Attitudes of Catholic Clergies to the Application of ChatGPT in Unite Religious Communities

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Abstract: The article “Attitudes of Catholic clergies to the application of ChatGPT in unite religious communities” investigates the perspectives of the Catholic clergy on the integration of ChatGPT technology in religious environments. Bearing in mind that communication technologies are becoming an integral part of every aspect of life, including religious practices, the study delves into the potential, advantages, and challenges associated with using ChatGPT to support religious discourse. Adopting a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with eleven Polish priests, addressing the diversity within the group. The respondents, who play important roles in organizing the life of Catholic religious communities, highlighted ChatGPT’s potential in enhancing the dissemination of information, educational initiatives, and pastoral care. However, they also expressed concerns about the technology’s impact on genuine human interactions and the preservation of religious practices.

Keywords: religion; AI; pastoral care; spirituality; religious communities; ChatGPT; ethics

1. Introduction

All churches, with some caution but also hope, have in the past used various kinds of newly discovered tools as means of communication to help carry out evangelistic activities. Therefore, the history of the church and its missionary activities cannot be considered without reference to media and technological developments (Guichun 2020). For example, printing technology allowed the Reformation to print Bibles and theological books (Marshall 2015). Radio, television and film have been used for evangelism (Sultana 2014; Justice 2014; Harmes et al. 2020). It should be noted that the involvement of churches in missionary activity through the media has always increased with the onset of certain constraints, such as the ‘Spanish flu’ pandemic (Frost 2020; Reilly 2020; Howard 2020). The same was true during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hall and Kołodziejska 2021; Asamoah-Gyadu et al. 2020). This activity is a reminder that religions are alive and able to respond to the demands of traumatic events (Wildman et al. 2020; Sułkowski and Ignatowski 2020; Ptaszek et al. 2023). Today, with pandemic restrictions no longer in place, great prospects are opening up for modern technological tools. These include chatbots, where their conversational role is emphasised. They are described as conversational robots, computer programmes that simulate conversation (Dahiya 2017; Chaves and Gerosa 2021). There are many synonyms for chatbot, such as ‘talkbot’, ‘bot’, ‘IM bot’, ‘interactive agent’ or ‘artificial conversation entity’ (Frankenfield 2022). The technology enabling ‘chat’ using telecommunication networks (and nowadays global computer networks, e.g., the Internet) is nothing new; it is the use of modern (for the moment) technology for interpersonal communication. In this way, we exchange information at a distance, without the need for direct contact. On the basis of literature studies in the field of cognitive psychology (Kumar et al. 2022), artificial neural networks (Dobe 2021; Rutkowski 2008) and chatbots (Adamopoulou and...
Moussiades 2020; Luo et al. 2022), we can construct comparative diagrams of information exchange in the classical way (conversation, discussion, workshops, lectures, etc.) and between a human and an automat on replacing an interlocutor (chatbot). These are shown in the figure below (Figure 1).

![Comparative diagrams of information exchange](image)

Figure 1. Comparative diagrams of information exchange: diagram on the left: classical way; diagram on the right: between a human and an automaton replacing an interlocutor (chatbot). Designations on the drawing: NLP—Natural Language Processing. IDE—Intelligent Data Exploration. Source: own elaboration.

2. Results

In the case of a conversation between two people, the question asked by one (the problem posed) in verbal form (e.g.: written or oral) is initially analysed, i.e., assigned to a knowledge and/or skill area, and keywords are searched. The memory (knowledge base and skill base) is then searched, taking into account the predefined range (area) of meaning and the selected keywords. If the meaning of all keywords and the links between them are found, the search process ends and an answer (solution to the problem) is formulated. If not all keywords find their representation in the mind bases, then a representation is built. If not all keywords are related to each other (do not associate with each other in a logical way), then by means of deductive or inductive thinking such connections are built. The new representations and connections (associations) are stored in the bases of the mind and serve, together with those previously identified, to formulate the answer (solution) (Skulmowski and Man Xu 2022).

