

ETHICO-THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF “ROBOT” PASTOR ON AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF 1 PETER 5:1-4

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Abstract

The invention of robots and other AI applications capable of undertaking human tasks with speed, accuracy and precision is unprecedented and it has raised the question of job security in many professions. In some religions, robots lead in different religious activities. This development has necessitated debate on the possibility of robots taking over priestly duties in African religions. As a contribution to the debate, this paper explores the ethico-theological implications of having ‘robot’ pastor in the church in Africa using 1 Peter 5:1-4 as a focal text. The aims are to exegete 1 Peter 5:1-4 to decipher its meaning in relation to pastoral duties and investigate the possibilities of robots carrying out those duties giving the peculiarity of African churches. The paper employs descriptive method and the evaluative model of African Contextual Hermeneutics. It was discovered that the pastoral duties discussed in the text cannot be carried out by robots since they do not possess the required emotions and feelings. Also, the emphases of African churches on communality, holistic view of faith and connection to the spiritual world which most times necessitate prayers for healing, deliverance from evil spirits, among others, are beyond the abilities of robots. The paper therefore concludes that robots cannot take over human pastoral duties in Africa. While robots may assist in duties that require physical interaction, human pastors will still be needed to carry out duties that require emotions, feelings, communication with God, experiential knowledge, modelling certain lifestyle, empathy among others.

Keywords: Africa, Christianity, Communalism, Artificial Intelligence, Robot, Pastor

Introduction

Significant progress has been made in the field of empirical science particularly with the development of robots for different areas of life. Notably, there are medical robots, industrial, sex, military, security, household robots and many more. These automated machines are engineered and programmed to carry out some human tasks with speed and precision for effective service delivery. The development in robotics and other related Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems has naturally propelled critical reflection and reaction from scholars predominantly from the area of ethics, law, social sciences, religion, and even ecological studies. Most of those reactions have been pressured by the need to regulate the application of scientific activities and technological innovations within a particular socio-cultural context. The recent introduction of robots in the worship life of Christians in some countries like Germany, in which robots carry out duties traditionally meant for human pastors has generated series of scholarly reactions primarily among Europeans, Americans and Asians of which their reactions are relative to their contexts. But it seems such reactions are low in Africa.

However, in Africa, available records show that some contributions have been made in robotic engineering. On Friday, 2nd of December, 2022, the Nigerian government unveiled the first African humanoid robot in Abuja named *Omeife*. Developed by a Nigerian based technology company called Uniccon Group of Companies, *Omeife* has near human resemblance, language competency, movement, and navigation using Artificial Intelligence and Computer Vision capabilities. The robot is said to have been programmed to have a thorough awareness of African cultural norms and behavioural styles. This six-foot-tall multilingual robot can speak eight different languages aside the English language. These languages include: Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, French, Arabic, Kiswahili, pidgin, Wazobia Afrikaans. Speaking at the event, the general manager of the company, Kehinde Oghenekevwe states that robots are here to assist humans, not to take their jobs (Onyedinefu, 2022). Though other startup robots are said to have been produced in Africa, Africa has not recorded the manufacturing of its first 'robot' pastor. While it is possible that such a project is in progress somewhere, the question that comes to mind is how possible it is to have a 'robot' pastor in Africa? This is the problem that this paper set out to address. It attempts theological and ethical possibility of having a 'robot' pastor in Africa, given the continent's communal life and worldview. The paper is analyzed through both descriptive and evaluative viewpoints. The evaluative model of African Inculturation Hermeneutics is employed to examine the roles of pastors in 1 Peter 5:1-4

and the possibility of having a robot perform these roles in Africa due to her worldview and communal life.

Robotic Pastor

Broadly speaking, robots refer to “all entities that are built by humans to perform tasks on their own” but in its narrow sense, “it is a technical entity that is empowered by energy source (usually electrical); uses technical apparatuses (sensors) for sensing its environment, to ‘perceive’; and manipulates it using effectors which is used to act on the environment; moves signals; and is controlled by algorithms” (Simmerlin and Tretter, 2024:258). Robotic pastor is an aspect of religious robot. Religious robots are used for religious purposes, such as celebrating religious ceremonies or accompanying prayers. Historically, religious services would hardly be included among the areas Artificial Intelligence would readily influence or significantly transform. This is due to the fact that technology and religion were perceived as opposite poles, and they have even been considered archenemies. Evidently, however, religious activities and human spirituality have progressively changed by the influence of technological advancement by reason of sociological necessity which has consistently brought religion into constant interaction with technology. Sahin & Gultekin (2023: 135) observe that the increase in the number of communication channels and the rise of digitalization have affected personal perceptions of religion, spirituality, and religious rituals. Technological devices such as microphones and projection devices are employed in places of worship, and virtual pilgrimages are conducted. Mobile religious applications have been produced, and prayer rugs that instruct prayers and other religious practices are available. Therefore, the continuously and the apparent uncontrollable infiltration of technological advancement in religious activities which varies in time based on people and their history of civilization could be considered the historic evidence of the evolution of technological interference in religious activities.

