

Kereke ya moyo (digital ecclesiology): Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT and the township Pentecostal pastor

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Abstract

A 2012 empirical study by Beger, Sinha and Pawelczyk mentions that South Africa has a mobile subscription of 100.48% and the highest number of households with more than one mobile phone. Members of township Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) are among these figures and are users of digital Christian resources accessed through various social platforms. Different age groups in the churches and the society respond differently to technology, with millennials and Generation Z (Gen-Z) being mostly techno-savvy and the older generation not. Old and less techno-savvy township Pentecostal pastors (55–70 years) and millennial Pentecostal pastors lead these churches. Since millennials, including millennial pastors, and Generation Z (Gen-Z) are mostly techno-savvy, it is not surprising that they are the largest users of smartphones in South Africa, and these churches are exposed to ChatGPT. This creates a digital gap between them and older township Pentecostal pastors. Thus, it is unavoidable for older pastors to fall behind in embracing ecclesiological digitalisation. The article argues that, unlike millennial pastors, AI and ChatGPT will inevitably make older pastors redundant if they do not embrace AI and ChatGPT.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence; ChatGPT; township Pentecostal pastor; ekklēsiā; digital ecclesiology; Pentecostal liturgy

1. Introduction and context

The church has been, over many centuries, facing internal and external influences that are either embraced or denounced. Currently, it is facing the dilemma of either embracing or denouncing digital technology that is

fast affecting every aspect of human life and in its church liturgy. Although the digitisation of church services has been discussed in the past (Dreyer 2019), the Covid-19 pandemic, with its hard lockdown regulations in various countries, created the space for African theologians to reflect more on the church going online (digital ecclesiology) (see Amenyedzi 2024, Boaheng 2024, Resane 2023, Rantsudu & Togarasei 2020). Campbell's (2020) work discussed how selected church leaders and media scholars viewed embracing the online shift of digital ecclesiology and digital theology during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An interesting study of the socio-economically unequal South African society context has shown that South Africa has a mobile subscription of 100.48% and the highest number of households with more than one mobile phone (Beger, Sinha & Pawelczyk 2012:10, 11). These statistics appear to include the poor African section of the population who do not have access to a home computer or a laptop. Another study showed that most African youth studying for the first time at South African public universities are not computer literate (Foloye & Ajayi 2021: 6–7). This reflects the existing digital divide between the rich and the poor students in South Africa, traced to the apartheid era (Foloye & Ajayi 2021: 1, 4). In this article, digital divide refers to the disparity in access to the internet and related tools (Foloye & Ajayi 2021:1, 5; Mphidi 2008: 2; Nyahodza & Riggs 2017: 40).

South African, African university students and the older African generation appears to be left behind in this fast-changing digital space. However, they have an advantage that digital technology has brought the computer into the palm of a hand through smartphones. Although smartphones are expensive, purchasing a smartphone is more affordable than purchasing an expensive computer or laptop. This phenomenon is shown in “[a] survey of the South African digital landscape [that] indicated that access to the Web is mostly via cell phone but that the affordability of cell phones – especially smartphones – as well as data, makes access to online services problematic for many.” (Venter & Daniel 2020: 3251). Other factors affecting internet access are age, income, lack of internet infrastructure, gender perceptions, and family background (Foloye & Ajayi 2021:3–4).

African millennials, who are parents of Generation Z (Gen-Z), and some older African generation parents, opt to purchase these expensive devices

for themselves and their children. Hence, it is observable that millennials and Gen Z from all sections of the South African population are mostly techno savvy, and it is not surprising that they are the largest users of smartphones in South Africa (see Beger, Sinha & Pawelczyk 2012: 10-11).