In the case of a ‘conversation’ with a chatbot, the overall process is similar, but all unit processes on the automaton (chatbot) side are algorithmised, i.e., pre-designed/programmed, with internal (system) and external databases playing the role of mind memory. At the moment, external databases are distributed in nature and their scope depends only on the access capabilities of the computer system.

The automation of the unit processes of a chatbot system was only possible thanks to developments in information technology. The first chatbots developed in the 1960s were based on the use of simple decision tables. In the course of development, the system’s internal database was expanded, and later external and distributed databases (e.g., the Internet) began to be used. At the same time, database mining techniques were refined using, among other things, various artificial intelligence technologies, known as IDE (Yao 2020).
Ways of analysing the question/problem posed have also been perfected. Particularly applicable here have been natural language processing techniques using appropriately constructed machine/computer procedures, known as NLP (Kaddari et al. 2021).

Artificial neural networks have played a particular role in automatically constructing new representations in databases and new links between representations, thus automating the very learning process of these networks—they are now able to generate new representations in databases and links between them.

An example of the application of all the technologies presented is the Chatbot GPT 4.0. The aim of the article is to find out the attitudes of Catholic clergy to the application of ChatGPT in unite religious communities. For this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted using an in-depth interview with a group of eleven respondents, clergymen belonging to the Catholic Church in Poland. Our objective in choosing Catholic clergy for our interviews was to investigate a unique perspective on the incorporation of chatbots within a historically traditional and prominent institution. There are two main causes that drove this decision. Initially, our objective was to offer a typological institutional viewpoint on chatbots. Catholic clergy, who have the greatest influence on the functioning of religious communities in Poland and are well versed in church doctrine, provide valuable perspectives on integrating chatbots into established organisational frameworks. Their viewpoints emphasise the possibilities and difficulties of implementing novel technologies in settings where customs and power structures are firmly established. Furthermore, the study seeks to attain a theoretical classification of the occupation. Through an analysis of the perceptions and interactions of clergy with chatbots, we can classify their attitudes and approaches, which may vary dramatically from those in more secular or technologically advanced domains. This classification improves our comprehension of professional attitudes towards the adoption of technology in different industries.

3. The Use of Chatbots in Professional Life and Religious Communities

The use of chatbots is developing in numerous fields, not excluding marketing, support systems, education, healthcare, cultural heritage and entrepreneurship (Adamopoulou and Moussiades 2020). There is also no shortage of contributions on governance as well as church religious life. The literature generally focuses on chatbots dedicated to medicine (Dharwadkar and Deshpande 2018; Bulla et al. 2020; Athota et al. 2020; Gentner et al. 2020). (Këpuska and Bohouta 2017; Shakhovska et al. 2019).

For many years now, churches have increasingly turned to the tools used in modern religious education in their activities (Karakostantaki and Stavrianos 2021; Chorna 2023). The use of these tools increased after restrictions were placed on community life during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cooper et al. 2021; Holleman et al. 2022). Churches are not shying away from the use of modern solutions used in management (Sherman and Devlin 2000; Olipas et al. 2021). We are witnessing the adoption of modern information and communication technologies, which contributes to the growth of religious communities. Of course, the level of adoption of modern technologies depends on the countries, individual church groups and their budgets (Bolu 2012), so it is understandable that we are analysing the use of chatbots in modern education and management.

