidican-Manci 2020, 2022; Vidican-Manci and Mărginean 2020). The position I try to advocate is one of balance, sometimes in line with what the Church says at the institutional level, but mainly in the vanguard trying to raise alarm signals about an institutional slowness regarding the need for more active involvement from the Romanian Orthodox Church in generating resources that can be used with confidence by those interested. The studies carried out in my Ph.D. thesis and the adjacent research reinforce that new technologies are good or bad depending on two realities: the formative beneficiary and the formable beneficiary. That is to say, the one who wants to transmit information through a medium they did not create to the one who receives it through the same medium. The focus in all the signed studies is on what can be extracted positively from the technology and not the negative aspects of the new technologies. This is not speculation but evidence; new technologies are used by the faithful of the Orthodox Church and even by the institution on a large scale. Therefore, the study of digital religions begins timidly in a single Faculty of Orthodox Theology out of 14 Faculties and Departments active in the Romanian Patriarchate.

3.2. *Prayer in the Orthodox Tradition*

To properly understand why we have shown interest in the youth–prayer relationship and formulated the questions in the manner already illustrated in the results, it is essential to note the relationship of Orthodox theology to prayer. This research is carried out in a confessional context; therefore, at least the environment in which adolescents carry out their educational and non-formal activities is marked by a specific pattern of thought and ritual. In the Eastern Tradition, prayer has a community and a personal dimension. The Holy Liturgy is considered the most important community prayer (Braniște 2015; Felmy 2010), while personal prayer has several levels of practice (Evdokimov et al. 1996; Kallistos 2019; Saharov 2001). It is all based on the texts of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. In any treatise on prayer, we will find invoked several New Testament texts, which I bring to attention in this study as well: particularly, Matthew 6:6 and I Thessalonians 5:17. In the first place, for a person who claims to be religious, the practice of prayer has a frequency regulated by the Church itself and enhanced by one’s own possibilities. In the morning and in the evening, the Christian fulfills their prayer program. It is a set of prayers that combines the prayer of thanksgiving and praise with that of petition. These prayers prepare the believer’s soul and mind for the day to come and help them take stock of the day that has ended. Another practice of prayer in the Orthodox Church is the “prayer of the heart”.

This prayer is specific to Hesychasm (Getcha 2023; Vryzas 2023; Coresciuc 2015; de la Poiana Mărului 2009), and in Romania, after the theological revival due to the removal of the communist regime, it has been strongly promoted, especially by monks. In detail, it requires the person to utter the formula “Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, Have mercy on me the sinner!” as often as possible until it becomes a permanence, a continuum. Therefore, St. Paul’s wish, “Pray without ceasing” 1 Thessalonians 5:17, has to find its equivalent in the Orthodox tradition in Jesus’s prayer (Ware 1986).

As for the questions concerning the content, objective, and purpose of prayer, the patristic literature speaks of them from the earliest centuries. If the Apostle Paul sees prayer as a modern “must do,” Evagrius the Solitary tells us that “prayer is a communion of the intellect with God. What state, then, does the intellect need so that it can reach out to its Lord without deflection and commune with Him without an intermediary?” and (Palmer et al. 1983, vol. I, p. 57). This sentence defines the state of prayer as a state of maximum concentration so that man may unite with God, and nothing should stand in the way.

With all these idealistic imperatives in mind, Eastern Christianity has developed a veritable arsenal of tools to facilitate access to prayer. The most common tools have been and remain prayer books; with the advent of modern media has come radio and television, and in the years of digital religion, the uploading to social platforms and institutional sites of countless recordings of prayers and psalms. What is certain is that prayer is a significant component of Orthodox spirituality, and without its practice, one is not considered a practicing Orthodox.

3.3. Data Interpretation and Research Limitations

Regarding the data collected, it is important to put them in dialogue with those collected by the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs and the Romanian Academy through LARICS in 2021 and make them public in 2023. Of those interviewed, 89.85% said they believe in God, 4.2% said they do not, and 5.8% said this question cannot be answered simply. Regarding attendance at Sunday religious services, 23.4% of respondents said they attend weekly, 16% once a month, 22% on major holidays, and 31.2% occasionally on some family holidays and events. The question with which this analysis intersects is about prayer. Of the respondents, 53.9% pray daily, 11.7% weekly, 7.3% a few times a year, and 18.1% very rarely or at complicated times (Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte and Academia Română 2023).

