



**Michał Wyrostkiewicz^{1*}, Marek Petro², Wojciech Wcisł³,
Wojciech Iwanicki⁴, Wojciech Suchowierz⁵**

¹ The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland);

² University of Presov (Slovakia);

³ The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland);

⁴ Polish Journalists Association (Poland);

⁵ The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland);

* autor korespondencyjny: michal.wyrostkiewicz@kul.pl

MW: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9029-9074>

MP: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2024-9981>

WW: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8187-6431>

WI: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0469-0803>

WS: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7197-3657>

**Pastoral Ministry in the Age of Algorithms:
Challenges, Adaptation, and Perspectives
on the Example of a Catholic Diocese in Central
and Eastern Europe**

Abstract: The growing role of Artificial Intelligence in various areas of life raises questions about its impact on pastoral ministry. This article examines the use of AI in the Archdiocese of Lublin (Poland), identifying both opportunities and challenges perceived by Catholic clergy. While AI supports pastors in selected areas of pastoral work, it simultaneously raises ethical, theological, and anthropological concerns, particularly regarding the risk of depersonalization of pastoral relationships. The study, based on desk research and the analysis of original empirical data collected among clergy, as well as relevant Magisterium documents, highlights areas that may require further theological reflection and consideration in clergy formation concerning AI. The findings contribute to practical theology by showing how empirical research can inform normative reflection on the responsible integration of AI into pastoral ministry.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Catholic clergy, information society, pastoral ministry, pastoral care, practical theology

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence is entering almost every sphere of life, including pastoral ministry, posing new challenges for the Church. Its growing presence affects the functioning of religious communities, influencing the organization of clergy work and their interactions with the faithful. In light of these changes, the question of how to use new technologies effectively and ethically becomes increasingly important.

This study examines and demonstrates how the clergy of a specific particular Church – namely, the Polish Catholic Archdiocese of Lublin – utilize artificial intelligence (AI) in their ministry, what challenges and opportunities they perceive in its application, and how this compares to Church teaching and the practices of other religious communities.

1.1. Artificial Intelligence as a Challenge for Pastoral Ministry

Artificial intelligence is now one of the key factors significantly influencing individuals, society as a whole, and institutions. This impact extends to many areas of life, including religiosity. It is therefore evident that the development and growing popularity of AI naturally affect pastoral activities related to the religious practice of Christians and that AI is increasingly being used by Christian pastors in carrying out their ministry within religious communities.

This emerging reality, which is becoming more visible within the Catholic Church, is viewed positively by the Vatican. This perspective is reflected in the opinions and guidelines issued by the Dicastery for Communication. When discussing the presence of the ecclesial community, including pastors, in the “digital world,” the Dicastery considers it a natural state of affairs and asserts: “The real question is no longer whether to engage in the digital world, but how to do so” (Dicastery for Communication 2023).

Answering this question is not easy. On the one hand, modern technology can support the clergy in managing religious communities, organizing their work, creating pastoral materials, and facilitating communication with the faithful. On the other hand, it can lead to abuses and errors, as well as raise numerous dilemmas

and questions regarding the moral consequences and spiritual implications of using digital products that one has not created – thus touching on issues of ownership and copyright. Moreover, it raises concerns about the theological compatibility of AI in pastoral activities, where not only knowledge but also a personal relationship with the conveyed message is crucial. This is particularly relevant when AI-generated content is used without proper internalization, effectively abandoning the role of personal testimony. Such an approach would signify a departure from the fundamental principles that should be a priority for pastors (Leo XIV 2025c, no. 26; Francis 2013; Congregazione per il Clero 2020, nos. 11–26; Sacra congregazione per il clero 2002; Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2001; Marcyński 2016, 96–102; Leśniczak 2019, 240–44; Ostafiński 2021). More general anthropological and metaphysical questions may also arise, such as those related to the broad concept of transhumanism and its potential impact on the understanding of the soul, free will, grace, and even God (Lipski 2023; Wróblewski and Fortuna 2023; Roszak 2024; Boniecki 2024). Additionally, concerns may emerge regarding the symptoms of depersonalization in relationships mediated through digital tools (Dicastery for Communication 2023; Francis 2024b; Szymanek 2024), as well as the risk of reducing – or even losing – the spiritual dimension of pastoral ministry, limiting it to mere administration, social care, and the transmission of religious knowledge (Reed 2021; Stoddart 2023). Another category of questions that challenges the rationale and necessity of using AI in pastoral work relates to the current misalignment of digital tools with actual pastoral needs, making their application in ministry largely superficial in practice (Young 2022).

