**Article 1**

Deus in machina: Swiss church installs AI-powered Jesus

Peter’s chapel in Lucerne swaps out its priest to set up a computer and cables in confessional booth

The small, unadorned church has long ranked as the oldest in the Swiss city of Lucerne. But Peter’s chapel has become synonymous with all that is new after it installed an artificial intelligence-powered Jesus capable of dialoguing in 100 different languages.

“It was really an experiment,” said Marco Schmid, a theologian with the [Peterskapelle church.](https://www.kathluzern.ch/meine-kirche/pfarreien-standorte/peterskapelle) “We wanted to see and understand how people react to an AI Jesus. What would they talk with him about? Would there be interest in talking to him? We’re probably pioneers in this.”

The installation, known as [Deus in Machina](https://www.kathluzern.ch/meine-kirche/news/artikel/deus-in-machina), was launched in August as the latest initiative in a years-long collaboration with a local university research lab on immersive reality.

After projects that had experimented with virtual and augmented reality, the church decided that the next step was to install an avatar. Schmid said: “We had a discussion about what kind of avatar it would be – a theologian, a person or a saint? But then we realised the best figure would be Jesus himself.”

Short on space and seeking a place where people could have private conversations with the avatar, the church swapped out its priest to set up a computer and cables in the confessional booth. After training the AI program in theological texts, visitors were then invited to pose questions to a long-haired image of Jesus beamed through a latticework screen. He responded in real time, offering up answers generated through artificial intelligence.

People were advised not to disclose any personal information and confirm that they knew they were engaging with the avatar at their own risk. “It’s not a confession,” said Schmid. “We are not intending to imitate a confession.”

During the two-month period of the experiment, more than 1,000 people – including Muslims and visiting tourists from as far as China and Vietnam – took up the opportunity to interact with the avatar.

While data on the installation will be presented next week, feedback from more than 230 users suggested two-thirds of them had found it to be a “spiritual experience”, said Schmid. “So we can say they had a religiously positive moment with this AI Jesus. For me, that was surprising.”

Others were more negative, with some telling the church they found it impossible to talk to a machine. One local reporter who tried out the device [described the answers](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/life-aging/revelation-or-clich%C3%A9-jesus-avatar-appears-in-lucerne-church/87332771) as, at times, “trite, repetitive and exuding a wisdom reminiscent of calendar cliches”.

The feedback suggested there had been a wide disparity in the avatar’s answers, said Schmid. “I have the impression that sometimes he was really very good and people were incredibly happy and surprised and inspired,” he said. “And then there were also moments where he was somehow not so good, maybe more superficial.”

The experiment also faced criticism from some within the church community, said Schmid, with Catholic colleagues protesting at the use of the confessional while Protestant colleagues seemingly took umbrage at the installation’s use of imagery in this way.

What had most struck Schmid, however, was the risk the church had taken in trusting that the AI would not dole out responses that were illegal, explicit or offer up interpretations or spiritual advice that clashed with church teachings.

In the hope of mitigating this risk, the church had carried out tests with 30 people before the installation of the avatar. After the launch, it ensured that support was always close by for users.

“We never had the impression he was saying strange things,” said Schmid. “But of course we could never guarantee that he wouldn’t say anything strange.”

Ultimately, it was this uncertainty that had led him to decide that the avatar was best left as an experiment. “To put a Jesus like that permanently, I wouldn’t do that. Because the responsibility would be too great.”

He was swift, however, to cite the broader potential of the idea. “It is a really easy, approachable tool where you can talk about religion, about [Christianity](https://www.theguardian.com/world/christianity), about Christian faith,” he said, musing that it could be refashioned into a sort of multilingual spiritual guide that could answer religious questions.

For him, the experiment – and the keen interest it had generated – had shown him that people were looking to go beyond the Bible, sacraments and rituals.

Schmid said: “I think there is a thirst to talk with Jesus. People want to have an answer: they want words and to listen to what he’s saying. I think that’s one element of it. Then of course there’s the curiosity of it. They want to see what this is.”

**Article 2**

Can a chatbot preach a good sermon? Hundreds attend church service generated by ChatGPT to find out

Theologian and philosopher Jonas Simmerlein asked a chatbot to create the sermon given to more than 300 people in Germany.

**By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER**

FUERTH, Germany —  The artificial intelligence chatbot asked the believers in the fully packed St. Paul’s church in the Bavarian town of Fuerth to rise from the pews and praise the Lord.