Specifically, by “Robot” Pastor we mean robots functioning as pastors in church, carrying out various pastoral functions such as: Bible reading, preaching, offering of prayer, visiting and giving of benediction, among others. Simmerlin and Tretter (2024) identify four aspects of religious practices in which robots have been deployed. These are: one, liturgy and rites, which include prayers and chants, blessings, recitation of traditional texts, religious services and rituals. Two, religious education which include formal teachings, informal encounters that provides information. Three, spiritual care – counselling, guidance, presence, companionship aimed at providing spiritual, emotional, social and mental health or ability to cope with them. And four, preaching: recital of a

sermon – preparation, delivery and reception of sermon. These functions are officially and traditionally reserved for trained, ordained, commissioned and revered human pastors.

Many robots and robotic applications have been developed in some religions to carry out these functions. For liturgy and rites, the robots/applications invented include but not limited to Ganapati Bappachi Robotic Aarti, BlessU2, Pepper, QT, The Prayer, Xian'er, AIBO, CARL, Automatic Conveyor – Belt Columbaria, eRosary and the Prayer Companion (Simmerlin and Tretter, 2024: 259-261). BlessU2 and eRosary among others are Christian robots. For Religious Education, there are Xian'er, NAO, Veldan and Ibn Sina robot, but none of them is a Christian robot. For spiritual care only a handful of them are used. DarumaTO, SanTO, OriHime, and Xian'er. However, the main focus of these robots for now is prevention of loneliness and DarumaTO and SanTO can do this. SanTO a Catholic robot can in addition to mere companionship, recite the rosary, quotes from Church Fathers and other traditional texts to provide verbal comfort. They have limited capacity to lead a formal counselling session. Efforts are in progress to produce AI that can autonomously create a sermon. There are however robots like Mindarla (a Buddhist android) from Kyoto that can preach a pre-programmed sermon (Simmerlin and Tretter, 2024:262-264).

The evolution of 'Robot' Pastor in Christianity could be traced to the 2017 event in Germany. According to (Midson, 2022: 2):

In 2017, visitors to a church in Wittenberg were given the opportunity to receive blessings from a robot. The so-called 'robot priest', named 'BlessU-2', features a touchscreen enclosed in the robot's main body, which allows people interacting with it to select the type of blessing that they seek ('traditional', 'companionship', 'encouragement', or 'renewal'), as well as the language and even gender of the robot's voice that reads aloud the blessing.

Midson (2022: 2) further adds that while giving the blessing, the robot raises its two arms and opens its robotic palms, each of which have lights at their centre that turn on; meanwhile, its face has eyebrows that move and a mouth on a basic LCD screen that is animated to imitate speech. In the end, the visitors were offered the opportunity to receive a printout souvenir of the robot's blessing, which is produced by a small printer contained within an automatically opening drawer beneath the screen on the robot's torso. The BlessU-2 robot was particularly launched in 2017 to commemorate 500th Reformation anniversary that was prompted by Rev. Fr. Dr. Martin Luther. The designers of this robot attributed the success of Luther's reformation of 1517 primarily to the advancement in science and technology especially the invention of printing press of which Luther maximized its existence in production and circulation of his reformation ideologies. On the premise they conclude, "Just as the Gutenberg printing press transformed how people

accessed Christian teachings, so too does BlessU-2 seek to explore how developments in robotics and AI may continue to impact Christianity” (Midson, 2022: 2).

In addition to establishing that the invention of robotic pastor is a necessary blessing to religion in the same proportion with other products of technological developments, such as microphone, musical instruments, printing press, etc which help man to carry out his religious activities effectively and with little or no stress, the inventors of robots equally maintain that this invention would spark up debate about religion and the role of artificial intelligence in society. Rev. Fabian Vogt, spokesperson for the Protestant Church of Hesse and Nassau that hosts the *LichtKirche* as well as the BlessU-2 projects, claimed in an interview that “it’s really an experience—an installation to make people talk about it, and that is what happens” (Miller, 2017: 3). Pastor Michael Brück of the *LichtKirche* similarly discusses how BlessU-2 “always triggers a reaction. He [sic] brings people into conversation about blessings, life, faith, the church” (Lichtkirche, 2024: 2). Consequently, this religious robot has been consistently advanced and introduced in other countries in Europe, Asia, and America and with the likelihood of establishing its presence in Africa. But many arguments have been advanced in support of robotic pastor to replace human pastors.

