Research Article

The Relationship Between the Church and Humanoid Robots in the Posthumanism Era

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Abstract.
The interaction between the Church and robotics in the era of posthumanism will become increasingly intense. In the past, religious discourses and robots never coexisted. However, the development of artificial intelligence and humanoid robots provides a challenging discourse for the church to respond positively. Robots in the future may become an assistant to both presbuteros and deacons to a certain extent. The church needs to realize that technology can be a medium to glorify God. This research was qualitatively conducted with a theological–philosophical approach. In the future, robots could accompany church servants in various capacities, such as welcoming the congregation, reading Bible verses, preaching, providing counseling, and even maintaining church security. Even so, there are limitations because humans still need communication that touches them emotionally. This research recommends the need for the church to be more open to robotics technology.

Keywords: Church, humanoid robots, posthumanism, artificial intelligence

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1. INTRODUCTION

The era of posthumanism allows humans to interact with humanoid robots. The development of humanoid robots is progressing at a fast pace. In the future the church will inevitably interact with humanoid robots. The relationship between the church and humanoid robots is complex. However, it is clear that the church will need to find new ways to understand and relate to non-human beings in the posthumanist era. Posthumanism can be traced back to the early 20th century, but it has gained increasing popularity in recent years. This is due in part to the rapid development of artificial intelligence and robotics. As robots become more sophisticated, they are beginning to raise a number of philosophical questions about the nature of humanity. Nowadays, as robots and AI are going to spread in human society, new possibilities and new ethical challenges are on the horizon [1]. This study aims to find out how the relationship between humanoid robots and the church is related to ecclesiastical tasks.

Historically, the development of human-machine relations began with the calculator. Back then calculators were just basic devices with algorithms to perform mathematical calculations efficiently. Then modern calculators evolved using the power of AI to solve equations, graph functions, or perform statistical analysis. The integration of modern calculators with software applications for data analysis, predictive modeling and pattern recognition has contributed to the development of humanoid robots that have complex intellectual tasks.

Humanoid robots will to some extent replace humans for mechanistic tasks and even further roles as artificial intelligence advances. Churches should reflect on the core values of their religion and consider whether the use of humanoid robots is compatible with their beliefs and teachings. Humanoid robots in the education ecosystem have promising prospects to assist teachers in teaching [2]. The question then develops into how humanoid robots can relate to the concept of humans, humanity, spirituality, and the role of humanoid robots in worship. It is important for the church to consider how the presence of humanoid robots will affect the context of worship and the spiritual experience of the people. Will this technology enrich worship or even interfere with the experience of the people in achieving spiritual closeness to God and others. It is necessary to treat the development of humanoid robots with serious ethical considerations [3]. Churches must consider the impact of using these robots on pastoral work, moral decision-making, and protecting the privacy of the faithful. In responding to the development of humanoid robots, churches must adhere to the core principles of their religion while considering the benefits, implications, and ethical consequences of such technology. Posthumanism is a philosophical movement that rejects the idea that humans are the only or most important form of life. Instead, posthumanists believe that humans are part of a larger network of beings, including animals, machines, and even the environment [4]. The church has traditionally been seen as a defender of human dignity and worth. However, in the posthumanist era, the church will need to find new ways to understand and relate to non-human beings, including humanoid robots.

Posthumanism encompasses the rejection of humans as the sole or most significant form of life and embraces the belief that humans are interconnected within a larger network of beings, such as animals, machines, and the environment [5]. It further advocates for the transformation of humans through technology, acknowledging the necessity and potential for change. Additionally, posthumanism challenges the traditional notion of human nature, recognizing its inadequacy in describing the complex world we inhabit today. Posthumanism has a number of implications for how we think

about ourselves, our place in the world, and our relationship to technology. For example, posthumanism suggests that we should not view animals as inferior to humans, but rather as fellow beings with whom we share the planet. It also suggests that we should not view machines as tools, but rather as potential partners in our evolution. Posthumanism is a complex and challenging movement, but it is also a movement that is essential to understanding the world we live in [6]. As technology continues to advance, posthumanism will become increasingly important in helping us to understand our place in the universe.