With the development of technology and chatbots, the potential to use ChatGPT in education is increasing. According to research conducted in this area, there is a high level of public consent for such initiatives (Tili et al. 2023). In terms of education, the need to include local sources in the creation of chatbots, and other available online resources to provide the necessary answers for those posing questions, is emphasised. Chatbots are already being used not only in language education, but also in computer literacy, general education, technical science and mathematics (Hwang and Chang 2021; Kuhail et al. 2023). In higher education institutions, chatbots can help gain knowledge about university rankings, availability of services, the presentation of the university environment and updates on campus activities, as well as acquiring other academic information (Ranoliya et al. 2017).
The use of chatbots in education generates sceptical statements (Tlili et al. 2023). In using chatbots, students have the potential to use ChatGPT for non-self-directed essay writing. This is because it is possible to freely ask the chatbot specific questions, copy and paste the generated answers and then present them as independent papers. Students can therefore produce essays that are not their own, with the consequence that creativity disappears. It is important that students understand the importance of honesty when producing essays and avoid using ChatGPT or other technologies when writing assignments. Professors, for their part, who are familiar with the capabilities of chatbots should implement different methods of assessment, to monitor for plagiarism (King and ChatGPT 2023). Learning and creating work while using chatbots can have a negative impact on motivation and engagement in the learning process. Therefore, when using chatbots in the course of education, it is necessary to support the teacher and foster interest and persistence in exploration among students (Fryer et al. 2019; Chiu et al. 2023). It is therefore fully understandable that there is no shortage of calls and incentives for the development of technology in this particular area (Tlili et al. 2023).

In general, if we treat chatbots as learning aids, learners’ mentors should take into account the impact of artificial intelligence on their cognitive and emotional levels when evaluating them and their possible use. As chatbots are today treated as systems that should personally support learners, it is necessary to take into account the knowledge of the information needs of those using them (Wollny et al. 2021).

Chatbots are used in the management of organisations (Santos et al. 2022). They serve as a tool to support organisational processes and, in particular, fulfil a human resource management function (Taule et al. 2022). There are specialised software packages that can be used by any organisation and by outsiders. The user, once logged in, can send detailed queries without any hindrance, not to mention complaints and grievances, which can be filtered in terms of their intensity and strength. Chatbots used in this way assign complaints to specific strength categories, so that they are directed to an appropriate responder, helping to resolve escalating issues. Emerging systems are helping many organisations to ensure the quality of their own services, gaining customer satisfaction with less human effort (Bala et al. 2017). Through the use of artificial intelligence and chatbots, the individualisation of professional training becomes possible. Chatbots make it possible to build individual learning paths, identify strong and weak knowledge areas among trainees and construct individual development plans. The proliferation and use of chatbots has led to a paradigm shift between the product user and the product manufacturer. Chatbots are finding a fertile environment for their development in specialised communicators, the number of which is constantly growing. They can replace classic search engines and social networks. Their advantages are ease of interaction, speed of response and their configurability for the user. Using a chatbot greatly simplifies interaction with services and provides a universal interface.

Effective management of assigned tasks is essential for successful team collaboration. Although there have been many innovations in the last decade in systems that review and manage group tasks, these innovations do not usually extend beyond the main channels of communication: email, other instant messaging and group chats. Working in teams requires formulating; discussing and analysing; making improvements; and assigning and verifying progress on assigned tasks through various electronic communication channels. Due to technical handicaps, effective group management still faces some limitations. To solve this problem, autonomous software using artificial intelligence methods (so-called bots or automata) are being constructed to address emerging problems in team management (Toxtli et al. 2018).

Marketing that uses chatbots represents a new and positive type of communication applied to social media and, by extension, influences the quality of the customer–brand relationship. Thanks to chatbots, customers are beginning to interact with brands in the same way they do with humans, increasingly informally, intuitively and often in real time (Kaczorowska-Spychalska 2019). Through them, dialogic interactions between brands and
online shoppers can be sustained. Chatbots could exercise control over decision-making processes involving customers (Appel et al. 2020; Cheng and Jiang 2022; Ramesh and Chawla 2022).