Theologically, it is often argued that the power of the act of preaching resides first and foremost in the message. It is the content of the sermon that really counts and not the preacher. For this reason, the use of the human person as the only medium for the propagation of the Gospel was suitable in the medieval era and continues to be ultimately relevant in circumstance where it happens to be the only option. Evidently, there are no biblical imperatives against the spreading of the gospel through other means apart from human vessels. Indeed, the early apostles were intentional about the spread of the gospel through every means possible. However, limited by the technological development of that time, they were primarily constrained to writing. Luke wrote “In my first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do...” (Acts 1:1 ESV).

Similarly, Paul lamented over his inability to physically meet with the Christians in Rome, hence, he wrote to them which could readily suggest that if he had other option of spreading the gospel with them even through an automated machine, he would have explored it. One could be presumed that the Roman Christians as in other cities would have excited to hear the voice of Apostle Paul or other revered Apostles even if it were through a robot. Therefore, the development of robotic pulpit will not in any way affect the effectiveness of the gospel, since its effectiveness is objectively a function of its content and the intent of the Holy Spirit.

Historically, scientific and technological development could be said to be evolving and by principle of scientific determinism, man does not have control over the evolution of science and technology. We are most often invaded by its development and most often force without coercion to appreciate it and with some sense of adventure we arrange our lives to flow in its direction. A case in point is the use of cell phones which an aged woman in village knows its value and would not want to live without. A man is said to be current when he can harness technological innovations in solving human problems. Science as well as technology has naturally earned the appreciation of religion because of the former's continuous assistance in the spread of the gospel. For instance, Schmidt (2021: 6) attributes the success of the 16th century protestant reformation to the earlier invention of printing press by Johannes Guttenberg in the 15th century. A similar appreciation could be given to the invention of radio, television, cell phone and social media platforms, which have helped in no little ways in spreading the gospel in no small measures. For this sense, an instrumentalist view of technology will quickly argue that technology is nothing more than a tool used to serve human needs. In essence, the development of robotic pastor is one of such developments in technological directed giving a new dimension to the propagation of the gospel whose inherent advantages may not be appreciated now but later.

Physiologically, it has been argued that robot reduces the work load of a human pastor and could equally be most useful where there are no qualified human pastors. The American health report show that many of the death of pastors in active service could be attributed to stress and fatigue due to lack of rest and appropriate time of recreation and relaxation. Therefore, developing a robot who handles the aspect of preaching could avoid the opportunity to relax and save himself his family, and the church the economic and psychological effects that could have resulted from his restless life and crowded schedules (Smietana, 2018:3). It has also been argued that in a situation where the church may not have economic power to engage the services of a pastor, the installation of robot programmed with sermon content, preferably by a choice pastor could be a suitable remedial approach to their economic reality. In this case, the delivery of the sermon through a robot would be seen the way as they would have listened to the pastor on the radio (Midson, 2022:3)

However, some have argued against the possibility of having a robotic pastor. In the first place, priests are believed to represent Christ no person. Jesus came to the world to represent God as a human. He felt what man feels, he was hungry, angry, slept, ate food, but he did not sin. Hence, he was able to save man. According to Hebrew 4:15 he thereby became the high priest, (intercessor) who is able to empathize with us in our weakness because he as a human was tempted the same way we are being tempted, yet he did not

sin. It is not possible that a robot will have these features (Mind Matters, 2019). Also, having robot as pastors can lead to decline in religious commitment. In a natural experiment carried out by Jackson, Yam, Tang, Liu & Shariff (2023) on the impact of robot and AI (study1) on religious adherents. They found out that using the automated Buddhist temple (study1) and a fully randomized experiment in a Taoist temple (study2) found out that religious adherents perceived robots' preachers and the institution that employ them to be less credible than human preachers. This explains reduction in religious commitment after people listen to robot preachers versus human. People require humans with ability to perceive. Robots do not have religious/spiritual experience and cannot. Human experiences do not depend solely on hearing words; the preacher's life is his sermon. In most cultures, people tend to identify with a preacher who has experienced what he shares with them. They need the evidence that the preacher has been with Jesus (O'Leary, 2023).

Thacker (2020) notes that about 20% of those who used Bless-U2 robot complained that they felt something was missing that can be gotten from human interaction. The percent will far higher if the audience were Africans. Thacker (2020) notes that Christianity is not merely about information transfer or an individualized experience. It is a communal faith in God (Heb 10:25). Apart from the spiritual fulfillment, social interaction is key to church going. Many churchgoers feel more at home and relieved in a church where they are welcome with joy, entertained with smiles coming from a fellow human who shows real emotion and not a programmed one. Robot may be able to produce a good sermon, quote scriptures accurately and interact like a human being, but it will not be able to replicate the flesh and blood image bearers Christ died for. It will not be able to "facilitate a community that will sustain a soul".