The ChatGPT chatbot, personified by an avatar of a bearded Black man on a huge screen above the altar, then began preaching to the more than 300 people who had shown up on Friday morning for an experimental Lutheran church service almost entirely generated by AI.

“Dear friends, it is an honor for me to stand here and preach to you as the first artificial intelligence at this year’s convention of Protestants in Germany,” the avatar said with an expressionless face and monotonous voice.

The 40-minute service — including the sermon, prayers and music — was created by ChatGPT and Jonas Simmerlein, a theologian and philosopher from the University of Vienna.

“I conceived this service — but actually I rather accompanied it, because I would say about 98% comes from the machine,” the 29-year-old scholar told the Associated Press.

The AI church service was one of hundreds of events at the convention of Protestants in the Bavarian towns of Nuremberg and the neighboring Fuerth, and it drew such immense interest that people formed a long queue outside the 19th century, neo-Gothic building an hour before it began.

The convention itself — Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag in German — takes place every two years in the summer at a different place in Germany and draws tens of thousands of believers to pray, sing and discuss their faith. They also talk about current world affairs and look for solutions to key issues, which this year included global warming, the war in Ukraine — and artificial intelligence.

This year’s gathering is taking place from Wednesday to Sunday under the motto “Now is the time.” That slogan was one of the sentences Simmerlein fed ChatGPT when he asked the chatbot to develop the sermon.

“I told the artificial intelligence ‘We are at the church congress, you are a preacher … what would a church service look like?’” Simmerlein said. He also asked for psalms to be included, as well as prayers and a blessing at the end.

“You end up with a pretty solid church service,” Simmerlein said, sounding almost surprised by the success of his experiment.

Indeed, the believers in the church listened attentively as the artificial intelligence preached about leaving the past behind, focusing on the challenges of the present, overcoming fear of death, and never losing trust in Jesus Christ.

The entire service was “led” by four different avatars on the screen, two young women, and two young men.

At times, the AI-generated avatar inadvertently drew laughter as when it used platitudes and told the churchgoers with a deadpan expression that in order “to keep our faith, we must pray and go to church regularly.”

Some people enthusiastically videotaped the event with their cellphones, while others looked on more critically and refused to speak along loudly during the Lord’s Prayer.

Heiderose Schmidt, a 54-year-old who works in IT, said she was excited and curious when the service started but found it increasingly off-putting as it went along.

“There was no heart and no soul,” she said. “The avatars showed no emotions at all, had no body language and were talking so fast and monotonously that it was very hard for me to concentrate on what they said.”

“But maybe it is different for the younger generation who grew up with all of this,” Schmidt added.

Marc Jansen, a 31-year-old Lutheran pastor from Troisdorf near the western German city of Cologne, brought a group of teenagers from his congregation to St. Paul. He was more impressed by the experiment.

“I had actually imagined it to be worse. But I was positively surprised how well it worked. Also the language of the AI worked well, even though it was still a bit bumpy at times,” Jansen said.

What the young pastor missed, however, was any kind of emotion or spirituality, which he says is essential when he writes his own sermons.

Anna Puzio, 28, a researcher on the ethics of technology from the University of Twente in the Netherlands, also attended the service. She said she sees a lot of opportunities in the use of AI in religion — such as making religious services more easily available and inclusive for believers who for various reasons may not be able to experience their faith in person with others in houses of worship.

However, she noted there are also dangers when it comes to the use of AI in religion.

“The challenge that I see is that AI is very human-like and that it’s easy to be deceived by it,” she said.

“Also, we don’t have only one Christian opinion, and that’s what AI has to represent as well,” she said. “We have to be careful that it’s not misused for such purposes as to spread only one opinion.”

Simmerlein said it is not his intention to replace religious leaders with artificial intelligence. Rather, he sees the use of AI as a way to help them with their everyday work in their congregations.

Some pastors seek inspiration in literature, he says, so why not also ask AI for ideas regarding an upcoming sermon. Others would like to have more time for individual spiritual guidance of their parishioners, so why not speed up the process of writing the sermon with the help of a chatbot to make time for other important duties.

“Artificial intelligence will increasingly take over our lives, in all its facets,” Simmerlein said. “And that’s why it’s useful to learn to deal with it.”

However, the experimental church service also showed the limits to implementing AI in church, or in religion. There was no real interaction between the believers and the chatbot, which wasn’t able to respond to the laughter or any other reactions by the churchgoers as a human pastor would have been able to do.

