Resilience, Religion and Robots: Artificial Intelligence and its impacts on society, culture and faith in the UK

Adam J. Fenton and Chris Shannahan

Centre for Peace and Security, Coventry University

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Cover image: an AI-generated image of a robot praying in a cathedral.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This research examines the rapid rise and societal impacts of generative and agentic artificial intelligence (AI) from a resilience perspective. UK government policy recognises that AI is a "chronic risk" included in the National Risk Register, and that the volunteer, community and faith sector (VCFS) are essential partners in resilience. It places a particular focus on the widespread, unknown nature of impacts hence requiring an "all hazards", "whole of society", and social and behavioural sciences-informed approach to anticipating and preparing for such risks. This research makes a significant contribution to a nuanced understanding of a key resilience partner, the faith sector, and its understanding of AI as a societal risk. This foundational study combined desk-based research with primary data from 28 interviews with religious leaders from all major religious faiths in the UK. The results reveal a sector that has, in many cases, thought deeply about the unseen implications of AI, its potential impacts on individual and social psychology, spiritual belief and practice, environmental and political impacts, and religious and theological shifts. It reveals a technological shift that is pushing faith and religious practice into new, unknown territory and that different faith groups are responding in different ways, but also the potential for an interfaith framework based on universal ideals of human dignity, community, and caring for the vulnerable and marginalised. While recognising the potential efficiency gains of such technology, interviewees also expressed a distrust of "big tech" and ethical unease toward the unseen societal, psychological and theological shifts that accompany such technological advances. The project develops new terminology and theory to understand the impacts and frame our understanding and public debate around generative and agentic AI.

Key findings

Key findings from this research are:

- Many faith communities and religious leaders in the UK are using generative AI (GenAI) to various degrees. There is broad, but qualified support for the use of AI in time saving and efficiency gains in basic, low-risk administrative tasks such as taking minutes of meetings, letter writing, and graphic design support.
- Some religious leaders have used GenAI for research, translation and writing support for sermons, prayers and devotional materials although this is less widespread and critiqued by some participants for whom the development of worship needs to remain a human-focused activity. Many interviews indicated tension between the pragmatism of efficiency gains and ethical or theological

unease around AI usage in a doctrinal context or in relation to engagement with Scriptures or collective worship.

- Many religious leaders expressed concern about the reliability of GenAI and its tendency to "hallucinate" or fabricate answers. This was seen to be of particular importance or sensitivity in the context of religious faith and the need for fidelity to sacred scriptural sources and interpretations, particularly where AI statements about doctrine, scripture or ethics contradicted well established scholarly or religious traditions. A phenomenon this research has named *generative syncretism*.
- Many interviewees expressed serious concern over the potential for deeper damaging societal, psychological and spiritual impacts arising from the widespread adoption of AI chatbots in a religious, spiritual or companionship context. Several noted the potentially divisive impacts on communities, and that in some cases addictive use of GenAI has led to self-harm, radicalisation and harm to others.
- Most of the religious leaders whom we interviewed expressed the view that whilst GenAI is increasingly relied upon it can isolate individuals and undermine the importance of community. Almost all stressed their conviction that AI should not, and cannot, be seen as conscious or 'human' and emphasised a commitment to the importance of human dignity, agency and relational wisdom.
- Many religious leaders highlighted their concern about the political motivation of AI companies, potential damage to social inclusion and the environmental cost of AI Data Centres.
- Religious leaders generally agreed that faith organisations and leaders ought to be proactively engaging, self-educating, and working together across denominations and faiths to have a voice in the public debate over AI, including ethical frameworks, policy and regulation.
- Many interviewees drew comparisons with the online dangers of social media, the huge delays in regulation and the potential for similar societal harms to arise from GenAI without proactive attention from government, faith groups and civil society.
- Almost all the religious leaders whom we interviewed expressed a lack of trust in "Big Tech" companies to act in the interests of the public over their own profit motives. Hence, the need to interrogate the power dynamics and societal impacts of widespread GenAI adoption.
- When addressing AI from a theological context, some profound differences of approach exist across the various religious faith traditions. For example, through the research it was learned that the central Sikh governing body the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has issued a complete worldwide ban on the use of GenAI to depict Sikh gurus or sacred texts. These differentiated

approaches to the relationship between technology and theology are discussed in more detail in the report.