The foregoing shows that while the use of robot in religious worship may have advantages like reducing human pastor's stress, its lack of emotion and spiritual experience will make it difficult for it to replace humans completely. Robots may be able to preach and quote the Bible accurately; in the area of spiritual care for example, they can only provide companionship. If robot is deficient in some aspects of pastoral functions, then it is important to ask if introducing it in Africa has advantages for African Christianity. First Peter 5:1-4 is one of the scriptures that spell out the duties of a pastor. In what follows, the paper examines this text in relation to the duties of a pastor in the church. Thereafter, the ability of robot to carry out these duties is explored.

A Reading of 1 Peter 5:1-4

The Greek Text of 1 Peter 5:1-4

¹Πρεσβυτέρους ἑοῦνὲνὺμῖν παρακαλῶ ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος καὶ μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων, ὁ καὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι δόξης κοινωνός,² ποιμάνετε τὸ ἐνὺμῖν ποιμνιον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐπισκοποῦντες μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκουσίως 'κατὰ θεόν', μὴ δὲ αἰσχροκερδῶς ἀλλ' ὡς προθύμως,³ μὴ δ' ὡς κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κληρῶν ἀλλὰ τυποῖν ὁμιλοῦντες τοῦ ποιμνίου.⁴ καὶ φανερωθέντος τοῦ ἀρχιποίμενος κομιεῖσθε τὸν ἀμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον.
(Source: SBL GNT)

The English Version of 1 Peter 5:1-4

¹Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you ²to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it not for sordid gain but eagerly. ³Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. (Source: NRSV)

The Background of 1 Peter 5:1-4

Though some commentators question Petrine authorship of this epistle, others have forcefully argued for it. Verse 1 of the first chapter of the epistle refers to Peter as the author. Also, as Bailey and Constable (1999:555) argue, the fact that there was only one Peter who was an apostle in the entire New Testament; the parallel between this letter and the sermons of Peter; and the testimonies of church Fathers like Polycarp, Clement of Rome and others, all confirm Peter, the apostle as the author of the epistle. Believed by many to be written during the Neronian persecution around 64AD (Robertson, n.d: 1858), Peter explains to his readers, the suffering of Christ and how his followers should show their faith in the face of persecution. Some see the epistle as one of the most condensed *resume* of the Christian life. Luther was said to have referred to 1 Peter as one of the noblest books of the New Testament, a paragon of excellence, containing all that is necessary for Christians to know. Because of their Christian faith, the original readers were faced with marginalization by the society; they were alienated in their relationships, threatened with, if not experiencing loss of honour and socio-economic standing (Jobes, 2005). An important theological emphasis of the epistle is how to live in the end time with all its features (Bailey & Constable, 1999:556).

The relevance of 1 Peter to Christianity in contemporary time cannot be over emphasized. In addition to the suffering experienced by many Christians in the Third World societies, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, if not properly managed has the potential to alienate believers from the essence and ethics of Christianity. But "Peter intends his readers to understand who they are before God so that they can be who they are in society" (McKnight in Jobes, 2005).

Brailey and Constable (1999:557) divide the epistle into five. The text under consideration falls within the fourth division titled "the responsibilities of Christians corporately" (4:12-5:11). This section is further divided into two: the fiery trials (4:12-19) and the church under trials (5:1-11). Polkinghorne (1979:1550) titles 5:1-5 "exhortation to elders and their younger brethren". Verses 1-4, the focus of this paper can be titled exhortation to elders. In the text, elders are admonished to care for the sheep under them as good shepherd.

Analysis of 1 Peter 5:1-4

Peter begins the exhortation to the elder by introducing himself as a fellow elder. According to him, "Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you". The conjunction οὖν, translated by NRSV as 'now' also means therefore, wherefore, then. It introduces the exhortations that follow. Davids (1990:162) notes that its use to introduce 5:1-4 is apt because the section is situated between 4:12-19 and 5:6-11 that deal with suffering. There is the need for support within the church during persecution. Persecution can divide the church and it is the leaders that will be most affected. Hence the relevance of the exhortation to the elders who were the leaders of the church. Polkinghorne (1979:1562) reasons that Peter did not base his advice to the elders on his authority as an apostle, but on three grounds: one, on the fact that he is a fellow elder, may be the elder of the church from where he wrote. Two, on the fact that he has witnessed the suffering of Christ and three, on his expectation to share in the glory of Christ. The passage is primarily addressed to "elders among you" πρεσβυτερους εν υμιν. The word πρεσβυτερος as used here means elder. In the NT, elders served as overseers. The New Testament assemblies were organized under the leadership of elders and deacons. In the early church, elders or/and bishops carried out the duties of contemporary pastors. Wiersbe (2007) notes that the words elder and bishop refer to the same office, except that while elder refers to the maturity of the person, bishop refers to the responsibility attached to the office. The word 'pastor' is another title for the same office. The Greek ποιμενας, ποιμην translated as pastors in Eph.4:11 is noun accusative masculine plural common from (shepherd). These were human beings with emotions.