It is understandable, therefore, that religious communities are also beginning to take advantage of the potential inherent in chatbots. This phenomenon is not limited to one religion. For example, on the basis of research carried out within Islam, attention is drawn to the possibility of using chatbots on religious issues for conversation in different languages. The chatbot ensures that answers taken from the Koran are received, not only to strictly religious questions, but also to social questions (Abu Shawar and Atwell 2004). It also provides information on religious worship, which, as with social questions, is based on the Koran, Sunnah and hadis. Indeed, questions about religion, traditions and ethics based on Islamic law are widespread on the Internet with long and detailed answers. However, some people expect short, clear and direct answers, obviously in line with the views of most Muslim scholars. In this regard, a chatbot can be used precisely (Sihotang et al. 2019).

In the Philippines, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a chatbot was created to support the work of non-profit organisations. It was used by Catholic clergy, among others, involved in the work of these organisations. The chatbots were used by clergy to assess the state of their own health. Through them, they were kept informed about the health and spiritual needs of sick people (Go et al. 2020).

Chatbots can be used to provide information about parish life in the dioceses concerned. It is necessary to implement Google’s technology for this: Dialogflow API. The Dialogflow API is a library of programmes that allows you to design your own chatbots that browse through your own subscribed databases and interpret the questions asked in different languages and formulate answers in them (according to the chatbot functionalities defined in Figure 1 and in the explanations below it). The questions are not only about the hours of celebration of Mass and the location of a particular church, but also about the priests ministering in dioceses, etc. (Sutono and Finandhita 2016).

In Vietnam, chatbots are used in religious education although they are not a primary tool in this regard. They are used where direct contact with the faithful is difficult. Through them, information on the functioning of Christian communities is provided. The age of the people willing to use chatbots is not insignificant in this respect. It turns out that the acceptance of these innovations concerns people aged between 24 and 30 years. It was people in this age range who were ready to adopt these innovations (Tran and Nguyen 2021).

The literature on the subject does not abound with texts on the use of chatbots by church communities. However, it is difficult to say whether religious communities will reach for these tools specifically, just as they would use experiences from education and management in their activities.

4. Methodology of the Research

Artificial intelligence technologies are constantly evolving and are increasingly being seen in various aspects of human life. One of the most recent developments is ChatGPT, a chatbot with a conversational interface that was developed in the OpenAI project. As one of the most advanced artificial intelligence applications, ChatGPT is attracting worldwide attention (Ranoliya et al. 2017). One of its advantages is its easy acquisition and operation, which does not require specialised training.

In this research, we address the issue of Catholic clergy attitudes to application of ChatGPT 4.0 in religious communities. Qualitative methods were used to achieve the planned objective. Within the qualitative method, an individual in-depth interview was used. Before proceeding with the study, the research questions were proposed as follows:

- Where did respondents get their knowledge of chatbots from?
- In what areas of the life of a religious community can a chatbot be used?
- What are the advantages of using a chatbot in religious life?
- What could be the potential risks of introducing chatbots into the life of the church?
Data collection for the qualitative research was based on an in-depth semi-structured interview. Its preparation focused on identifying the dispositions for the in-depth interviews. These constituted the initial interview schema and were not strictly adhered to, allowing the interview to explore the relevant themes in each case. So, during the interviews there was an opportunity to clarify issues, to ask respondents additional questions so that it was possible to refine the research question. Before the research was conducted, the dispositions were consulted with external experts dealing with the possibilities of introducing modern technology for the functioning of church institutions and specific parish communities. They included two lay people involved in parish life who came from an academic background, and two clergy who were familiar with the issue of chatbots and were involved in pastoral activities. Interviews were conducted between the beginning of August 2023 and the end of September 2023. Respondents were asked the following specific questions to answer the research problems presented (Table 1):

Table 1. Questions for the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did the clergy acquire knowledge of modern technologies and where did they get it from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What were the motives of the respondents when learning about chatbots?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What modern technological solutions are used by the clergy and religious communities they are associated with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To what extent can the chatbot be used by the clergy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What can a community chatbot be used for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To what extent can a chatbot be used for communication within the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Can a chatbot contribute to faithful activity and attract new members, and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To what extent does the age of the faithful affect chatbot use and contacts in the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>What are the risks of using a chatbot?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Where may the clergy’s criticism of the chatbot come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>May these risks be due to the clergy’s lack of preparation in the use of modern technology, and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>To what extent may these dangers arise from the clergy’s lack of preparation in the use of modern technology?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