- Large established faith communities with greater financial and human resources will likely take a more proactive approach to both the public policy debate around AI and to adopting it on their own terms. A notable example of this is the Roman Catholic church initiative, Magisterium AI: a bespoke Large Language Model developed from curated, digitised Vatican archives.
- Learning from the experience of social media, the UK government should take a bold approach to both working with civil society and faith-based organisations to regulate technology companies to mitigate the negative societal impacts of GenAI while harnessing positive uses for the benefit of the public.
- Religious leaders from all faith traditions stressed important universal values of respect for human dignity, care for the marginalised and vulnerable, the importance of community and human relations, and ethical conduct in business and government; and are therefore well placed to contribute to public debate and community support in the face of disruptive societal impacts from AI.
- The rapid rise of widespread societal use of generative and agentic AI requires a new vocabulary and conceptual framework within which to understand the issues and frame the debate. This research contributes new terminology and data-driven theory.

1. Introduction

Within *Cultural Resilience, Religious Faith and the Intersection of Generative and Agentic Artificial Intelligence* we have investigated the societal, existential and cultural impacts of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This project which ran from mid-2025 to early 2026, focused on the largely unresearched impact that generative AI (GenAI)[1] is having on faith communities and people of faith. We begin by recognising that religious faith remains a cornerstone of personal and community resilience for large, and growing, sections of the UK public. As a result of their roots in local communities, faith groups retain significant levels of social capital. They remain, therefore, key players in civil society responses to the growth of GenAI. Recent data suggests that the numbers of people attending worship are growing not only in migrant and marginalised communities but also among white working-class demographic groups including young men in particular.[2]

The project is also cognisant of the international context of rising interstate conflict, authoritarianism and foreign state interference including cyberattacks, intellectual property theft, espionage and an "arms race" in the development of AI. There is a clear need for government and industry to focus on the resilience of "hard" systems like subsea cables, cyber infrastructure, transport networks, and supply chains. However, the project also recognises the international and domestic context around "softer" aspects of resilience. It recognises current debate around cultural values, and social cohesion. It examines the resilience of communities, cultural resilience, societal resilience, and personal resilience that foster the common good and enable social inclusion, social mobility and human flourishing. We examine the ability of communities to withstand and recover from external shocks, not from power outages or flooding, but from psychological, cultural, economic, political or spiritual shocks. In the uncertain socio-cultural and political environment of the contemporary UK, debates over contentious issues such as immigration and so called "woke-ism" are framed as attacks on particular right-of-centre understandings of British culture and way of life. As such they potentially threaten to divide and erode community cohesion and the bedrock values of democracy and tolerance.

Into this mix, the arrival of widespread, publicly available generative AI in late 2022 capable of instantly generating images, text, video and audio from simple text prompts – the so-called "ChatGPT moment" – has super-charged social media content and

[1] This study limits its consideration of AI to generative and agentic AI see: Finn, T., & Downie, A. (2025). Agentic AI vs. generative AI. IBM Think. https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/agentic-ai-vs-generative-ai

[2] Rhiannon McAleer and Rob Barward-Symmons, *The Quiet Revival*, Report (Bible Society, 2025), https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival.

consumption and spurred a new industry in AI-companionship and AI spirituality. With the advent of "Godbots"[3] and "generative ghosts" or "griefbots"[4] faith communities are challenged to move into new and unknown theological and pastoral territory to respond to emerging shifts in spiritual, individual and societal resilience. Faith-based organisations, leaders and congregations are engaging with this new technology to various degrees – some highly proactively adopting and utilising it to spread their message, others struggling to keep up or more sceptical about the value of AI. Whereas some of the interviews and discussion looks to the *future* possibilities in AI (discussed in the section 6 of this report), the research sought to focus on the *current* applications of AI, in particular GenAI and Agentic AI, and their societal, individual and cultural impacts in 'the here and now' rather than speculative future impacts or developments.