By inference, the township Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (PCCs)¹ are inferred among the above statistics, and they are users of digital Christian resources accessed through different social platforms. This brings the township Pentecostal pastor into the discussion. The township Pentecostal pastor's membership context, before and post the COVID-19 pandemic, often includes leading the poor, the middle class and the affluent members who seek answers to existential issues. These pastors are from various Pentecostal traditions (see footnote 1). Their members include the techno-savvy millennials and Gen Z, and the less techno-savvy older generation above age 60. The latter are less techno savvy because of past historical context, like the apartheid's Bantu education system that denied them access to quality education (Mzondi 2024:16). The Bantu education Acts regulated the inferior education system, from primary to university level, for Africans to keep them as servants. Gall (2020:16) states that "[b]y dedicating substantial amounts of time to subjects such as crafts, gardening, and sewing, the education curriculum under Bantu Education trained Black students to be unskilled labourers, such as gardeners and seamstresses." Foloye and Ajayi (2021:3) emphasise that "[a]partheid created large economic, academic and social gaps between different race groups, with the black majority living far below the standard of living enjoyed by their white counterparts." This mishap has excluded them from quickly embracing digital technology and cell phone technology that has permeated all facets of society.

That digital technology has permeated all spheres of human life stirred Cole-Turner (2000:100) to argue that "[t]here is no place to hide from technology, no inner sanctuary of the self-left unmanipulated, no part of creation untouched." It should also be noted that digital technology benefits humanity and has negative implications for humanity (Dreyer 2019:3).

1 Classical Pentecostal Churches, Charismatic Churches, Neo-Pentecostal Churches and African Prophetic movements

Digital technology is part of the technology that evolved from the First Industrial Revolution (IIR) to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Artificial intelligence (AI) is a product of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Three views about AI and 4IR follow. Peckham (2021:17) says 4IR is “[a] cluster of technologies, such as AI, sensors, and communications infrastructure like 5G have converged to allow the creation of new ways of doing things.” Schwab (2016:1) describes 4IR as “a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another”. Henning (2021:30) states that “[i]n a fully connected and digitalised world we need new ways to balance the tensions between people, cultures, technologies, virtual realities, and AI objects with our consciousness.”

AI’s most recent OpenAI chat box, ChatGPT, launched on 30 November 2022 (OpenAI), has introduced new digital technologies that enable it to perform many functions with speed and ease. ChatGPT mimics humans as it attempts to answer many questions by searching and using data from various internet sources (Kalla et al 2023:828, 830). It is described as “a language model that uses advanced artificial intelligence techniques to generate natural language responses to a given prompt or input. Its impact has been felt across various fields, from natural language processing to customer service to content creation.” (Kalla et al 2023:827). Kalla et al (2023:833) further note that “[t]he future of ChatGPT is exciting and full of potential. As natural language processing technology continues to evolve, ChatGPT is expected to become even more sophisticated and capable of understanding and responding to human language more naturally and nuancedly.”

This future suggests considering the advantages and disadvantages of ChatGPT. The advantages of ChatGPT are natural language-like responses, scalability, can be customised ability, and efficiency (Kalla et al 2023:828). Its disadvantages are bias, a need for more emotional intelligence, limited knowledge, and a lack of empathy (Kalla et al 2023: 828-829).

ChatGPT brought a new shift in how we live, work and relate to one another, interacting with technology on the internet to perform certain tasks. This shift in how we live, work and relate to one another brings Marwala’s (2020:n.p.) concern that “the greatest worry around the 4IR

is not that it will challenge our belief systems or spell the end of religion but will make humans irrelevant.” Specifically for religion, this means, potentially, making some ecclesial activities of the township Pentecostal pastor irrelevant due the shift to embrace digital ecclesiology and ChatGPT. Put in another way, will the township Pentecostal pastor adapt or ignore the use of digital ecclesiology and, particularly, AI and ChatGPT in their religious practice?

Technological determinism (TD) – is a theory that holds that technology is an external force that shapes society (Gunkel 2003:510; see Țicău & Hadad 2021:149) – is used as a framework. It is divided into “hard determinism” and “soft determinism.” The article uses the latter to expands the argument that unlike millennial pastors, AI and ChatGPT will inevitably make older township Pentecostal pastors (55–70 years) redundant because they cannot use AI and ChatGPT due to past socio-economic marginalisation factors like low education levels, digital gap between the rich and the poor, particularly the African poor, earning low income, if any. Again, “[p]eople aged 50 and over are less likely to use modern technologies because they believe that their traditional devices are sufficient. They are also of the view that modern devices are too difficult to use.” (Foloye & Ajayi 2021: 3). These views allow the article to look at the positive and negative aspects of technology in the process of township PCCs leaders either embracing or rejecting AI and ChatGPT.