This problem may also be situated within a broader reflection on Church communication in the era of artificial intelligence, where rapid technological development is understood not only as a technical shift, but as a challenge raising fundamental anthropological and ethical questions (Tridente 2024).

1.2. The Importance of Empirical Research in Reflection on Pastoral Ministry

Even the sample questions presented above indicate that a Catholic pastor who wishes to function effectively in today's world – with its digital tools – is in a difficult situation. The same applies to the theologian trying to provide appropriate knowledge that can be translated into pastoral practice. Although the questions and problems presented above suggest a direction for reflection within practical theology – which seeks to support modern pastors who wish to effectively and conscientiously utilize AI (in line with the recommendations of the pope and the Dicastery, and offering a chance for the true realization of the Church's mission in today's world, as well as personal growth and the fulfillment of one's vocation) – these are still the results of theoretical reflections by researchers or journalists describing new situations in the Church. Undoubtedly, they refer to observations of life but are not based on in-depth analyses of data collected through empirical research. Most often, they focus on a specific aspect or problem which, although scientifically interesting and contributing to the development of theological knowledge, has only moderate practical application. The challenges related to the use of AI faced by pastors require not only theoretical, rather general reflections but also practical guidelines.

As the key to identifying appropriate topics and addressing issues of greater practical importance – that is, issues that are significant for practical theology – is to ask the pastors themselves. This approach allows us to learn what they think about AI and its use in their activities. This is exactly what was carried out during the research, the results of which form the basis of this article.

This approach corresponds to the methodological orientation of practical theology, which seeks to integrate empirical research with theological reflection in order to better understand and support pastoral practice. In this perspective, empirical data do not merely illustrate theoretical assumptions but constitute an essential component of theological inquiry, enabling a movement from lived experience to normative interpretation (Osmer 2008, 4–11, 31–34).

1.3. Universal Character of Local Research Results

The apparent self-evidence of the topic's relevance is a consequence of the dynamic development of technology and the need to integrate modern tools into the everyday work of the Church. The research on the practical use of AI by clergy in the Archdiocese of Lublin is of particular significance, as it provides concrete data on the actual application of AI in pastoral ministry, which may be relevant to the global reflection on this phenomenon. The findings of this research can serve as a starting point for further international studies, highlighting the common challenges and opportunities brought about by the development of AI in the religious context. Describing this research not only answers existing questions but also formulates new ones that are relevant for theologians around the world.

The study, which focuses on the Archdiocese of Lublin, is not merely a "local research episode" but appears as an undertaking of great significance for practical theology. Gathering concrete data and making it the basis for scientific exploration (rather than merely theoretical questions and hypotheses posed by researchers) allows the construction of a strong empirical foundation regarding the implementation of AI in pastoral work. This is a typical case study that helps to identify mechanisms and tendencies, understand how they arise, and resolve similar issues in comparable situations. Although the case of the Lublin Archdiocese is specific (as is any specific research case), the results of the described study may be relevant for broader comparative reflection. They reveal challenges that clergy around the world might face, regardless of region, and identify educational and formational needs that are key in the context of integrating AI into the Church. The conclusions drawn from this case may inspire similar research in other regions of the world (especially in Central and Eastern Europe and other areas where digitalization processes in the Church are still developing, such as South America or African countries), where – due to the similarity of the situation – the research from the Archdiocese of Lublin can help identify common challenges. These findings can serve as valuable guidelines for clergy and theologians, assisting in the creation of frameworks that may inform future discussions on the integration of AI in pastoral ministry.

What has been written above shows that this text emerges as an original voice in the discussion aimed at answering the question mentioned at the beginning – drawn from the document of the Dicastery for Communication – which, when read in the context of the research described here, asks: How can a pastor engage with the digital world? More broadly: What guidance does practical theology offer pastors who wish to consciously and effectively use the possibilities of AI in their ministry?

1.4. Practical Character of the Research Findings

The theses above clearly show that the reflection of practical theology becomes indispensable when the Church seeks to incorporate AI into its mission. It helps clergy understand how technology can be consistent with Christian values and also establish ethical guidelines for its use in everyday pastoral work.

Emphasizing the practical importance of the research, it is worth noting that today's clergy face the challenge of adapting to modern technologies – including artificial intelligence – in their daily pastoral work. The research questions posed in the study respond to the real needs of pastors, who must understand how to use AI in an ethical manner that is consistent with Christian values while effectively supporting their ministries. The study's results help identify gaps in knowledge and practice, indicating directions for further education and formation.

It is no exaggeration to state that practical theology, in the context of AI utilization, plays a key role in helping clergy understand how technology can support their mission while preserving the personal and spiritual dimensions of their ministry. Through such reflection, the clergy can better navigate a rapidly changing digital world.