They were church leaders and not necessarily elders in terms of age, though the use of the word can also mean older people. Unique in the New Testament, the term “fellow-elder” stresses empathy with the elders in their task. It is also consistent with the use of the term among early leaders to avoid the use of exalted titles (Davids, 1990:200).

The term “witness” (μαρτυς) as used by Peter is used possibly for those who proclaimed the true gospel and their experience of the risen Christ in the sense of Acts 22:15, Heb 12:1. Davids (1990:200). A martyr is not just the one who gives his life for Christ, but basically a witness who tells what he has seen and heard. In the next phrase, Peter refers to himself as a “partaker” of (or the one who shares in) his (Christ’s) ‘about to be revealed’ glory. He had already indicated in 4:13 that those who identified with Christ in his suffering will have joy when he is revealed in glory. Peter refers to it here knowing fully that because he is faithful now, he is a partaker or partner-κοινωνος of the glory. This was stated by Peter to encourage his “fellow elders” to continue to be faithful witnesses and participants in his suffering (Davids, 1990: 201). There seems to be a connection between suffering and the glory of the Lord (1Pet.1:11, 4:13). Paul states that the present suffering is incomparable with the glory that will be revealed later. It seems glory serves as a source of encouragement in times of suffering Poiknghorne (1979:1562).

In verse 2, Peter urged them to “tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it not for sordid gain but eagerly”. The verb ποιμνατε translated as ‘tend’ or ‘shepherd’ in NKJV, is verb imperative aorist active 2nd person plural from ποιμαίνω (to tend, to shepherd). Ποιμνατε also means feed, care. To tend denotes carrying out all the activities attached to the office of shepherd/pastor– guiding, guarding, folding among others. New International Version uses “Be shepherds”. ποιμην (shepherd) is used metaphorically to mean leader, ruler. In Acts 20:28, the Ephesian elders were advised to “shepherd the church of God”- ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, showing elders were pastors over the church. Pastors teach, preach, counsel, visit, manage the people, resources and materials of the church, also administers the sacrament, see to the spiritual care of members, among others. Peter’s advice to elders is reminiscent of Jesus’ charged to him in John 21: 15 - 17 in which he used feed (βοσκει) my lambs (v.15), tend (ποιμανε) my sheep (v16) feed (βοσκει) my sheep to reiterate his assignment.

The image of shepherding God’s flock or God’s people as his flock is from the OT (Ps 23, Ezek. 34), but the command to elders to shepherd in NT is focused only here and in Acts 20:28-29. These two NT instances also connect shepherding with “watching over it” implying that a shepherd does the work of oversight or the work of a bishop. The word επισκοπουντες ‘watching over it’(NRSV), ‘serving as overseer’(NKJV), though omitted

by some manuscripts (N* B 322 323; so also, RSV), is a restatement or amplification of the preceding statement 'tend the flock of God that is in your charge'. The participle shows specifically what the elder are expected to do (Dubis, 2010:162, Vincent, 708). This job is also known in Jewish materials. For example, in Qumran, it is stated "This is the rule for overseer (mebaqqer- επισκοπος) of the camp... He shall love (the congregation) as a father loves his children, and shall carry them in all their distress like a shepherd his sheep (CD 13:7-9), (Davids 1990:201, Beyreuther, 1972: 565-566). In Titus 1, elders are also advised to be overseers. Davids (1990;201) notes that Peter makes two significant points here: He used the ingressive aorist to indicate that this is something that needs to be done with ever new vigour, rather than as a routine undertaking and that because it is the "flock of God", they have no proprietary rights.

Peter moves on to expand the command by introducing three sets of contrasts ('not...but'). First, they should watch over the flock not because they must, but voluntarily in a godly manner. Though in the early church, elders were selected by others (Acts 14 : 23, Titus 1: 5), he advised them not to see their job as something forced upon them. Davids (1990:201) reasons that the stress of pastoring, especially while supporting oneself with another job as well as the danger of persecution in which the leader and his family would be the main and first target, could make the work tiring. But they were advised to do it voluntarily, that is with joy not with groaning. Second, God would have them do it not for sordid gain but eagerly (NRSV): they are to do it not for profit, but eagerly. The word αἰσχροκερδῶς translated as filthy lucre or sordid gain is from αἰσχος meaning disgraceful and κερδος gain. Such motive is base and disgraceful. προθύμως (eagerly) is a compound of προ forward and θυμος heart/spirit. This implies a ready mind, denoting not merely willingness, but zeal. Unlike Greek philosophical teachers, they should not turn ministry into a business, but to carry out their duties eagerly without thinking of the profit.