This qualitative practical theology study applies a case study method (Gustafsson 2017; Thomas 2021) to focus on the effects of AI and ChatGPT among the leaders from the above-mentioned four strands of Pentecostal churches grouped as millennials Pentecostal pastors and township Pentecostal pastors (55–70 years). The choice of a case study is informed by its ability to engage in an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit that intends to generalise (Gustafsson 2017:2).

In addition to literature, the author also uses a participant observer approach (Savage 2020) to ground the case study analysis. Participant observer approach is “the process of immersing yourself in the study of people you’re not too different from.” (O’Connor 2005:5).

The article consists of two main sections, namely, *ekklēsiā* and ecclesiology, and digital ecclesiology. The first section provides the necessary foundation

for the second section where the author engages the details gleaned from participatory observation about technology, AI and ChatGPT among township PCC pastors. This section concludes by proposing some practical steps for older township PCC pastors to take to avoid being redundant due to the influence of AI and ChatGPT.

2. *Ekklesiā* and ecclesiology

The Greek word, *ekklēsiā* (“to call out”), is a translation from the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל). It flows from the use in the Septuagint (De Beer 2019:350–351). Examples that refer to Israel’s gatherings or assembly in the Old Testament are mentioned in Deuteronomy 9:10, 18:16, 31:30; Judges 20:2; 1 Samuel. 17:47, 1 Kings 8:14 and Psalm 22:2. However, as noticed in the New Testament, it should be noted that the church is not a continuation of the Old Testament system. During his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ, responding to Peter’s answer, mentioned to his disciples that he would build his *ekklēsiā*; this was after asking them about who people said he was and later who they thought he was (Mt 16:17–18).

After Christ’s death and resurrection, Luke’s letter, Acts, shows that this *ekklēsiā* was inaugurated on the day of the feast of Pentecost with one hundred twenty believers gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15, 2:1–3) and it later grew to over thousand believers (Acts 2:41) who continued to meet at the temple courts and their home (Acts 2:46, 5:12). This was the first *ekklēsiā* that later experienced its first persecution (Acts 8:1–4) followed by those outside Jerusalem (Acts 9:1–2, 13–14). Later in his narrative, for the first time, Luke calls the believers who met at Mary’s house (Acts 12:12), *ekklēsiā* (Acts 12:1 and 5).

Ekklesiā appears in the Pauline corpus and refers to a gathering body of believers who he sometimes uses the imagery of the body (1 Cor. 12:12–30; Eph 4:4), the bride (Eph.5:22–32) and the building (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20–22). Paul uses the first imagery to admonish pervasive schisms in the Corinth church identified in 1 Corinthians 3:1–23. He uses the same imagery to teach the believers in the church in Ephesus to promote unity (Eph 4:3).

Paul's first imagery dominates his teachings that the believers are parts of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, Romans 12:3–8 and Ephesians 4:11–13. This imagery underscores the believers' relations to each other and Christ, that is, connectivity. All believers are connected to each other and the head, Jesus Christ. None is less important than the others in diverse parts of the human body. The notion of a body in Paul's corpus promotes the importance of interdependence of believers who form a community, emphasised as follows: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor 12:26, NIV).

Consequently, the Holy Spirit has placed each believer in different parts of the body of Christ to perform specific functions to benefit the *ekklēsiā*. These parts of the body of Christ are called gifts of the Holy Spirit. One of the gifts, speaking in tongues, is accompanied by an interpretation function to witness to the unbelievers (1 Cor 14:18–25) while the other gift, prophecy edifies the believers (1 Cor 14:22; see 1 Cor 14:26). These functions constitute the purpose of the *ekklēsiā*. It is then observed that the function of *ekklēsiā* is horizontal (believer to believer and believer to the unbeliever) and vertical (the believer to Christ and the unbeliever to God).