2. Methodology

Before presenting the analytical details, it is essential to clarify the subject and scope of the study, identify its sources, and briefly describe the data collection process, the characteristics of the respondents, and the methods applied. Particular attention

should also be paid to the research implications stemming from the chosen methodological tools.

2.1. Subject and Scope of the Study

The subject of this scientific endeavor is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin (a brief description of the diocese, necessary for understanding its specificity, is provided later). The study focuses on answering several research questions that comprise the research problem:

- Do clergy use AI, and what does the Apostolic See encourage (as noted in the introduction)?
- In what way do clergy utilize AI in their pastoral work: What specific tools do they use, and how advanced (professional) is their use of AI?
- What benefits and challenges do they perceive in its application? To what extent are their practices and perceived challenges in line with the Church's teaching on digital technologies, and how well does their usage reflect the Church's teachings on the matter?

The answers to these questions serve as the basis for drawing detailed conclusions regarding the clergy's use of AI. They, in turn, form the foundation for deriving practical recommendations.

In other words, this article aims to understand how clergy use AI in their work and the challenges associated with it, as well as how coherent this is with the Church's teachings. Such an outline of the issue reveals its current relevance and underscores the importance of this reflection within the scope of practical theology.

The issue of using new technologies, including artificial intelligence, in pastoral work is currently one of the key challenges to which the Church is attempting to respond. This is evidenced by numerous papal statements and Vatican agendas that directly address this topic.

Furthermore, in the document *Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media*, it is emphasized in the very first paragraph that digital technology is a tool that can support the Church but also presents it with new challenges

(Dicastery for Communication 2023, no. 1). How can AI be used responsibly so as not to lose the personal dimension of pastoral care, while still taking advantage of its capabilities? This question requires deeper reflection aimed at finding a balance between theory and practice. In the present study, which combines the analysis of empirical findings with theoretical assumptions, we seek answers to these issues in the context of the clergy's work in the Archdiocese of Lublin.

2.2. Empirical Data Collection

The empirical data presented in this study were collected through a survey conducted among the clergy (presbyters and bishops) of the Archdiocese of Lublin between March 27 and April 4, 2024. The questionnaire was distributed electronically using Google Forms and sent to all 861 clergy members via official diocesan communication channels, with the assistance of the Chancery of the Metropolitan Curia in Lublin.

A total of 73 respondents completed the survey, representing 8.48% of the target population. Given the relatively low response rate, the results cannot be considered representative of the entire clergy of the Archdiocese. The limited participation introduces a risk of non-response bias, as individuals more interested in or familiar with digital technologies may have been more likely to take part in the study.

For this reason, the research should be understood as exploratory and context-specific. Its aim is not to provide statistically generalizable conclusions, but rather to identify initial tendencies, attitudes, and interpretative patterns concerning the use of artificial intelligence in pastoral ministry within a specific ecclesial context. In this sense, the study functions as a pilot contribution to a broader research project and as an empirical point of departure for further, more comprehensive analyses.

The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions divided into two main sections. The first section included demographic and contextual variables (such as age, years of ministry, pastoral assignment, and work environment), allowing for the characterization of the respondent group. The second section focused on the use

of artificial intelligence in pastoral practice and included both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Due to the use of filtering questions, respondents answered either 12 or 19 questions depending on their earlier responses. For example, respondents declaring the use of AI were asked to describe the nature of such activities, whereas those expressing critical attitudes were asked to justify their position.

Google Forms was used for data collection and initial organization. The preliminary quantitative analysis was conducted within this environment, while qualitative analysis of open-ended responses was carried out using NVivo software. The complete dataset, including structured and editable files as well as the research instrument, has been deposited in an open-access repository (RepOD) (Wyrostkiewicz et al. 2025), ensuring transparency, reproducibility, and the possibility of further independent analyses.

While the quantitative data provide a general overview of attitudes and declared practices, the qualitative responses offer additional insight into the reasoning, concerns, and pastoral interpretations of the respondents. Together, these elements form the empirical basis for the practical-theological interpretation developed in this article.

2.3. Respondents – Research Sample

At this point, it is worth providing some information about the Archdiocese of Lublin, which serves as the space for gathering empirical data. It is one of the units of the Catholic Church in Poland and is the main diocese in the Lublin ecclesiastical province. It covers a region with a rich religious tradition, a well-developed network of parishes, and significant educational centers, the most important being the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The archdiocese is also an active center of pastoral ministry. In this context, it appears as a typical diocese in Central and Eastern Europe (Zahajkiewicz 2005).