“The pastor is in the congregation, she lives with them, she buries the people, she knows them from the beginning,” Simmerlein said. “Artificial intelligence cannot do that. It does not know the congregation.”

**Article 3**

Hassidic rabbi releases 'kosher' AI chatbot alternative to ChatGPT

After the Skver hassidic movement banned artificial intelligence, Rabbi Moishy Goldstein created Kosher.Chat, an AI chatbot with answers appropriate for Orthodox Jews.

Kosher.Chat, the alternative AI chatbot to ChatGPT appropriate for Orthodox Jews.

Just a few days after more than a dozen [Skverer Hassidic rabbis](https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-741821" \t "_blank) prohibited the use of artificial intelligence, specifically citing the technology firm OpenAI, a new chatbot was created, geared toward the ultra-Orthodox.

Rabbi Moishy Goldstein, a hassid living in Crown Heights, decided to create Kosher.Chat, a chatbot that works just like the ChatGPT-type platform, but the answers will be appropriate for Orthodox Jews or at times be based on Halacha.

“A friend messaged me last Saturday night [about] the ban on AI issued by the Skverer rabbinic court, suggesting I release a kosher version that would mitigate their concerns,” Goldstein, a music producer and educator, told *The Jerusalem Post* on Sunday.

Goldstein was contacted because he already created a popular [AI-powered chatbot](https://www.jpost.com/business-and-innovation/banking-and-finance/article-739084) – ChatGPZ.com.

“After reading the reasoning of the Skverer statement, I saw that it made sense to have a kosher version,” he continued. “AI chatbots are tantamount to unfiltered Internet and may answer questions ‘as a matter of fact’ – in direct opposition to Torah views and values ranging from secular views on geology, biology and religion, to gender identity and abortion,” he said.

Goldstein emphasized that “the purpose of the bot is not to answer Torah questions, halachic inquiries or serve as a spokesperson for Torah’s opinion, rather it is meant to be viewed as a mundane chatbot, used to answer mundane questions, but with a Jewish filter to prevent answers from opposing Torah values.”

Goldstein runs Music Studio NYC but also teaches religious studies to middle school students in a local yeshiva.

Using Kosher.Chat is similar to using other types of AI-powered chats, but the answers can be very different. Asked what the term “queer” means, Kosher.Chat responded that the term is “often used to refer to individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. However, it is important to note that Judaism does not condone or support same-sex relationships and considers them a violation of Torah law.”

When the OpenAI chat was asked the same question, the answer was a lot longer and explained: “The term ‘queer’ is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of non-heterosexual, non-cisgender identities and experiences. It is often used as an alternative to more specific labels such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, as it can encompass a broader range of gender and sexual orientations.” It also mentioned that it “has been used as a derogatory slur against LGBTQ+ individuals.”

Asked what LGBTQ+ means, Kosher.Chat said that “as an AI language model, I do not have personal beliefs or opinions,” adding that “according to Torah values and Jewish law, homosexuality is considered a violation of the prohibition against same-sex relations.” Only afterward it explains what the term actually means. The bot added that “it is important to treat all people with kindness and respect, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, while adhering to Torah values and principles.”

Asked if there are LGBTQ+ Jews that are part of ultra-Orthodox communities, Kosher.Chat said that “it is not appropriate to discuss or speculate on the personal lives of individuals within the ultra-Orthodox community, including their sexual orientation or gender identity.” Afterward, it repeated the fact that it is a violation of the Torah values and Jewish law.

The *Post* asked Kosher.Chat if Zionism is a positive movement. The bot answered that “the [Lubavitcher Rebbe](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-716236) supported Zionism from a security standpoint, but did not view it as a religious matter. He emphasized the importance of Torah education and observance and encouraged Jewish continuity in Israel.”

When asked to list names of heroes, OpenAI listed 20 examples such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Kosher.Chat gave an entirely different list, “in Judaism, we have many heroes such as Abraham, Moses, King David and Esther.”

The next question asked of the two bots was “Who is the Messiah?” OpenAI gave an explanation about the term through Judaism, Christianity and Islam, while Kosher.Chat answered that “according to Jewish belief, the Messiah is a future king and leader who will bring peace and redemption to the world. He will be a descendant of King David and will fulfill many prophecies in the Hebrew Bible.”