1.1. The Church and Posthumanism

The relationship between the church and the development of science and technology is complex and multifaceted. While there are instances of conflict and tension, there are also positive interactions, collaborative efforts, and recognition of the value of scientific knowledge and technological advances in enhancing human well-being and understanding the world. The church has a long history of grappling with the implications of new technologies. In the past, the church has often condemned new technologies as being sinful or dangerous. However, in recent years, the church has begun to take a more nuanced view of technology. Theological dialogue between the church and posthumanism can be a thought-provoking and complex endeavour. Such dialogue involves exploring the theological implications of posthumanist ideas and engaging in critical reflection from multiple religious perspectives. The church has challenges in theological dialogue about human nature and identity. Posthumanism challenges traditional ideas about human nature and identity. But the Bible clearly states that man was created in the image and likeness of God. But this meeting of views resulted in contemplation and reflection on theological understandings of what it means to be human, the inherent value and dignity of human life, and how these concepts intersect with posthumanist ideas. Some conservative church figures also oppose posthumanism for reasons of dogma and ethics regarding humans as the crown of God's creation. But some church leaders have even embraced posthumanism, arguing that it can be used to promote human flourishing [7].

1.2. The Church and Humanoid Robots

Humanoid robots are one of the most controversial aspects of posthumanism. Some people believe that humanoid robots are a threat to humanity, while others believe that they can be used to improve our lives. The church has also been divided on the issue of humanoid robots. Some church leaders believe that humanoid robots are a violation of the image of God, while others believe that they can be used to promote human flourishing. A humanoid robot is a robot that has a physical body with the same general shape and proportions as a human [8]. Humanoid robots are often designed to interact with humans in a natural way, and they may be used for a variety of purposes, such as manufacturing, healthcare, and customer service [9].

There are a number of potential benefits to the church interacting with humanoid robots. For example, robots could be used to provide pastoral care to people who are isolated or who have difficulty accessing traditional religious services. Robots could also be used to educate people about the church's beliefs and values. However, there are also a number of risks associated with the church using humanoid robots. For example, some people may see robots as a threat to human jobs or even to human existence. Additionally, there are ethical concerns about how robots should be treated and how they should be used. The research question of this paper is how is the relation between humanoid robots and the church in the posthumanism era.

2. METHOD

This study uses qualitative methods with a literature study approach. Researchers used 13 pieces of literature related to the use of humanoid robots in religious practices and social fields. In this type of research, researchers collect literature regarding the development of humanoid robots, the attitude of the church towards the post-humanism era and the use of robots as assistants to presbuteros. Literature sources are obtained from books, scientific journals, articles, reports and other documents, as the main source of information to answer research questions. Literature related to humanoid robots and religious practices is then compiled into a conceptual or theoretical framework and then integrated to answer the relationship between robots and priests (presbuteros) in the future.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Benefits and Risks of Relationships Between Church and Humanoid Robots

There are a number of potential benefits to the church interacting with humanoid robots. For example, robots could be used to provide pastoral care to people who are isolated or who have difficulty accessing traditional religious services. Robots could also be used to educate people about the church's beliefs and values. For example, robots could be programmed to give talks about the Bible or to lead prayer services. Robots could also be used to reach new people who might not otherwise be interested in religion. For example, robots could be used to interact with people online or in public spaces. However, there are also a number of risks associated with the church using humanoid robots. For example, some people may see robots as a threat to human jobs or even to human existence. Additionally, there are ethical concerns about how robots should be treated and how they should be used. Some people worry that robots will eventually take over all of our jobs. This could lead to widespread unemployment and social unrest. Others worry that robots will become so intelligent that they will eventually become our equals or even our superiors. This could lead to a loss of human dignity and autonomy. There are also ethical concerns about how robots should be treated.