All these factors make it a suitable site to analyze the impact of new technologies, such as AI, on religious practices and pastoral ministry, and for providing contextually grounded insights that may be indicative of broader tendencies observed in similar ecclesial contexts (Cooperman et al. 2017). A more detailed characterization

of the respondents (age, years of ministry, and pastoral roles) is presented in the analytical section.

2.4. Source Materials

As already indicated, the primary source of this study consists of empirical data collected by the authors themselves (Wyrostkiewicz et al. 2025). Consequently, whenever information concerning the attitudes of clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin towards artificial intelligence is referenced, it should be understood as drawing upon this original empirical material.

Source material also includes documents from the *Magisterium Ecclesiae*, which are typical sources in theological works. Among these, particular attention is given to: *Message for the 57th World Day of Peace "Artificial Intelligence and Peace"* (Francis 2023), *Message for the 58th World Day of Social Communications "Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication"* (Francis 2024b), *Message for the 60th World Day of Social Communications* (Leo XIV 2026), *Address to Attendees of the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence* (Francis 2024a), *Address to Participants in the conference "Artificial Intelligence and Care of our Common Home"* (Leo XIV 2025b), as well as the aforementioned *Towards Full Presence* (Dicastery for Communication 2023). These documents are subjected to historical-critical and contextual analysis, allowing consideration of their genesis, the authors' intentions, and the changing conditions under which they were formulated. This is done to achieve a more precise understanding of their content by situating the discussed problems within a broader cultural, social, and ecclesiastical context.

2.5. Data Analysis Methods

The primary research method used in the studies underlying this text is desk research – that is, the analysis of available sources and data obtained from earlier studies. This primarily concerns the report that serves as the basic source material (as mentioned earlier), as well as press articles, statistical publications, and other studies related to the use of artificial intelligence in pastoral ministry that draw on empirical research data. This method allows for the collection and

systematization of existing information, which forms the basis for drawing conclusions and identifying areas requiring further research.

Another important research tool is the comparative method, which is used especially to demonstrate the consistencies and discrepancies between the main report and other studies, notably *AI in the Church* (Exponential's AI Next et al. 2024) and *How U.S. Christians Feel About AI & the Church* (Barna Group and Gloo 2023). The first of these was developed by Exponential's AI Next in collaboration with AIforChurchLeaders.com, ChurchTechToday.com, and other leading organizations, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of awareness, adoption, and perspectives regarding AI among various church communities. The second is the result of work by the Barna Group in conjunction with the Gloo platform. Its goal was to understand how American Christians feel about AI and its potential application in the Church.

In addition, the study employs qualitative analysis of open-ended responses from clergy. This method allows for capturing personal reflections and experiences related to AI in their ministry. As a supplementary method, quantitative analysis of statistical data collected through surveys is also used, which enables an assessment of the level of knowledge and interest in technology among the respondents.

The analysis is primarily descriptive and exploratory in character and does not aim at statistical generalization, but rather at identifying patterns and interpretative frameworks within the studied context. The results of this analysis are subsequently interpreted within a practical-theological framework, allowing for a transition from empirical observation to normative theological reflection within the framework of practical theology (Osmer 2008, 128–30).

2.6. Interdisciplinarity and Complexity of the Research and its Outcomes

The combination of all these methods provides a multifaceted approach to the issue under discussion, linking theological and social perspectives along with other areas of knowledge that address artificial intelligence. The resulting work is thus of an interdisciplinary nature.

The interdisciplinary approach applied in this study arises from the need to comprehensively understand the challenges associated with the use of artificial intelligence in pastoral ministry. Combining theological, social, and technological perspectives allows us to capture both the spiritual and practical aspects of the issue. This approach enables both the examination of current pastoral practices and the identification of formation needs among the clergy, thereby contributing to the development of practical theology and support for modern pastoral ministries.

The complexity of the analyses presented here results not only from the integration of different scientific perspectives but also from the unique combination of theoretical and empirical approaches that complement each other. The use of interdisciplinarity enables the translation of theological reflections into practical solutions that can be applied in everyday pastoral work. The study integrates theoretical assumptions derived from Church teaching with the reality of clergy practices, offering a new perspective on the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of AI. This research model responds to the contemporary challenges of practical theology in the context of the dynamic development of technology and allows for the construction of a solid foundation for further scientific exploration and practical pastoral implementations. It not only enables an understanding of the current state of knowledge and practice among the clergy but also indicates directions for future research and the development of educational and formational tools. Thus, it possesses a very practical value, which is an asset for practical theology.