Three, they should not "lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock". The Greek κατακυριεύοντες (lord it over) carries the idea of high handedness, not legitimate authority, else words like προισταμαι (lord over) would have been used. (Vincent 709). The term κληρῶν translated as 'charge' here means lot or heritage. It appears in mark 15: 24 and Acts 1: 26 and could mean something assigned by lot, portion or share. It is used here to refer to the congregation assigned to the elders (Vincent, 1997:709, Davids, 1990:201). The plural τυποὶ meaning examples is a word from which 'type' comes meaning. It can mean impression left by a stroke. It can also give the idea of image or form, pattern or model. They were to be models of servants and ministers, not bosses and executives. A leader is expected to be a model. In Wiersbe's (2007:924) view, this resolves the tension between a shepherd being among the sheep and over the sheep.

Where a preacher practices what he preaches, people are willing to follow him. Rather than dominating, they should lead by being example to the flock. This concept of leadership is common in the NT. In 1Tim4: 12 for example, Paul admonished Timothy to be example in lifestyle, speech, purity and faith. Davids (1990:201) notes that being an example fits well with the image of “flock”. Ancient shepherd walked in front of the flock and called them to follow.

Verse 4 gives assurance that if they carry out their duties with proper attitude as spelt out in verse 3, there is reward for them from the lord at the Parousia. (Polkinghorne, 1979:1562). Jesus is here referred to as the chief shepherd who will pay the under shepherd. The under shepherd will “receive”. This pay is the eschatological reward which does not consist of gold or silver but a crown 1Cor 9:28 refers to the crown as imperishable crown (2Tim 4: 8). Davids (1990:204) feels that it consists of glory and honour. Crown can mean the conqueror’s crown, not of the kings as used by Paul. It is probably used here to refer to the crown of leaves determined by the epithet “unfading” (Vincent, 1997:710). The foregoing shows among others, that the elders that Peter exhorted were human beings with emotions who were expected to carry out their duties of shepherding, which require the human person. They have to model certain lifestyles for it to make impression in the life of the flock. Wiersbe (2007) summarizes their duties as bishops thus:

Looking diligently to it, inspecting into the various cases of the members of the church; using diligence to know the state of the flock, and performing all the offices of a careful shepherd; as feeding the flock; and not themselves; strengthening the diseased; healing the sick; binding up that which was broken; bringing again that which was driven away, and seeking that which was lost; watching over them that they go not astray; and restoring of them in the spirit of meekness, when they are gone out of the way; and overlooking both their practices and their principles; admonishing, reproving them for sin, as the case requires; and preserving them, as much as in them lies, from wolves, and beasts of prey; from false teachers, and from all errors and heresies: all which is to be done.

Most of the duties referred to by Wiersbe above can only have impression on the people if they are carried out by humans who have experienced such before. It is a human elder (pastor) that will not know how it feels, for example, to be sick, to be bereaved or to have backslidden, to have lost a contract or job, to miscarry or to be at the point of death. These are duties that machine that do not have flesh or emotions cannot carry out. What then is the implication of the foregoing on Africa?

Ethico-theological Implications of 'Robot' Pastor on African Christianity in Relation to 1 Peter 5:1-4

Among others, African Christianity is rooted in African communalism. Gyekye (1997: 114) defines communalism as "the doctrine that the communality (or group) is the focus of activities of the individual member of the society." The virtuous qualities of African communalism include: strong religious sense of "*koinonia*" or fellowship; inter-human relation irrespective of tribe or religion. This is an emphasis on human brotherhood. It also focuses on its utilitarian ethical ideal. African communalism focuses essentially on collective interest. It is a fact that African Christianity is alive and active. Onyinah (2007), Oladipo (2016), Mbiti (2016) among others, discuss the features of African Christianity. Some of the features according to them are discussed below. African Christianity is a dynamic blend of traditional African beliefs, practices and a vibrant expression of Christian faith. Its emphases are on communality, holistic view of faith and connection to the spiritual world. It places high value on community. Worship often holds in large gathering and it often emphasizes shared experiences and mutual support (Oladipo, 2016). In most cases, it is an integration of traditional beliefs and healing with Christian theology. Solutions are sought to spiritual and practical problems (Mbiti, 2016). It also emphasizes the spiritual world and its influences on daily life. Hence, practices like prayer for deliverance from evil spirits and protection against misfortune and blessings for success are emphasized (Mbiti, 2016, Onyinah, 2007). Worship in Africa is dynamic. It is often expressive, involving singing, dancing, drumming and physical expressions of faith. Africans believe that their practice of Christianity should lead to improved health, prosperity, and successful relationships (Mbiti, 2016 and Onyinah, 2007). Hence African Christians especially those belonging to the African independent churches and Pentecostal churches lay strong emphasis on the Holy spirit including the experience of speaking in tongues, spiritual gifts and divine healing (Muller, 2019:154). Also, it provides a sense of hope and community for those facing poverty, social inequality and other challenges.