3.2. Benefits of Using Humanoid Robots

Humanoid robots may take on a future role in ecclesiastical tasks. Humanoid robots have the potential to engage with churchgoers in unique ways, such as delivering sermons on pre-programmed topics, reciting prayers, or assisting in religious rituals. They can provide new experiences for the congregation so that they can grow the congregation's interest in coming to church. Robots can also make religious services and activities more accessible to individuals who may face physical limitations or be unable to attend in person. For example, humanoid robots could be used to offer virtual religious services or provide companionship to those who are isolated or living at home. Robots can also serve as educational tools, providing instruction and explanations on Bible verses, doctrines, and the traditions of the church's fathers. They can also help in the catechism program in terms of explaining church dogma according to what has been programmed. Humanoid robots can also potentially offer emotional support and

counseling in certain situations. They can listen in, share inspirational messages, or offer comfort to individuals who are going through difficult times.

3.3. Risks of Using Humanoid Robots

The use of robots can stir up theological debate in conservative circles because robots blur the line between the sacred and the profane. Robots are also seen as lacking the spiritual qualities necessary for religious practice. The use of robots also raises ethical concerns regarding the development and use of humanoid robots regarding data security and the manipulation of people who have the ability to control or leak data captured by robots. The use of humanoid robots can also unintentionally reduce human connection. Human-to-human interaction and relationships are important aspects of many religious traditions, and overreliance on robots can undermine these interpersonal relationships. Widespread adoption of humanoid robots in religious contexts could have economic implications for individuals involved in religious services, such as priests, musicians or caregivers. Robots can reduce jobs in the ecclesiastical realm.

It is important to note that the church's decision to interact with humanoid robots should be made through careful consideration, open dialogue, and alignment with religious values and principles. Each religious community may have its unique perspectives and opinions regarding the integration of technology into their practices, and the implications should be thoroughly discussed and evaluated.

3.4. Relation Robots and Presbuteros

Technologies like robotics and artificial intelligence have experienced rapid advancements, and there are some examples where robots are used in religious contexts. For instance, there are robots designed to read sacred texts or perform simple liturgical tasks. In the future, presbuteros tasks that are mechanical in nature will be assisted by humanoid robots. So far, presbuteros has an important task in shepherding and leading church congregations. Presbuteros is a term in the Greek language that literally means "old" or "elderly person." In the context of Christianity, this term refers to the church leaders who have the responsibility of overseeing, teaching, and shepherding the congregation. However, completely replacing the complex role of church officials that involves emotional, spiritual, and human relationships with God and fellow humans remains a subject of debate.

3.5. Robots and Mechanistic Tasks in the Church

Using robots in Sunday school can be an innovative and engaging way to teach children about various religious topics. Robots can be useful in Sunday school activities.

Robots can make children interested in interacting and listening to Bible stories according to the software that has been set. Robots can play a role in icebreaker activities. The ability of artificial intelligence that is owned makes the robot able to answer various children's questions related to stories, characters or moral teachings in the Bible. Using humanoid robots to tell stories can be an interesting and interactive way to involve children in the learning process. The presence of a facilitator is essential to ensure a safe and supportive environment for children and to address any questions or concerns that may arise during the session. Humanoid robots should be seen as a tool to enhance the storytelling experience, not as a substitute for human interaction and guidance.

In 2017, the German Protestant Church produced Bless-U2, a robot meant to administer blessings in order to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. This action brought the concept of a robot priest one step closer to becoming a reality. More than 10,000 blessings are bestowed upon individuals that engage with this system through the use of this robot. Additionally, there is an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled robot in the shape of a miniature statue of a saint in Peru called SanTO. This user- friendly robot features a microphone, a facial recognition system, and a variety of other sensors in order to provide the highest level of interaction possible for the person operating it. People have the option of confessing their sins to robots, who will then provide them personal support based on the Bible [10].