This study aligns with the current trends in practical theology, which increasingly draw upon experiences and data from other scientific disciplines. This opens the way for the introduction of original perspectives and research tools, enriching the field with new methodological and conceptual approaches. As an example, it is worth noting that in recent theological reflections on large language models (LLMs), scholars have argued that these technologies not only challenge the notion of human uniqueness in areas such as language, creativity, or meta-representation, but also raise significant questions for ritual and liturgical theology. Researchers working in

this field point out that LLMs may gradually penetrate liturgical practices and influence the functioning of theological language and symbols in the context of worship (Barnard and Otte 2024). In addition, there is a growing number of theological reflections on the place and role of AI in pastoral ministry (Przygoda et al. 2025; Przygoda 2024), particularly in preaching (Hussey 2024).

Although the present study addresses different questions and employs different methods, the referenced work – already present within the discourse of practical theology – demonstrates how significantly the horizon of research in this discipline is expanding. It also shows that the theological engagement with artificial intelligence is becoming an integral part of theological reflection and confirms the need for a deeper interdisciplinary dialogue – between theory and practice, theology and the empirical sciences.

3. Analyses and Discussions

This section of the article focuses on analyzing the research findings regarding the attitudes of the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin toward artificial intelligence in the context of pastoral activities, Church teaching, and global trends among religious leaders. In the following subsections, three key perspectives will be presented: the status quo of the Lublin clergy, their dialogue with the *Magisterium Ecclesiae*, and a comparison with the experiences of religious leaders from other parts of the world. The analysis not only assesses the current state of knowledge and practices among the Lublin clergy but also highlights similarities and differences between the local context and global trends.

3.1. Clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin and AI – Status Quo

The analysis will not only assess the current state of knowledge and practices of the clergy in the Archdiocese of Lublin but also identify similarities and differences between the local context and global trends. These results may serve as a foundation for further reflection on the role of AI in pastoral ministry.

3.1.1. Knowledge about AI and the Use of Technology in Pastoral Activities

The collected data indicate a relatively low self-assessment of knowledge about artificial intelligence among the respondents. Within the surveyed group, 30.1% of participants rated their knowledge at the lowest level (1 on a scale of 1–6), while only 2.7% selected the highest level. The average self-assessment score was 2.8, suggesting a generally limited familiarity with AI among respondents.

In the analysis of age-related differences, younger clergy members (24–35 years old) tend to report slightly higher levels of knowledge compared to older respondents. However, even within this subgroup, the declared level of familiarity with AI remains moderate, which may indicate that generational differences alone do not account for the observed limitations.

Although 67.1% of respondents consider AI to be a helpful tool in pastoral work, only 40.8% declare that they actively use it. This discrepancy may point to the presence of mediating factors, such as limited competencies, insufficient access to technological resources, or uncertainty regarding the appropriate use of AI in a pastoral context.

Given the exploratory character of the study and the limited response rate, these findings should be interpreted with caution and understood as indicative rather than representative. Nevertheless, they highlight a potential tension within the studied group between the perceived usefulness of AI and its actual implementation, which may constitute an important area for further empirical research.

3.1.2. The Usefulness of AI and Technology in Pastoral Ministry

The responses indicate that many participants perceive artificial intelligence as a potentially useful tool in various aspects of pastoral work. In particular, respondents point to its role in accelerating content preparation, generating pastoral inspirations, and supporting the organization of parish activities. This perception is reflected in the quantitative data, where 67.1% of respondents consider AI to be a helpful tool.

Based on the collected responses, several areas of AI use can be identified within the studied group. These include:

Preparation of liturgical and catechetical content: respondents report using AI to support the development of sermons and catechetical materials, particularly by generating structural ideas, examples, and assisting in the analysis of source texts. 57.1% of respondents declare using AI in this area.

Designing visual materials: AI-supported tools, such as Canva, are used for preparing graphics for parish needs, including posters and promotional materials. This application is indicated by 52.4% of respondents.

Planning pastoral activities: some respondents report using AI to generate ideas for pastoral initiatives and to support organizational planning. 57.1% of respondents identify this function as useful in their work.

Taken together, these responses suggest that, within the studied group, AI is perceived primarily as a supportive and auxiliary tool rather than a central element of pastoral activity. At the same time, the variation in declared usage levels may indicate differences in access to tools, competencies, or individual attitudes toward technology.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, these observations should be treated as indicative rather than representative. Nevertheless, they point to a pattern in which the perceived usefulness of AI does not always translate into its consistent application, which may constitute a relevant area for further empirical investigation.