The selection of respondents was purposive and allowed for specific cases to be reached, providing an opportunity to delve deeper into the specifics of the issues under study (Fendt and Sachs 2007; Schoonenboom 2023). The process of searching for respondents did not seek research participants who, by definition, ‘should not’ fit the assumptions made at the outset (Watson 2015). Several criteria were taken into account when selecting respondents. Namely, an effort was made to account for their practical involvement in the community, university work, and, most importantly, their familiarity with the operation of the chatbot. Eleven interviews were conducted with clergy. More than twenty pages of notes were taken during the interviews, which were also conducted using online tools. All participants gave their consent to participate in the research. The interviews lasted on average about one and a half hours, with the shortest lasting just under an hour and the longest lasting over two hours. The key that guided the analysis of the materials obtained was the need to gain knowledge about the potential use of chatbots in the functioning of the Catholic religious community, not forgetting the risks that arise from their widespread availability, and given that churches have tended to approach new technologies with caution, and then adopt and use them in practice. Nvivo software (Nvivo13) was used for the analysis in the paper.

A summary of the respondents to the survey is presented in the Table 2 below.
Table 2. Respondents of the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Code</th>
<th>Function Held in the Church</th>
<th>Location/Number of Inhabitants</th>
<th>Contact with the Faithful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>Catholic theology lecturer at university</td>
<td>City of over 750,000</td>
<td>Occasional contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>Catholic theology lecturer at university</td>
<td>City over 500,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>Spokesperson of the episcopal curia</td>
<td>City of over 75,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the religious community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
<td>Hospital chaplain</td>
<td>City over 750,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5</td>
<td>Catholic school principal</td>
<td>City of around 50,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6</td>
<td>Parson</td>
<td>City of over 56,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D7</td>
<td>Parson</td>
<td>Suburbs up to 5000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D8</td>
<td>Vicar and youth minister</td>
<td>City of around 40,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D9</td>
<td>Vicar and catechist</td>
<td>City of around 40,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D10</td>
<td>Vicar and catechist</td>
<td>City over 750,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D11</td>
<td>Vicar and catechist</td>
<td>Rural area up to 150,000</td>
<td>Constant contact with the faithful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Own Research Results and Discussion

Nearly all respondents said they acquired knowledge about artificial intelligence and chatbots on their own due to daily requirements (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D8), and a few may have attended specialised training courses (D9; D10) or had initiated them themselves (D11).

When it comes “to chatbots, I am compelled” (D1) and “encouraged” (D2) “to deepen my knowledge about them, as “some university students” (D1; D2), “primary and middle school students” (D8), and “parishioners” (D5; D7) are familiar with them. Questions about chatbots and artificial intelligence appear in my activity in the form of, “what do I think about them” (D3; D8), and even “do I use them myself” (D5; D8; D10).

There is no shortage of questions about “to what extent they can be used when seeking answers to homework assignments” (D7, D8, D11). They became interested in the “chatbot when dealing with the faithful” (D3; D5), as information about them “comes in handy for various contacts” (D2), or “unexpected circumstances of a clergyman’s ministry” (D4; D9). It is interesting that “I was told about the chatbot by friendly parishioners” (D3).

The research showed that there are opportunities to use chatbots in coordinating work in the religious community, especially in the information and education sphere. Indeed, “a lot of material is available on the Internet” (D2) and “can be obtained through popular search engines” (D3), which does not change the fact that “obtaining information requires a lot of time” (D4), which is “constantly, even notoriously lacking” (D4; D5). A chatbot would “definitely help in sourcing the necessary material” (D2) and “I am thinking of strictly religious content” (D7), as well as “institutional” (D8; D11) and “even church-wide” (D8).