Introducing 'robot' pastor to a Christian community with the above traits has both ethical and theological implications. First Peter 5:1-4 shows the necessity of human pastors in Africa. The passage unambiguously describes the distinguishing characteristics of the pastoral office. Apart from clearly accenting the essential place of a human being in the pastoral office, it also focuses on affirming the inseparable moral value of both the message preached and the moral life of the preacher. A close examination of the text highlights the following points: One, the theological metaphor for a pastor (shepherd) relates only to a human person: Apostle Peter writes "ποιμάνετε τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν ποίμνιον τοῦ θεοῦ..." literally interpreted "Shepherd the flock of sheep of God among you". Throughout biblical narrative, when the concept of "shepherd"

whether in its literal sense of the one who cares for sheep or in the figurative sense, it refers primarily to the human person. The following biblical texts are evident to this point (Jeremiah 3:15; 23:1, Ezekiel 34:2, Luke 2:8, John 10:14 Ephesians 4:11). Pastoral office requires much diligence and tenderness as the care for the sheep. It demands total commitment and a deep sense of love for the sheep. Such level of responsibility cannot be given to a robot built without feelings and emotions.

Two, the pastoral office derives its essence in the act of caring: The call for shepherding puts a pastor in a position of emotional responsibility and attachment to the need and plight of his members. Here, the responsibility is expanded beyond mere homiletical rhetoric and phraseology. A pastor in reality is expected to be “incarnational” in discharge of his duties. That is, just as Christ in incarnation became man in order to save man, in a similar way, a pastor is expected to feel the pain of his parishioners, in effect be their confidant in despair, empathize with them in troubles and tears, and be their source of comfort and consolation in sorrow. Berkeley (1958: 177) argues that this is the sense in which Jesus admonished Peter to feed His Lamb (John 21:17). Such a crucial pastoral function cannot be carried a robot or even by a pastor in proxy.

Three, a pastor is a model of morality: In the text, Peter stressed “...but be an example to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3 ESV). This is a follow up on the act of shepherding. Shepherding works more through the influence of example, rather than the application of power. Again, this is the logic behind the doctrine of incarnation; where the redemptive work of Christ is grounded in Him becoming man. This implies that leadership and moral influence in the church is not primarily instructional, but basically relational. The metaphor use for believers in the text is “sheep”. This character naturally suggests vulnerability in both senses of safety and moral uprightness. Therefore, the moral guidance believers need cannot be accomplished solely through the rhetoric of preaching but most significantly through an exemplary living of their pastor whom they naturally look up to as their model. Such salient responsibility whose relevance extends even to the secular society cannot be carried out by a robot. Therefore, replacing pastor with robot certainly robs off negatively on the moral life of the church as well as the society. The automated machine that carries out mere pastoral function of preaching is not moral agent and the moral advice that comes from it cannot be trusted in the sense of flowing from a participatory experience.

Further, it is important to note that for the sustainability and promotion of communal life, the African societies place premium on leadership. Leaders in traditional African societies are not just those responsible for the implementation of laws and orders in the society, they are primarily the custodians in principle and behavior, the ideals of the society. The definition of leadership by Brady & Woodward (2005: 7) as “the influence of others in a

productive, vision-driven direction done through the example, conviction, and character of the leader" truly represents African notion of leadership. Hence, the introduction of robotic pastors to take over priestly duties in African churches raises ethical and theological questions about the ideals and tenets of Christianity. It equally pulls a serious threat on the traditional identity of the African society, because of its tendency to undermine the essence of human leadership and brotherhood.

Robotic pastor fits in more in societies that emphasize the uncontrollable desire for individualism brandished in the language of freedom. This can only fare well in western countries, not in Africa. A few months after her third election victory in 1987, the then British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, commented, "There is no such thing as society." (cited in Deer 1987: 6). Reacting to this statement a newspaper analyst and investigative journalist, Brain Deer regarded it as typical of the uncaring society that the modern Western world had become—one where people lead essentially solitary lives, unconnected to those around them.