3.1.3. Concerns and Barriers in Using AI in Pastoral Ministry

In addition to recognizing the potential usefulness of artificial intelligence, respondents also articulate a range of concerns and perceived barriers related to its use in pastoral practice. The analysis of the responses allows for the identification of several recurring thematic areas:

Concerns about the depersonalization of pastoral relationships: some respondents express the view that the use of AI may weaken the personal dimension of pastoral interactions, which they consider fundamental to ministry. In this context, emphasis is placed on the irreplaceable role of empathy, spiritual depth, and direct interpersonal contact.

Perceived lack of control over technology: respondents indicate concerns regarding the reliability of AI-generated content, particularly the risk of errors or misleading information. AI is described as a tool that requires careful verification and supervision, which may increase the time and effort required in pastoral work.

Ethical and moral considerations: some responses point to potential tensions between the use of AI and Church teaching, especially in relation to the generation of theological content and issues of authorship. Concerns are also raised about data protection and the privacy of parishioners.

Limited competencies and resources: referring to the findings presented in section 3.1.1, respondents associate the use of AI with insufficient knowledge and limited access to technological tools. These factors may constitute practical barriers to the adoption of AI within the studied group.

Lack of perceived necessity: some respondents indicate that they do not consider the use of AI necessary in their pastoral work, viewing traditional methods as sufficient.

Taken together, these responses suggest that, within the studied group, attitudes toward AI are characterized by a certain ambivalence: the recognition of its potential usefulness coexists with a set of practical, ethical, and relational concerns. Given the exploratory nature of the study, these observations should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative. Nevertheless, they point to areas that may require further empirical investigation, particularly in relation to the conditions under which AI could be integrated into pastoral practice without undermining its personal and relational dimensions.

3.2. The Clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin in Dialogue with the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* on AI

In recent years, the Catholic Church has emphasized the need for a responsible and ethical approach to new technologies, including artificial intelligence. Among the documents that explicitly address AI and analyze it in relation to Christian life and pastoral ministry are those introduced as source material in the methodological section.

A comparison between the findings of the *Report on AI in Pastoral Ministry* and these documents leads to interesting conclusions.

3.2.1. Alignment Between the Archdiocese of Lublin Clergy's Views
and Church Teachings

The comparison between the empirical material and selected documents of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* allows for the identification of certain points of convergence. These do not constitute a direct confirmation of Church teaching but rather indicate areas in which the concerns expressed by respondents resonate with themes present in official ecclesial reflection.

One such area concerns the potential depersonalization of pastoral relationships. Some respondents articulate concerns that the use of AI may weaken the personal dimension of pastoral interaction, which they perceive as fundamental to ministry. Similar concerns are present in Church documents, which emphasize the irreplaceable value of authentic human relationships and warn against forms of communication that may reduce or replace personal encounter (Francis 2020, no. 112; Dicastery for Communication 2023, no. 7; Leo XIV 2025b).

A second point of convergence relates to the perception of AI as a supportive, rather than substitutive, tool in pastoral activity. Within the studied group, respondents indicate that AI may assist in tasks such as preparing liturgical and catechetical content or organizing pastoral initiatives. This perspective corresponds with the broader approach found in Church teaching, which encourages the responsible use of digital technologies in service of the Church's mission, while maintaining the primacy of the human person (Francis 2023; Leo XIV 2025c, no. 25).

A further area of alignment concerns ethical reflection on the use of AI. Some respondents highlight the need to critically assess the moral implications of AI, particularly in relation to the generation of theological content and the preservation of human dignity. This concern reflects a central theme in contemporary *Magisterium*, where the development and application of artificial intelligence are consistently framed within an ethical horizon oriented toward

the protection of the human person and the common good (Francis 2023; Leo XIV 2025b; Zadroga 2025).

Taken together, these observations suggest that, within the studied group, certain intuitions and concerns regarding AI develop in a direction that is compatible with key themes present in Church teaching. At the same time, the nature of this alignment remains indirect and interpretative, rather than systematic or comprehensive, and should therefore be understood as a point of departure for further reflection rather than as a definitive conclusion.

3.2.2. Discrepancies and Challenges

Alongside the areas of convergence identified above, the comparison between the empirical material and Church teaching also reveals certain differences in emphasis and perspective. These differences do not necessarily indicate opposition, but rather point to a divergence between normative reflection and the practical horizon within which respondents operate.

One such difference concerns the relationship between the perceived usefulness of artificial intelligence and its actual implementation. While a majority of respondents consider AI to be a helpful tool, a significantly smaller proportion declare its active use. In contrast, Church documents – such as *Towards Full Presence* – encourage a more proactive and conscious engagement with the digital environment (Dicastery for Communication 2023, nos. 1–7). This divergence may reflect not so much a rejection of these recommendations as a gap between theoretical openness and practical readiness within the studied group.