The possibility “to use a popular chatbot leads to the conviction that specialised chatbots would be useful” (D4; D5), dedicated “explicitly to evangelical and ecclesial life” (D1; D3), and further, “specifically to diocesan and parish life” (D8; D11). A chatbot dedicated to religion “should be kept up to date” (D6). In this day and age, when “we have to deal with a lot of misinformation circulating on the Internet” (D10) it would be “a good way to post verified and reliable information” (D1). “As often as they freely and indiscriminately circulate on the Internet” (D7), they are merely an expression of “unreliable and unverified sensational information” (D5). I am sure that “such thematic and reliable chatbots would be an aid to religious life” (D11). A specialised chatbot would be useful in “the religious life of sick people” (D10). “I am aware of the limitations of internet access, but perhaps it would be possible to prepare a thematic chatbot for prison inmates” (D9).

Respondents indicated that in some circumstances they use chatbots themselves. There are times when “I am looking for information regarding diocesan life” (D1) and after “some time I decide to type a relevant question into the chatbot” (D3). When I am asked about religious life “I reflexively type a query into the web browser” (D4), “sometimes I am reminded of the chatbot” (D7; D11). The possibility to “use the chatbot tentatively takes root in my practice” (D10), “I spontaneously reach out to the chatbot” (D2; D4). I use “the chatbot occasionally knowing its faults” (D1).
The chatbot “can be used, generally speaking, to find inspiration for speeches” (D4; D7). It is particularly helpful in “moments of fatigue, such as during a carol visit” (D3; D5), or in “situations of other onerous ministries” (D6), “which I do not want to talk about in detail” (D9) or “with precision” (D10).

The study has shown that the use of chatbots can bring some tangible benefits. “These include, first and foremost, the possibility of acquiring condensed knowledge” (D2), which “we can acquire at almost any time” (D11). In this context, respondents emphasised the easy access to chatbots. Since “the Internet is everywhere, why not use such a tool” (D3; D7), “well almost everywhere” (D4; D10). This widespread accessibility “is also provided by modern tools such as smartphones” (D10). This was eloquently expressed by one respondent, who pointed out that “why waste time on pointless games when you can sort out basic knowledge” (D1) or “learn something interesting” (D5; D2). Respondents also emphasised the availability of the tools needed to use the chatbot. “No one can say they don’t have a smartphone” (D5), “patients in hospitals have them” (D10), “to a very limited extent, understandably, prison inmates have access to tools that allow them to use the Internet” (D9).

Respondents indicated that “chatbots point to the potential inherent in the human mind and its creativity” (D1; D11). Instead of “criticising a tool that is commonly used by students, including in theological faculties” (D2), “by students in school” (D7; D8), it would be good to “highlight what man is capable of, as a creation of God himself” (D3), or “how great things he is capable of” (D5). It is unfortunate that “the negative potential inherent in modern technology is over-emphasised” (D4) and even “exaggerated” (D5), “it would be good to point out its positive significance” (D8) and “even extol it” (D6). “I don’t understand for what reasons we constantly position ourselves negatively towards modern technology” (D7). “If one takes such a good look at such a negative attitude, one gets the impression that one too often wants to see evil” (D9), and “even Satan as an intelligent and creative entity” (D10). “It is constantly necessary to emphasise how great the human mind is” (“D1) and its “still unexplored corners” (D11).

According to the respondents, information gained through chatbots can provide a starting point for an arranged conversation on a topic (D1; D7), or “a discussion” (D3; D5) and “arouse interest” (D11) and “a starting point for further scientific research” (D2).

Research has shown, as noted above, that there are some concerns and negatives associated with the widespread use of chatbots. This over-criticism may “stem from limited knowledge in this area” (D1; D11), “or even from ignorance” (D5; D2). “It is always the case that if one does not know something, it is easy to criticise” (D3) or “depreciate” (D7), there is “excessive criticism” (D8), “exaggerate the negatives” (D5).