Paul does not end by providing the above-mentioned purpose and function of *ekklēsiā*. He also provides the leadership and structure of the church (Eph. 4:1–4; 1 Tim 3:1–15; Titus 1:5–9) with the spiritual leaders providing a central role of teaching and equipping the believers (Eph 4:12–13). This authority and structure have manifested differently from the first century to date, across various protestant denominations in the western church. These texts form the basis for the Augsburg Confession of 1530 about the church. Thus, it is noted that the church is "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered" (Hanson 1997:198).

Lastly, *ekklēsiā* is translated church in English, and the term ecclesiology in theology is about the study of the nature and structures of the church. It is worth noting that *ekklēsiā* does not only refer to the assembly of local believers, but it also refers to the universal unseen believers of all times. This is the *ekklēsiā* Jesus Christ mentioned in Matthew 16:17–18.

The first century local churches met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Cor 16:2; II Cor 11:20), had some leadership structure (Acts 13:1;14:23; I

Tim 3:1,8), collected and administered offering (II Cor 8:1–24), practiced healing prayer (James 5:13–18); practiced various forms of prayers (I Thes 5:17; Phil 4:6; I Tim 2:1), and followed some liturgy that include teaching, singing, prophecy, speaking in tongues and interpretation, and breaking bread as explained in I Corinthians 14:26. All these were to edify the believers. Several texts show that two ordinances, baptism and breaking bread, were practised during the first-century church (I Cor 1:14–16; Gal 3:27; II Cor 11:17). These practices translate into three main local church liturgical practices of the Word, baptism and breaking of bread (Wilkey 2014:33).

Pentecostals observe the breaking of the bread (Vondey 2010:47–49), adult water baptism (Lord 2010:143–144) and have a high view of the Scriptures (see Archer 2007:311–312). Generally, Pentecostals emphasise baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as a continuity between the Acts 2:1–5 event and modern-day Pentecostal experiences (Nel 2017:1–3). Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit is present in all areas of a believer; they also emphasise the centrality of the story of Jesus covered in the four gospels and Acts as the core of God’s redemptive plan for humankind (Archer 2007:311–312). Hence, the argument for an integrative Pentecostal theology that led to *ortho-pathos*, that is, doing theology with the marginalised community and the narrative approach (Archer 2007:309–312).

Now that we have addressed *ekklēsiā* and ecclesiology and noted the nature of *ekklēsiā*, digital ecclesiology is our next focus.

3. Digital ecclesiology

This section addresses the liturgical elements of teaching, singing, speaking in tongues, and interpretation, prophecy, and prayer among township PCCs in a digital context. We live in an era of virtual communities that are “created, gathered, developed, and sustained exclusively online” (Gould 2015:30), including the physical church gathering shifting to being online. Dreyer (2019:1), among others, sets the pace for discussing digital ecclesiology within the global Reformed tradition contexts and mentions that church attendance has dropped because the church is perceived as no longer relevant. However, Classical Pentecostal Churches, Charismatic Churches, Neo-Pentecostal Churches and African Prophetic movements

show a growth in attendance due to their digitised ecclesiology that appeals to millennials and Gen Z.

A few Charismatic Churches, Neo-Pentecostal Churches and African Prophetic movements have successfully digitised their liturgy and either broadcast them live or post-recording on free-to-air DSTV religious channels. Examples are Gauteng Province-based churches like Rivers of Living Waters Ministries, Hope Restoration Church, The Free Way Tabernacle, Unity Fellowship Church, Charity and Faith Mission, and Grace Bible Church.

Campbell and Dyer (2022:14) describe digital ecclesiology as “the study of the structure and practices of the Church in online or digitally enhanced contexts, and the theological implications of the online/offline or hybrid church experiences this creates.” It is essential that digital ecclesiology should take cognisance of the PCCs’ liturgical elements of teaching, baptism, breaking the bread (Archer 2007:311–312), and the common praxis of singing, speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, and prayer among township PCCs in a digital context. Hence, three focal points (digital divide, AI and ChatGPT and township PCCs and interactive church service, AI, and ChatGPT) about digital ecclesiology among the above-mentioned churches follow.