A further difference emerges in the scope of reflection on artificial intelligence. In the analyzed responses, attention is primarily directed toward immediate pastoral concerns, such as the preservation of personal relationships, the usefulness of tools, and practical limitations. By contrast, Church teaching often situates AI within a broader social and anthropological horizon, emphasizing its potential role in fostering fraternity, solidarity, and peace (Francis 2020, nos. 205, 218; 2023; 2024a; Leo XIV 2025a; Parolin 2025). The relative absence of these broader themes in the responses may indicate

a more practice-oriented perspective among respondents, focused on concrete ministerial challenges rather than wider social implications.

Another point of divergence concerns the depth of anthropological reflection. In the Message for the 58th World Day of Social Communications, Pope Francis introduces the concept of the “wisdom of the heart” as a key criterion for evaluating the use of AI (Francis 2024b). This concept emphasizes the integration of technological competence with a deeper understanding of human relationality and moral responsibility. In the analyzed material, references of this kind do not appear explicitly; instead, responses tend to focus on the functional and instrumental dimensions of AI use. This may suggest that the reception of such concepts remains indirect or mediated through more practical concerns.

At the same time, the empirical material also brings to light issues that are less explicitly developed in official Church documents, particularly those related to the everyday use of AI tools. Respondents point to risks such as errors in generated content, the need for constant verification, and questions of control over technology. These observations, while not always directly addressed in Magisterium texts, highlight the practical dimension of AI use and may complement more general theological reflection.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the relationship between empirical attitudes and Church teaching is neither one of simple alignment nor of clear discrepancy. Rather, it can be described as a dynamic interplay between normative frameworks and practical experience. This interplay may constitute an important field for further practical-theological reflection, especially in exploring how general principles are received, interpreted, and implemented within specific pastoral contexts.

3.3. The Clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin in the Global Context of AI

To gain insight into the situation of the clergy in the Archdiocese of Lublin regarding AI on a global scale, it is necessary to compare data from other research areas. As mentioned in the methodological introduction, the research material here includes two reports: *How U.S. Christians Feel About AI & the Church* (Barna Group and

Gloo 2023) and *AI in the Church* (Exponential's AI Next et al. 2024). Based on the comparison of the information, both similarities and significant differences have been demonstrated in the attitudes toward AI between the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin and spiritual leaders of other religious groups operating in different parts of the world.

3.3.1. Similarities

A detailed analysis reveals similarities among the contents of the three reports under consideration, indicating a convergence of thought between the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin and leaders from other religious groups.

Ethical concerns: In the report concerning the clergy in the Archdiocese of Lublin, 37% of respondents expressed concern about the potential depersonalization of pastoral relationships. Similarly, the Barna Group studies show that 56% of religious leaders are worried about the loss of the personal character of relationships as a result of using AI (Barna Group and Gloo 2023). Both, the clergy in the Archdiocese of Lublin and global leaders, express the need for reflection on the ethical aspects of AI.

Lack of adequate technological knowledge: In the Archdiocese of Lublin report, the average level of knowledge about AI was 2.8 on a scale of 1–6, indicating significant educational gaps. Similar issues are evident on a global scale – the Barna Group report indicates that 42% of religious leaders see a lack of education as the main barrier to adopting AI in pastoral ministry (Barna Group and Gloo 2023).

Slow pace of AI implementation: Both in the Archdiocese of Lublin and globally, the actual use of AI remains limited. In the Archdiocese of Lublin, 40.8% of respondents declare that they use AI in practice, which aligns with global data – only 18% of religious leaders in the *AI in the Church* report claim to be fully prepared to integrate AI into their ministry (Exponential's AI Next et al. 2024).

3.3.2. Differences

A comparison also reveals differences between the opinions of the Archdiocese of Lublin clergy and the respondents participating in the Exponential's AI Next and Barna Group studies.

Increased caution among the Archdiocese of Lublin clergy regarding the adoption of new technologies: Global religious leaders more frequently declare their readiness to explore new technologies. In the *AI in the Church* report, 66% of respondents use AI occasionally, weekly, or daily. In contrast, within the Archdiocese of Lublin, AI is employed in a more limited scope, mainly focusing on preparing sermons, catecheses, and graphics.

Divergence in attitudes toward education: In the Archdiocese of Lublin, 81% of respondents see the need for technological education, whereas global religious leaders more often point to a lack of available educational tools as an obstacle (Barna Group, 42%).

Implementation of tools supporting pastoral ministry: On a global level, AI is not only used for content creation but also for analyzing parish data and planning evangelization activities (Exponential's AI Next et al. 2024). The comparison suggests that the scope of AI use among clergy in the Archdiocese of Lublin remains more limited, particularly in areas such as data analysis and pastoral planning.