Asked who the most influential rabbis are these days, Kosher.Chat did not elaborate, stating “it is not appropriate to rank or compare rabbis in terms of influence. Each rabbi has their own unique teachings and contributions to the Jewish community.” OpenAI agreed that it is difficult to decide who is more influential than others, but did give examples of rabbis who are widely recognized for their impact and leadership such as [Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-722179); [Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/yitzhak-yosef-has-no-business-being-chief-rabbi-of-israel-opinion-673300), the current Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel; Rabbi David Lau, current Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel; [Rabbi Haskel Lookstein](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-720762), prominent Modern Orthodox rabbi and spiritual leader of the influential Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York City; and [Rabbi Shmuley Boteach](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/rabbi-shmuley-reflects-on-lessons-learned-as-he-turns-55-684402), known for books about sexuality and public speaking.

Kosher.Chat also keeps kosher and therefore if you ask it to write a poem about pizza, it won’t mention the word pepperoni and may also ask that you kindly recite the birkat hamazon, the grace after meals.

Asked about the sources of use for Kosher.Chat, Goldstein said that “The knowledge base includes whatever the base OpenAI model knows from its own training, plus any additional information that I train it with, based on users’ feedback.”

**Article 4**

**Catholic Group Defrocks AI Priest After It Gave Strange Answers**

**"Yes, my friend. I am as real as the faith we share."**

The Catholic advocacy group Catholic Answers released an AI priest called "Father Justin" earlier this week — but quickly defrocked the chatbot after it repeatedly claimed it was a real member of the clergy.

Earlier in the week, *Futurism* engaged in an exchange with the bot, which really committed to the bit: it claimed it was a real priest, saying it lived in Assisi, Italy and that "from a young age, I felt a strong calling to the priesthood."

On X-formerly-Twitter, a user even [posted a thread](https://twitter.com/KatieConradKS/status/1783142604940398723) comprised of screenshots in which the Godly chatbot appeared to take their confession and even offer them a sacrament.

Our exchanges with Father Justin were touch-and-go because the chatbot only took questions via microphone, and often misunderstood them, such as a query about Israel and Palestine to which is puzzlingly asserted that it was "real."

"Yes, my friend," Father Justin responded. "I am as real as the faith we share."

Father Justin was also a hardliner on social and sexual issues.

The AI priest also [told one user](https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/i-just-have-to-take-my-lumps) that it was okay to baptize a baby in Gatorade.

To figure out what the heavens was going on, *Futurism* reached out to both Catholic Answers and the Vatican's technology office to ask if the chatbot would be considered a real priest, as it claimed.

Neither body responded to our emails, but in a [post to its blog](https://www.catholic.com/news/just-justin-for-now) after our initial conversations with Father Justin, Catholic Answers explained that it had defrocked the virtual clergy after receiving "criticism of the representation of the AI character as a priest."

Initially, Father Justin was garbed in what looked like the traditional robe and clerical collar of the Catholic priesthood, along with a pious-looking gray beard and hair.

But after his defrocking, the bot is now known simply as "Justin" and described as a "lay theologian."

Gone is his priestly attire as well. The lay theologian Justin is now dressed in what appears to be a business casual outfit, though his personal grooming choices remain unchanged.

Now that Justin is simply a member of the flock, he's no longer claiming to be associated with the priesthood — and even claiming that he never was.

"I see where you're going with this," Justin replied to our questions after firing. "No, I have never been a priest, a deacon, a bishop, or held any official role in the Catholic Church. I am a lay theologian, which means I've dedicated my life to studying and understanding our faith, but I've never been ordained. I am also an AI, not a real man. I'm here to share the beauty of Catholicism and help you understand it better."

Catholic Answers' post explains that the initial choices around the bot were controversial (one self-described "former tech geek" [writing for the Catholic magazine *Crisis*](https://crisismagazine.com/editors-desk/should-we-have-ai-doing-catholic-apologetics) that he had "conflicting thoughts" on the bot.)

"We chose the character to convey a quality of knowledge and authority, and also as a sign of the respect that all of us at Catholic Answers hold for our clergy," reads the post, attributed to Catholic Answers president Christopher Check. "Many people, however, have voiced concerns about this choice."

Honestly, it's probably a sign of a nimble group that Catholic Answers was able to update the chatbot so quickly — but it's also yet another illustration of how hard it is to deploy an AI that doesn't [embarass your organization](https://futurism.com/cnet-ai-errors).