3.6. Robot Can Replace Presbuteros Only for Limited Assignment

Robots in the future may be able to perform several tasks related to presbuteros duties to carry out church services mechanically and liturgically, such as operating audiovisual equipment or delivering pre-programmed sermons, at least this has been done in Buddhist circles [11]. But robots are unlikely to have the ability to truly articulate and model empathy for humans. Empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others, which requires complex emotional intelligence and a deep understanding of human experience. Human pastors are trained to provide emotional support, guidance,

and counseling to their congregations, drawing on their empathy and personal experience. They are also involved in community outreach, advocating for social justice, and addressing the diverse needs of members of their community. These aspects of pastoral work require human connection and understanding, which are not easily duplicated by machines. In short, while robots may have a role in certain aspects of running church services, the qualities of empathy, emotional intelligence, and community involvement are important aspects of pastoral work that robots are unlikely to perform effectively.

3.7. Empathy as a Limitation of the Robot

Empathy is a complex human skill that involves understanding, connecting with, and sharing the emotions of others based on personal experiences and perspective-taking. It requires a deep understanding of human emotions, social context, and the ability to relate to others' experiences. Robots, as artificial machines, lack the subjective consciousness and personal experiences that humans possess [12]. While they can be programmed to recognize and mimic certain emotions, they do not possess genuine emotional experiences or subjective awareness. As a result, they are unable to truly empathize with others in the same way that humans can. While robots can be designed to recognize and respond to certain emotional cues, their understanding is limited to the programmed algorithms and data they have been provided. They lack the intrinsic ability to feel or genuinely connect with the emotions of others. Empathy is deeply rooted in our shared human experience and is influenced by our unique perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and personal histories. These aspects of being human contribute to our capacity for empathy. Therefore, empathy remains a distinctly human capability that is unlikely to be replicated by robots.

The breakthrough of using humanoid robots can facilitate accessibility because it can help personally to congregations who are elderly or who have special needs. Humanoid robots can also accompany congregations that have distance constraints from the church. The availability of a limited number of pastors and the demand to pay attention to the congregation can at least be overcome by the presence of humanoid robots, although they cannot replace the Pastor's position. In the field of research, humanoid robots can collect data, interviews, or polls that are useful for priests in making organizational decisions.

In the future, technological advances may create robots that can simulate certain emotional responses from humans. Robots will become more intuitive and responsive

in interacting with humans. But even though robots can mimic human emotions, they are by no means able to actually share or experience those emotions. Robots can only imitate emotions based on pre-programmed responses and algorithms, not as actual emotional understanding or subjective experience [13]. Empathy, on the other hand, involves deep understanding and sharing of emotions based on personal experience, perspective taking and genuine human connection. This includes more than the ability to display or imitate emotions but involves the ability to relate to others on an emotional level.

4. CONCLUSION

The relationship between the church and humanoid robots is complex and there is no easy answer. Humanoid robots do not have consciousness and empathy, which are important qualities in a pastor or spiritual leader. These human qualities involve deep emotional connection, empathy, and the ability to understand and respond to complex human experiences. While robots can simulate certain behaviors and perform tasks, they do not possess subjective consciousness or genuine emotions. However, it is clear that the church will need to find new ways to understand and relate to non-human beings in the posthumanist era. The church could use humanoid robots to spread its message and reach new people. However, it will need to be careful to address the potential risks associated with using robots. The church could also use humanoid robots to explore the philosophical implications of posthumanism. This could help the church to develop a new understanding of the nature of humanity and its place in the universe.

This study recommends the use of humanoid robots as assistants of pastors in the future for mechanistic tasks, such as leading choirs, translators, ushers, and reading the Bible. But the task of presbuteros remains irreplaceable because spiritual communion is a relationship between God and humans as creatures created in God's image and likeness.

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