These data reveal that, on a general level, Romanians have a disposition for spirituality and prayer. In our study, the fact that they are in a denominational school is reflected in their attitude toward prayer. For 86.1% of Orthodox teenagers it is important and very important, and 72.7% pray daily or weekly. This is reflected in the family upbringing and school environment favoring this behavior.

Surprisingly, respondents are only somewhat open to AI-supported prayer. What could be the reason? There could be several explanations:

- (1) The fact that young people do not need any intermediary in prayer or any means to help them paradoxically fulfills the ideal described by Evagrius of Pontus (Palmer et al. 1983). However, they are unlikely to be in such a high state of prayer, so it is more likely out of convenience, for personal comfort, and because a student who has so much to accomplish in a single day feels they can save time from missing out on prayer.
- (2) Consequently, a book for a teenager would be a reason to stay longer in a state of prayer, which is undesirable.
- (3) They may feel very comfortable with the set of prayers they know from memory and not want anything additional.
- (4) It is quite possible that what one feels towards the prayer book will transfer to any other means, even to an AI-supported tool, hence the results.
- (5) Lack of information, lack of promotion of such tools by the Church and its mass communication channels, hence their inaccessibility.

- (6) There is no concrete tool that the Church can make available to adolescents (Vidican-Manci and Mărginean 2020). Suppose 79.6% did not have the information that artificial intelligence can be used in prayer, as in the case of Alexa Pray. It may mean that they did not seek such information, but also that it was not brought to them beforehand, because the Orthodox Church, at an official level, does not promote this type of tool.

Although they did not think they could pray assisted by artificial intelligence, when it comes to a possible offer from the Church, 38.9% believe they should get involved and prepare such tools. So, the journey from not knowing and needing to be informed about the possibility and even existence of digital tools with artificial intelligence to 38.9% wanting to know about such an offer shows that we are in front of a generation that is not afraid of technology. Moreover, from a personal point of view, their positive attitude towards technology should be considered.

In terms of the limitations of this study, i.e., errors that might have influenced the results, the Alexa Pray question might be significantly irrelevant. The motivation for this statement is that the audience to which the questions are addressed is Romanian-speaking, and the Alexa Pray application is for an English-speaking audience. Without a Romanian-language app delivered by the Orthodox Church, we considered the Anglican app relevant, but it is arguably irrelevant from the respondents' point of view. These limitations are also due to the absence of socio-demographic data that would have allowed us to take a quantitative approach and to make multiple interpretations regarding the respondents' gender, social and financial status, families, level of education, and access to the internet and new technologies. All this is assumed to be exploratory research, which may mean further study and new research considering these limitations is required.

4. Materials and Methods

This research is limited only to the activity of the Orthodox Church in Romania; it does not concern the diaspora. The study was conducted in a confessional high school in Romania, namely the "Mitropolitul Nicolae Colan" Orthodox College in Cluj-Napoca. The school educates boys and girls whose spiritual choice is Orthodoxy. The reason for choosing this school is that it incorporates the largest denominational educational institution in Romania and the oldest Orthodox denominational school in Cluj-Napoca. The city, the second largest in the country, is multi-denominational, with rich Christian traditions. In this town, the multi-denominational and multi-ethnic factor gives a particular specificity to the place. The data collection method was a questionnaire, and Google Forms was used.

The research method in this study included qualitative, questionnaire application, and textual analysis. The research is multidisciplinary, combining practical theology, the study of digital religions, and digital theology (Vidican-Manci 2020). It is all the more relevant as in Romania the public discourse on new technologies is on the agenda, schools are upgrading their premises with the latest technologies, and students have access to the whole arsenal the internet, artificial intelligence, and state-of-the-art hardware. A questionnaire was administered to teenagers aged 14–18, a mixed group of 216 respondents from the Orthodox denomination. The questionnaire was administered after the reason for the research had been explained beforehand and the respondents' agreement had been obtained, which is why only 216 out of 362 adolescents responded. In addition to the questionnaires, textual analysis was also used for the documents on new technologies that the Romanian Orthodox Church has published over the years.

The reason for choosing the Orthodox College and not a public school was the desire to test, in the first phase, the interest in AI-supported prayer in an environment steeped in religious values, specifically Orthodox Christianity, where prayer is most likely to be a recurring behavior. The intention is to continue the research on a different scale, first to collect data from all denominational schools and then to apply questionnaires in a proportion of public schools to understand attitudes towards prayer more comprehensively and the implications of AI in its practice.