3.1 Digital divide

This article acknowledges that a huge digital divide exists between the rich and the poor in South Africa. The divide covers access to a house computer or a laptop, internet access, computer literacy and the price of data, as mentioned in the introduction and context. This reality contrasts with the mobile access statistics that state that South Africans have the highest mobile subscription, with more than one household having more than one device (cf Beger, Sinha & Pawelczyk 2012:10, 11). It should be emphasised that a high mobile subscription and having more than one device in a household does not translate into (1) AI and ChatGPT literacy and that (2) every household in the townships having a computer or laptop as observed in the efforts of the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) assisting needy students with laptops and internet data (NSFAS 2021). Some of these needy students are from township Pentecostal families and churches.

This confirms that many Africans access the internet through mobile devices. As a participant observer, the author noticed that it is common in the townships to find individuals having two mobile devices, sometimes, a very expensive brand and a cheap one, yet the individuals do not have airtime or data. It is a matter of purchasing a device which is far affordable than a computer or laptop since the cost combination of the two is less than the cost of a computer or laptop. Yet, the above-mentioned digital divides still exist, as seen in the efforts of the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and a study of university students mentioned in the introduction and context section.

It is not that bad, though, because since 2019 to date, the digital divide is being addressed in townships like Soweto, Dobsonville, Kagiso and Mohlakeng with fixed fibre overhead infrastructure available at reasonable tariffs for those who can afford. Several households, Pentecostals included, now have some unlimited fibre internet connectivity in these townships using mobile devices. However, almost all PCCs in the townships do not have a fibre connection in their places of worship. This is no longer a concern since the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced some churches to use digital ecclesiology using recorded and live-streamed sermons, is over. And townships' PCCs have now resumed face-to-face (in-person) church services. Additionally, the members and leaders augment face-to-face services by somehow using the above-mentioned fibre connectivity at home to participate in online church activities like Bible study, prayer meetings and sharing video content.

Cost is always a factor in embracing digital ecclesiology. The costs of all the related equipment, computer/laptop, screen, overhead projector or flat screen(s) and worship software are very high. Although worship software may be downloaded free, the other devices are costly for an average township Pentecostal church, consisting mostly of poor members, unemployed youths, and a few working or no middle-class members.

3.2 Township Pentecostals, AI, and ChatGPT

Using AI and ChatGPT requires some basic computer literacy and access to a computer or laptop, which ordinary Africans, including old township Pentecostal pastors and millennial Pentecostal pastors in the country, do not have. The middle to upper middle class, a few African old township

Pentecostal pastors and millennial Pentecostal pastors may already possess some AI and ChatGPT literacy as they are occupying employment that requires daily use of a computer. Through such exposure, their members can benefit from AI-generated ecclesial services during Sunday and weekday activities, and some ChatGPT-generated ecclesial services.

Focusing on ChatGPT, Kalla et al (2023: 831) mention that one of the impacts of ChatGPT is to create innovative projects and resources. Such innovations should be grounded on the emphasis on the Gospel-Acts approach that elevates the Word and the Holy Spirit (Archer 2007:311–312) and further take cognisance of the religious concerns that AI should not make believers less dependent on God, devalue the relationships among believers, undermine the spiritual discipline of the PCCs pastor's personal devotion time, guidance of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation and discharging ministry responsibilities. The same applies for conducting church services that emulate the aspect of praise and worship, the preaching of the word, sacraments and altar call, as Davis (2021:75–107) highlights them in Pentecostal liturgy.

As such, township PCCs' pastors familiar with ChatGPT may customise their ecclesiological activities for different age groups in a local church. Using a smartphone to create innovative activities and resources will not be easy for old township Pentecostal pastors and millennials Pentecostal pastors, but worth a try. They can download existing Christian video content and documents to generate activities that suit different age groups in the local church. The latter may also search for sermon preparation methods to enhance their sermon delivery. In addition, they may also search various Christian content to prepare suitable Bible study materials.