Criticism of chatbots centres around the fact that “too often knowledge acquisition is limited to what is on the Internet” (D3; D8). “I cannot imagine that everything related to the functioning of a religious community should be limited to the Internet” (D6). “Meanwhile, the tendency is just like that” (D1; D5). “Too often I hear from friends that if you are not online, you do not exist at all” (D3; D9). Reaching out almost always to online resources makes “a need to post information immediately, which is then unreliable” (D8) or “too short” (D11). “Acquired knowledge is limited and leads to mental laziness” (D2).

If the use of chatbots were the only source of knowledge acquisition, “we would be dealing with a certain dehumanisation” (D1; D11) or “a total surrender of the human soul, which would lead to even less contact with the community” (D3), a “full surrender of the soul” (D4), or “its dangerous flattening” (D5). Two of the respondents noted that in “religion there is an excessive detachment of human beings from contact with the community because of robotisation” (D1). What is even more, “robots want to bless the faithful” (D3; D11).

“We recognise that chatbots acquire knowledge that is not state-of-the-art” (D2; D8) and “sometimes inadequate to the facts” (D9). The use of chatbots in this regard would “limit the potential and current needs of humans” (D11).
Finally, respondents indicated that the exclusive use of “chatbots would be a phenomenon unfair to themselves” (D6) and “to the community” (D5). Thus, “it would be indiscriminate” (D7) and “a short-sighted action” (D8).

Research has shown that the use of chatbots can have some tangible benefits. This is due to the fact that this computer programme is easily accessible, and using it helps to highlight the potential inherent in the human mind. This is particularly important when dealing with young people who are keen to embrace modern technology. Reaching out to social messengers such as Messenger or WhatsApp provides and guarantees a rich, multimedia insight into the world of young people that is not easily accessible through other means (Irfan and Dhimmar 2019; Gibson 2022). The same is true for chatbots, the use of which can contribute to reaching and engaging young people (Pietilä 2020), if only because young people are increasingly using chatbots because they solve problems quickly, and are easy and effective to use (López-Sánchez et al. 2023). Research shows that chatbots can bring condensed knowledge at almost any time. Such possibilities are due to the potential inherent in modern programmed chatbots (Mleczko 2021; Følstad and Taylor 2021). It should also be emphasised that, as discussed earlier and visualised in Figure 1, chatbots can perfectly simulate an interlocutor, making discussion possible and attractive. This depends, of course, on the knowledge base (database) on which it is based.

The research has shown that there are opportunities for chatbots in coordinating the work of a religious community, particularly in the informational and educational spheres. This is also the case, as specialised chatbots are used by various religions in precisely these two areas: information and education (Shawar and Atwell 2004). There is no doubt that in terms of information transmission, the implementation of modern technologies by religions is needed (Sutono and Finandhita 2016). The use of chatbots in the information area would also fit in with the church’s increasing openness to the media and growing use of social communication tools (Tworzydło et al. 2020). This is important in view of the growing pluralism and problems within religious communities, and misinformation—especially on social media—about the activities of churches (Małosa and Rozpędowski 2023). The need to communicate positive information, if only about charitable activities, is therefore particularly important. The Catholic Church in Poland is still doing very little to ensure that these efforts are recognised and appreciated not only by believers () but also by the general public. As far as the use of chatbots in education is concerned, it should be noted that there is public acceptance of the use of chatbots in this sphere (Tlili et al. 2023). In Catholic education, chatbots are used in Vietnam (Tran and Nguyen 2021). They can be used, e.g., in the organisation of specialised training.