As stated in the introduction, this research hypothesizes that young people in denominational education are very open to using AI-assisted digital tools in prayer programs. The questions in the questionnaire were as follows: (1) Were you aware that you can pray with artificial intelligence? (2) Do you think prayer is important for your life? (3) Are you used to praying? (4) Have you ever used the prayer book to pray? (5) Have you ever heard of Alexa Pray (Amazon's artificial intelligence) prayer software? (6) Have you ever thought about using artificial intelligence to pray? (7) Do you think the Orthodox Church should also promote prayer through digital tools supported by Artificial Intelligence? Therefore, the interest was to test information about AI-assisted tools, prayer behavior, and attitudes toward a possible Church offer of AI-supported prayer.

The present study, if it were to be framed in one of the waves of research that Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria talk about, complementing Morten Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg, sits at the intersection of the fourth and fifth waves where the internet is taking a step forward by supporting artificial intelligence (Campbell 2023). Romanian Orthodox theology is still analyzing and searching for answers regarding integrating the internet and emerging technologies in everyday life, (Campbell 2023; Freudenberg 2023). Still, the questions are also about the impact that artificial intelligence has or could have on people. In terms of key areas, the study falls into the last of the five areas, namely ritual.

5. Conclusions

The present study represents a step toward a more complete understanding of the implications of new technologies, specifically artificial intelligence, in the religious life of young Romanian Orthodox Christian. It raises the issue of a new dimension of the Church's relationship with young believers, a kind of third territory (Evolvi and Giorda 2021). The research hypothesis was partially confirmed. The expectation was that most would also be excited by the possibility of praying using artificial intelligence. However, the percentage of those willing to use such tools is significant, which may be an impetus for future Church projects at the macro level.

It was also pointed out that official documents on new technologies are incomparably less than those of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. The existing ones focus on describing the importance of digital networks, quantifying the centers set up and the mission facilitated by the new media. There are no project materials or program documents, nor are there any declarations of future intentions to partner with the creators of new technologies and artificial intelligence, which would show an openness to those who would prefer such faith mediation.

Equally valid, it cannot be said today that an Orthodox Christian or a person interested in the Orthodox Church and faith would not have access to multimedia resources. While the BOR is careful regarding the content broadcast by TV Trinitas, Radio Trinitas, and official websites, especially in content concerning the teaching of the faith, the internet is dominated by private projects. A generous collection of prayers for personal use can be downloaded, some even listened to, from the official website of Romania's largest Metropolitanate, the Metropolitanate of Moldova (doxologia.ro). Given the reality on the ground and the need revealed by this research, the question arises as to what could stand in the way of the BOR thinking of an AI-assisted tool that young people can use. The private area has already taken a step forward, and we are not discussing its value here, the bisericagpt.ro I mentioned earlier. About the Orthodox Church's relation to artificial intelligence, even if at the level of Theological Faculties there are beginning to be interested professors, we are still at a timid beginning, and their research does not seem to be received and encouraged at the level of the hierarchs on whom depend the decisions to open or not the Church also towards artificial intelligence. In the Church press, it was announced that the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization had set up a "Scientific and Ethical Council on Artificial Intelligence". The news had no concrete effect, position statement, or document from the Holy Synod.

At the moment, at least at the declarative level, we have no indication that the Holy Synod has any document on the table that aims to develop digital tools, such as Alexa Pray, e-rosary, or other types of platforms using artificial intelligence. Could this be a signal that the Church sees in these tools an acceleration of the secularization process and does not want to amplify it? To ignore the discussion of a third space (Evolvi and Giorda 2021) where it could find or help spiritually disoriented young people? To be uninterested in this chapter because of the specific Orthodox nature of prayer, silent and withdrawn? If so, why do we have such a rich offer of prayer in the virtual environment (doxologia. ro)? Artificial intelligence is just another level that new technologies have reached. It is here; it is among us; what would be the point of ignoring it? Will preferring to remain in the backwaters be an advantage or disadvantage for the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and its young people? These questions remain to be answered in future studies. The conclusion, also based on the research undertaken and presented in this study, is that the richness of content already present in the virtual environment could be supported by a transfer of Orthodox prayers to artificial intelligence without affecting in any way what is the traditional Orthodox prayer process. If 38% of young people in denominational education are open to testing such a tool, replicating the research in other centers in the country could provide valuable feedback for future steps the BOR should take in this sector.

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