The author confirms that millennial Pentecostal pastors are mostly bi-vocational since they juggle secular employment with leading their local churches. Depending on their employer's policy, they have the time and quickness to learn AI and ChatGPT from their work environment that may have embraced the use of AI and ChatGPT in computer programmes. They can, through positive and ethical dialogue, generate information about pastoral activities like sermon preparation and enhance that through PowerPoint presentation slides. PowerPoint lovers may generate relevant pictures and graphs about issues the pastors want to form part of

their presentation. Already, Microsoft has a variety of online PowerPoint templates. They are also able to select contemporary songs for a sermon. Although this is readily available from various Christian sources, ChatGPT may assist in finding Scriptures, some exegetical details about Bible books, and suggestions on how to customise liturgy for different audiences.

Digital ecclesiology also includes essentials of local church administration and operations these pastors may embrace using free downloadable church management software. This is possible by acquiring a 10-inch tablet and a sizable external memory card or hard drive or using cloud saving as backup to assist in managing and coordinating local church administration and operations. They may also switch to using Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom to hold online church leadership meetings instead of holding face-to-face meetings.

3.3 Interactive church service, AI, and ChatGPT

As noticed in the above subsection, Davis (2021:75–107) mentions that Pentecostal liturgy consists of the following elements: praise and worship, the preaching of the word, sacraments and altar call. These elements create an interactive liturgy found among global Pentecostal churches. Since in South Africa, township Pentecostal pastors and members prefer interactive liturgy that incorporates natural singing, hand clapping and dancing (Mzondi 2019:49,50), it is unlikely that AI and ChatGPT would replace these inherent aspects of their interactive liturgy. Mzondi (2019:49) mentions that singing accompanied by dancing and clapping is close to their upbringing. A Covid-19 African Pentecostal digital ecclesiology experience indicated that “[i]ssues of sound lag, delays, and distortions represent technical stumbling blocks for believers (Addo 2021:51). This is real because

For Pentecostals, worship means experiencing the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of the [c]hurch or gathering. It is through worship that humanity is connected most significantly in communion with the divine, and it is through the Spirit that all congregational worshipers relate to each other and the Holy Spirit. (Ngwenya 2024:5)

On the other hand, it should be noticed that Millennials and Gen Z prefer live band interactive church services accompanied by digital technology.

In addition, such services include preaching and teaching, prayer, tithes and offerings, prophecy, healing and deliverance, and speaking in tongues.

The conventional interactive service versus the AI and ChatGPT content service tension can be mitigated by promoting a hybrid of AI and ChatGPT liturgy aspects and conventional liturgy interactive aspects. This move also promotes the use of conventional orality culture and AI-generated content in the local church.

The issue of costs affects how a township Pentecostal pastor leader's decision to wholly or partly embrace AI and ChatGPT in their ecclesiology. A bi-vocational township millennial Pentecostal pastor leading a church with a sizable number of middle-income members has an added advantage over the old township Pentecostal pastors leading a church with mostly poor members. They can intentionally, through leadership structures, plan to save money from the collected tithes and offerings, over a fixed period, to purchase the relevant equipment(s) needed to promote AI and ChatGPT activities in the church.

Undoubtedly, an old township Pentecostal pastor leading a church of mostly poor members and unemployed youths cannot achieve what a bi-vocational township millennial Pentecostal pastor leading a church with a sizable middle-income member can. This economic factor, unfortunately, shifts the older pastor to the margins of AI and ChatGPT.