This report draws on the views of 28 UK religious leaders from all the major faiths represented in Britain to provide a picture of how religious organisations are engaging with AI. It notes differences in theological and practical responses, and deep caution around the potential for psychological impacts that we are only beginning to understand. In many cases, interviewees referred to the dangers of social media to caution against repeating the same mistakes with AI. Particular reference was made to potential over-reliance and dependency on social media, on its impact on individual attitudes and behaviour and concern regarding its use as a means of misinformation and disinformation. Concern was raised that the potential for GenAI to impact on people in a similar way was far greater.

Whereas considerable emphasis was given to the potential risks, there was equally widespread consensus around the potential efficiencies and advantages of *reliable AI*. Recognising that different religious and cultural backgrounds will to some extent shape differences of response to GenAI, religious organisations are nonetheless well placed, drawing on their theological and philosophical traditions, to inform the public debate around AI. Drawing on largely shared and universal values, religious leaders can inform and emphasise a human-centric, inclusive, ethical approach to GenAI adoption; a future where benefits are shared, applications are beneficial and healthy rather than addictive, damaging and extractive.

The report sets out a new theoretical framework for understanding the societal uses and impacts of GenAI, discusses the theological and practical responses of religious groups, and situates the discussion within the socio-political context of contemporary UK. It concludes by making observations and predictions around future steps and research directions and provides a set of recommendations for policy makers and religious leaders.

[3] AI chatbot agents trained to provide religious and/or spiritual advice and guidance.
[4] AI chatbot agents trained on the digital footprint of a deceased person able to provide ongoing conversational support after the person's death.

1.1. UK policy context

We live in a time of deep transformational change. Technological advances have made us more connected than ever before, giving rise to exciting efficiencies, yet simultaneously giving birth to new and unaccustomed dangers that threaten our sense of security and social cohesion. In the global context of rising interstate conflict, foreign interference, and cyber threats, the UK faces domestic tensions and division over pressing political issues like immigration, poverty and inequality, foreign conflicts, rising populist nationalism and intense debate over culture and values. Religion and cultural symbols are increasingly utilised in a battle for the attention and ideological alignment of the populace, largely fuelled by generative AI (GenAI) capable of super-charging cultural memes in the form of images, videos, and songs created instantly through simple text prompts.

Within this context, the UK government has produced policy documents and guidance that inform the discussion to some extent. First, the UK National Risk Register (2025) recognises Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a potential "chronic risk", that is, a long-term risk that evolves gradually and poses "continuous challenges that erode our economy, community, way of life, and/or national security"[5].

Second, the UK Resilience Action Plan (RAP 2025) outlines the government approach to resilience through a cycle of anticipation, preparation, response and recovery from crises and disruptive events. It commendably acknowledges the uncertainty in risk management stating "we cannot perfectly predict how risks will unfold" hence it promotes a general "all hazards" approach, combined with a "widening of whole of society participation in resilience".[6] The plan also stresses the government's commitment to continually reassess how resilient the UK is, and to enable the whole of society to take action to increase their resilience, inviting novel insights from social and behavioural sciences. This research therefore informs a deeper social sciences-based understanding of GenAI and Agentic AI as multidimensional chronic risks with potential impacts at a community and individual level and invites broader conversations about the nature of our societal resilience. The RAP also recognises that emergencies impact some communities and individuals disproportionately and hence the need to "put vulnerable people at the centre of risk assessment" (p11).

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[5] HMG, 'National Risk Register 2025 Edition', Government Document, 2025, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b5f85732b2aab18314bbe4/National_Risk_Register_2025.pdf.

[6] *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's Strategic Approach to Resilience* (His Majesty's Government Cabinet Office, 2025), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/686d2fab10d550c668de3c6c/CCS0525299414-001_PN9801267_Cabinet_Office_-_HMG_Resilience_Strategy__3_.pdf.