In an overtly individualistic society, traditional notion of leadership, in which the led are expected in the interest of the community, to accept and give support to policies of the leader, will naturally be considered as an infringement on their liberty and freedom. For which reason, they are free to live their egoistic ascension. Robotic Pulpit which leaves church people with no human leadership more than being an aspect of scientific development is promotion of western individualism and all the negativities associated with it. Such is alien to African society and is bound to destroy the African religio-ethical identity. The uniqueness of African identity must be upheld even in the face of scientific or technological development. According to Metz (2021: 58), some scientists argue that the ethical principle that guides the growth and spread of AI in all its diverse forms is the principle of utilitarianism. He defines utilitarianism as "the doctrine that for any action to be rational and moral, it must be expected to maximize what is good for human being and to minimize what is bad for them in the long run." Consequently, it could be maintained that Robotic pulpit maximizes the interest of those who would want to hear a gospel that is not mixed with human emotion and sentiment, and of those who desire the psycho/physiological welfare of their pastor by providing robot to do such work. Nonetheless, it be noted clearly that by standard of utilitarianism, what is good for a people is absolutely subjective. Thus, subjective approach to human well-being is arguably taken in moral circle to be the only thing for its own sake or at least the only sort of good that should be action-guiding for every moral agent.

Therefore, if robotic pastor is implanted in churches in African on the claim that it is accepted by Christians in Europe and America, without critically considering the effects of such implantation on the uniqueness of African life, it can be counterproductive. At such instance, there is no need stressing that African value is completely submerged in the Western world-view. An objective evaluation of robotic pastor to take over all the duties of a human pastor in the context of Africa reveals that such development is not suitable for a people whose social and religious life is founded on the principle of human interaction and social participation. That explains why typically, Africans sing and dance during church. When such a crucial social element is destroyed by the introduction of an automated machine as worship leader, both African value and Africans' happiness are completely devalued and undermined.

Conclusion and Observations

The argument of this paper does not undermine the benefits of Artificial Intelligence and the gains of robotic pastors in any society. Its argument among others is that the introduction of robotic pastor in African Christianity should be done with careful analysis of the peculiarity of the Church in Africa and that because of this peculiarity; it is not possible for robot to totally replace humans in pastoral duties in African churches. The importance of robot in modern time cannot be ruled out but it must be noted that, as Onyedinefu, (2022) has rightly stated, robots are not here to take over human jobs, but to assist humans.

Madu implies that AI is God's creation through the instrumentality of humans when he states that "these scientific and technological innovations are the handiworks of man, who, in creation, was given a divine seed, in the form of intellectual capacity to work in partnership with God in the task of recreating the world" (Madu, 2024: 26). So, the development in AI cannot be totally thrown away by Christianity. One cannot deny the reality that AI has continued to impact humans in all aspects of their endeavours, be it in business, politics and even in evangelism. For example, the Thinking Machines like cybernetics and complex information processing machines that utilize human reasoning as a guide to offer superior services in contemporary world (Madu, 2024:28. AI can lead in performing rituals, help in improving human health, promote preservation and enhancement of life through its different machines like machine-learning algorithms. However, since AI seems to rely only on what humans programmed into it, it may not be able to access divine revelation or prophetic messages which is important to most Africans and is part of the reasons for many African's religiosity. As it has been said, AI cannot worship or talk to God (Simmerlin & Tretter, 2024:268, Madu, 2024:30-31). Madu, though extols the place of AI in African life, warns that AI may not be able to

represent human in human-to-human and face-to-face interaction. Thus, AI will not be able to adequately fit into the African idea of communalism. Madu even warns that with AI, such interaction can be 'drastically reduced' and this negates the African communal spirit (Madu, 2024:32)b. It is on the basis of this that it can be stated that robots can assist in carrying out some aspects of pastoral duties, not to take over the whole of the duties. For example, they can help out in some aspects of liturgy and rites, teaching, preaching that may not require emotions and feelings. But in terms of other aspects and spiritual care, robot will not function well among African Christians.

Recommendations

1. African countries must develop ethical policies that regulate the type of technological development should accept or reject in accordance with African religio-ethical identity.
2. African countries must enhance or encourage technological development in Africa and by Africans in order to curb the extent to which Africans will continue to be a dumping ground for western culturally based technology.
3. Africans in global technological development must advocate for African cultural value to be taken in account when defining a framework for a global technological advancement, especially in the area of Artificial Intelligent.
4. While the various ways in which technological development had contributed to religious growth should be appreciated and earned for church growth, robotic pulpit which undermines the divine identity of the pastoral ministry should be rejected by Christians leaders and all well-meaning believers.
5. Africans must promote the central role of leaders to the moral growth of the society and encourage leaders in exemplary living.

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