Furthermore, not being exposed to AI and ChatGPT concretises the marginalisation of the older pastor, ultimately becoming technologically redundant. However, all is not lost, they can purchase a 10-inch tablet or a 128 GB notebook, a prepaid/cash basis cost of under R 8000.00, from Vodacom or Makro or Dion or a cell-phone department of a retail store. Then request to use, in rotation, church members' unlimited fibre connections to create some AI and ChatGPT content and use cloud saving back-up. Taking such initiative could assist the old township PCC pastor from being technologically redundant. Securing the service of unemployed church youth is also essential in avoiding being technologically redundant. The pastor may consider asking one or two techno-savvy unemployed youths or techno-savvy middle-income members to assist in generating AI and ChatGPT church content. These few cost-effective actions may assist the PCC pastor in aligning with one of the World Association for

Christian Communication (WACC) and World Council of Churches (WCC) guidelines about digital justice for churches by encouraging:

Working with state and civil society actors and faith groups to create spaces and channels that are inclusive, accessible, interactive, and participatory, promoting racial justice, gender justice, digital justice, expanding public spaces, and creating visions for the future (World Association for Christian Communication & World Council of Churches 2022:46)

The old township PCC pastor may use the process, listed below, as an example of a hybrid ecclesiology. The process combines the conventional interactive service and the AI and ChatGPT-generated content for a Sunday service preparation intended to enhance discipleship:

1. Spend time in prayer, seeking God's face and direction.
2. If we assume that the pastor, during the above step, is led to each on a theme: "The importance of teaching the word" based on II Timothy 2:2 for four Sundays. S/he then moves to identify four African songs or choruses that suit the older generations, and later communicates to the worship team leader via the team's WhatsApp group to sing one song each Sunday, during the series, before preaching.
3. Using AI and ChatGPT in sermon preparation, with the help of one or two techno-savvy unemployed youths, use ChatGPT, s/he then:
 - a. Generate a catching introduction and a conclusion and then translate them into an African language s/he uses during preaching.
 - b. Search on the internet for two free online commentaries on II Timothy to identify the author and date of the letter, help prepare the socio-historical context of the text, and the author's intent.
3. Search for four contemporary songs or choruses relevant to the theme that suit millennials and Gen Z in the church and later communicate to the worship team leader via the team's WhatsApp group, also to sing one song each Sunday, during the series, before preaching.

- a. Search on the internet for two examples in the past five decades that show believers not taking the importance of teaching the word.
- b. Search on the internet for two contemporary examples that show believers not taking the importance of teaching the word.
3. Make an altar after challenging believers to take teaching the word seriously.
4. Ask the worship team to sing a combination of two of the above-mentioned songs each Sunday as you pray for the believers who resolve to take the teaching of the word seriously.
5. Allow for announcements to be made, reminding the church that each Sunday, the text will be sent via the church's WhatsApp group for the midweek Bible study discussions.
6. Close with prayer

4. Conclusion

The article used technological determinism as a framework to discuss the use of AI and ChatGPT among township PCC pastors. Due to socio-economic factors in South Africa, some Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in affluent areas were the first to embrace digital transition, while churches in the townships and rural areas lagged. This phenomenon has not diluted their Pentecostal-Charismatic distinctiveness. This praxis has enabled churches to reach believers who are unable to attend Sunday and mid-week services online. It should be emphasised that PCCs did not allow the use of technology to dilute their distinctiveness.

Most of the township PCCs mentioned in the article are non-denominational but are affiliated with some PCC structure. Technological adaptation among them is evolutionary, as some leaders learn using it from each other. This praxis occurs among old and millennial pastors. The latter are positioned to adapt to AI and ChatGPT easily.

The challenge of AI and Chat GPT adaptability among older township PCC pastors presents an opportunity for South African theological training institutions to consider empowering them. Theological training institutions

are positioned to close the digital gap among pastors by introducing, in collaboration with churches that have AI-literate members, computer literacy training and the ethical academic use of AI in their curricula as stand-alone courses for enrolled students and PCC pastors in townships and rural areas.

This is against the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic that forced South African theological institutions to consider alternative teaching and training strategies by embracing a hybrid of residence and online theological education. In addition, the introduction of AI brought the unethical academic use of AI identified in institutions of higher learning.

This article adds to ongoing discourses about religion and technology in the township PCC context. I also provide a basis for engaging in an empirical study to determine whether specific old township PCC pastors could be redundant if they do not embrace AI and ChatGPT.

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