The criticism of chatbots stems from the fact that the knowledge gained is limited to what is on the Internet, and to claim exclusive use of chatbots would be unfair to oneself and the community. It would have to be argued that the Internet is today the most widely used tool for knowledge acquisition and chatbots can, as research indicates, highlight the potential inherent in the human mind and its creativity—the user is forced to formulate relevant questions, assumptions for discussion and theses. When encountering modern chatbots, a fundamental problem arises. It concerns the difference between human and machine creativity. A study conducted in Scandinavia on the creativity of chatbots and humans when it came to the use of everyday objects found that chatbots generally generated more creative responses. When it came to higher-quality products, human ideas matched or surpassed chatbot solutions. The Scandinavian study provides insights into the relationship between human and machine creativity, which raises important questions about the future of creative work in the age of artificial intelligence (Koivisto and Grassini 2023).

Respondents indicated that chatbots lead to dehumanisation. Note that the concern about dehumanisation by chatbots has been around since the chatbot known as Eliza was created in 1966 (Rudolph et al. 2023). With successive experiences, the chatbot learns, expanding its communication skills and developing knowledge of how to adapt messages and improve its own communication and response rules. As a result, chatbots can answer questions, provide answers and solve problems by understanding users’ appropriately
formulated intentions. Therefore, the chatbot becomes a technological reflection of the human, leading to a dehumanisation of the real and even a dehumanisation of science with its (more human than human) manifestations (Rahim et al. 2022). We must also not forget that modern technologies can be and are being used to change human behaviour. As such techniques become more commonplace, it is clear that we are entering uncharted territory with a wide range of consequences for society (Oldfield 2021), which must not be forgotten.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

The issue of the application of ChatGPT in religious communities fits into a broader discussion on the impact of artificial intelligence on social life. Devices using artificial intelligence are becoming popular in services, the scientific and academic research, and online entertainment and commercial systems (Ranoliya et al. 2017). Church messages and opportunities for religious communities to use chatbots cannot be left out of discussions on this topic (Pugeda 2005). This article’s positive attitude towards the issue of ChatGPT stems from a determination to connect the improvements in technology with their real-world implementation in various institutional settings. The study provides a detailed viewpoint on the perception and usage of chatbots in contexts that are not usually linked with rapid technology advancements, with a specific focus on Catholic clergy. This approach not only enhances the existing body of knowledge on chatbots but also offers practical insights for developers and policymakers seeking to adopt similar technology in comparable institutional contexts. Limited research has shown that chatbots can find application in the religious space, specifically in the informational and educational sphere. Further research, therefore, should be conducted in the wider environment of religious communities, including people who, for technical reasons as well as age-related limitations, remain distanced from modern technology. Younger people who are open to the advantages of modern means of information flow should also be included in the research. It would be interesting to carry out comparative studies on an international scale, in which members of churches of different denominations, such as Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox, could participate.

Two clear attitudes have emerged regarding the use of chatbots, namely supporters and sceptics. The latter pointed out that it would be unfair to themselves and to the community to acquire knowledge based only on the Internet. At the same time, they stressed that there is no escaping modern technology anymore. Supporters reminded that chatbots allow us to appreciate the potential inherent in the human mind. Strong advocates of the use of modern technology in religious life should keep in mind that the virtual modern kingdoms do not always accept traditional religions as well as traditional anthropology. They will tend to endorse mechanical life and will accept human beings to the extent that they are willing to go beyond the limits that make us human. (Geraci 2008). Those distancing themselves from modernity must not forget that religions have always, albeit with some resistance, accepted and used modern technology. It is worth asking, in this context, who or what builds, powers and controls the powerful information networks and the many facilities and technologies with which these networks connect? (Morelli 2019). It is important to reflect on this and feed reliable and thoughtful content into these networks for use by chatbots.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; methodology: G.I., Ł.S., K.P. and R.S.; software: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; validation: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; formal analysis: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; investigation: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; resources: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; data curation: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; writing—original draft preparation: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; writing—review and editing: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; visualisation: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; supervision: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; project administration: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P.; funding acquisition: G.I., Ł.S., R.S. and K.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the University of Social Sciences.
Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants taking part in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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