The comparative analysis shows that while the Archdiocese of Lublin clergy share similar concerns and needs with religious leaders in other contexts, they exhibit a greater reluctance to adopt AI in their pastoral activities. Drawing inspiration from global experiences – especially regarding education and collaboration with secular experts – could help in more fully integrating this technology into their ministry.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of the clergy of the Archdiocese of Lublin toward artificial intelligence in the context of pastoral ministry, and to relate these findings to selected elements of Church teaching and broader research conducted in other ecclesial environments.

The results indicate that, within the studied group, artificial intelligence is perceived in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand, respondents recognize its potential usefulness, particularly in supporting the preparation of pastoral content and the organization of ministry. On the other hand, this recognition coexists with a relatively limited level of practical use, as well as with a range of concerns related to the depersonalization of relationships, ethical implications, and the reliability of AI-generated content.

The analysis also reveals a tension between the perceived usefulness of AI and its actual implementation. This tension may be associated with factors such as limited competencies, restricted access to technological tools, and uncertainty regarding the appropriate integration of AI into pastoral practice. At the same time, the responses suggest that attitudes toward AI are shaped not only by technical considerations, but also by deeper anthropological and relational concerns.

When interpreted in light of Church teaching, the empirical material points to areas of both convergence and divergence. Certain intuitions expressed by respondents – particularly those concerning the importance of personal relationships and ethical responsibility – resonate with themes present in Magisterium documents. At the same time, differences emerge in the scope and depth of reflection, especially in relation to the broader social and anthropological dimensions of artificial intelligence.

Given the exploratory character of the study and the limited response rate, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire clergy of the Archdiocese. Rather, they should be understood as indicative of tendencies and interpretative patterns within the studied group. In this sense, the study functions as a pilot contribution, identifying areas that may require further empirical investigation.

From the perspective of practical theology, the results highlight the importance of grounding normative reflection in empirical observation. The study illustrates how the analysis of concrete pastoral contexts may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges associated with the use of artificial intelligence in ministry. It also confirms that the encounter between theological

reflection and empirical research is not merely methodological, but essential for addressing contemporary pastoral realities.

At the same time, the findings suggest that the integration of artificial intelligence into pastoral practice raises questions that extend beyond the strictly local context. These include issues related to the formation of clergy, the ethical use of technology, and the preservation of the personal dimension of pastoral relationships in an increasingly digital environment. The responses analyzed in this study indicate that these challenges are already present at the level of everyday pastoral experience, even if they are not always articulated in broader theoretical terms.

In this perspective, the study points to the relevance of further interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, social sciences, and technological disciplines. Such dialogue may contribute to a better understanding of both the opportunities and the limitations associated with the use of artificial intelligence in religious contexts, as well as to the development of more adequate forms of reflection and practice.

Although the present research does not allow for general conclusions at a global level, it may serve as a point of reference for further comparative studies and for the gradual construction of a more comprehensive understanding of the role of artificial intelligence in pastoral ministry. In this sense, the study does not close the discussion, but rather opens a space for further empirical and theoretical exploration.

Duszpasterstwo w erze algorytmów – wyzwania, dostosowanie i perspektywy na przykładzie diecezji katolickiej w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej

Abstrakt: Rosnąca rola sztucznej inteligencji w różnych obszarach życia rodzi pytania o jej wpływ na duszpasterstwo. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje wykorzystanie AI w Archidiecezji Lubelskiej w Polsce, wskazując zarówno na możliwości, jak i na wyzwania dostrzegane przez duchownych katolickich. Sztuczna inteligencja może wspierać duszpasterzy w wybranych obszarach pracy pastoralnej, ale zarazem wywołuje pytania natury etycznej, teologicznej i antropologicznej, zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do ryzyka depersonalizacji relacji duszpasterskich. Badanie, oparte na oryginalnych danych empirycznych zebranych wśród duchownych oraz relewantnych oraz źródłach zastanych i dokumentach Magisterium Kościoła, wskazuje obszary wymagające pogłębionej

refleksji teologicznej oraz uwzględnienia w formacji duchownych dotyczącej AI. Wyniki badań wnoszą wkład w rozwój teologii praktycznej, ukazując, w jaki sposób badania empiryczne mogą wspierać refleksję normatywną nad odpowiedzialną integracją sztucznej inteligencji z duszpasterstwem.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuczna inteligencja, duchowni katolicy, społeczeństwo informacyjne, duszpasterstwo, troska duszpasterska, teologia praktyczna

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