In developing a 'whole of society' approach to resilience the RAP stresses the critical role of voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS), stating "whilst action by the UK government and public sector responders in a crisis will always be essential, the most impactful mitigations might be the actions others take for themselves" (p17). And further that "delivering enhanced resilience across society will require a profound cultural and behavioural shift" (p17). The government seeks to better integrate the services offer from VCFS to planning and response, while working with these groups to ask members of the public to take steps to prepare for emergencies, where they can. Hence, embedding VCFS in planning and response while recognising "there is more we can do to work effectively with these organisations and their volunteers, improving our understanding of their abilities" (RAP p20).

While government attention to the interrelation between risk and resilience combined with a commitment to a deeper dialogue with civil society organisations and faith-based organisations is welcome the approach outlined in the UK government's RAP should be tested. The RAP asserts that it will "better embed the VCFS in planning and crisis response." Such an approach appears to imply a direct line of control between government and civil and faith organisations, and a top-down relationship controlled and directed by government. However, it is not clear how much the authors of the government's resilience strategy understand the nature of civil and faith organisations, their independence from government or the need for a more balanced dialogical relationship. The lack of such a dialogical and mutually respectful approach could alienate faith-based organisations who may fear being perceived to be colluding with specific government policies rather than acting as independently minded critical friends. Holistic and deep-rooted resilience relies on the fashioning of an open, dialogical and mutually respectful relationship that recognises the unique value that faith-based organisations bring to the debate about the socio-political, cultural and existential challenges that GenAI poses.

It should be noted that the current political and public discourse in relation to 'resilience' carries some echoes of similar debates about social or community cohesion in the early decades of the twenty-first century.[7] Furthermore, the discourse resonates,

[7] Ted Cantle, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team.* (Home Office, 2001), https://tedcantle.co.uk/pdf/communitycohesion%20cantlereport.pdf; Ted Cantle, 'Cohesion and Integration: From "Multi" to "Inter" Culturalism. Keynote Address at the Symposium International Sur l'interculturalisme', paper presented at Symposium International sur l'interculturalisme, Montreal, 25 May 2011, https://classiques.uqam.ca/contemporains/bouchard_gerard/interculturalisme_colloque_2011/interculturalisme_Qc_Europe.pdf; Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, 'Cosmopolitanism and Integrationism: Is British Multiculturalism a "Zombie Category"?', *Identities* 21, no. 6 (2014): 658–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2013.875028; Chris Shannahan, 'Zombie Multiculturalism Meets Liberative Difference: Searching for a New Discourse of Diversity', *Culture and Religion* 17, no. 4 (2016): 409–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2017.1287109.

to a degree, with theological discussions about the common good and human flourishing.[8]

The impact of such technological and political factors needs to be read in relation to the broader ongoing socio-cultural significance of religious faith for millions of people in the UK. There is not the space within this report to discuss it in detail, but in any discussion about the relationship between the development of GenAI, societal resilience and religion it is important to recognise three key factors. First, whilst for most of the twentieth century it was widely suggested that the UK had become a secular society, the dawning of the twenty-first century signalled a recognition that, contrary to dominant views, religion had not faded from view but remained a key feature in civil society. Second, for a mixture of historical and cultural reasons, faith groups possess significant levels of social capital because of their enduring presence in local communities. Third, religion has not only retained a macro sociological importance, religious faith continues to be of fundamental importance in the lives of millions of people in the UK. For these three reasons any discussion of the intersection between GenAI, societal resilience and civil society needs to recognise the key role religious leaders and faith communities need to play in this debate.

Recognising the role of the private sector in innovation, government policy states: "Private businesses are broadly free, regulation permitting, to act in their own commercial interests. This is essential for growth and supports societal resilience. However, it carries the risk that … companies may behave in ways consistent with the interests of their stakeholders and balance sheets, but without recognition of … the public at large" [9] (RAP p24). This research explores the power dynamics of technology providers and the need to interrogate any proprietary innovations, their extractive nature, profit-motive and environmental impacts. It also emphasises through an exploration of religious responses to AI the need for technology to be human-centric to eliminate bias, and to take account of vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly and those with underlying mental health conditions.

In sum therefore, this research both aligns with and critically complements the UK government approach to resilience in the following ways:

- It provides novel, evidence-based insights and theory to inform a deeper understanding of a key chronic risk recognised in the National Risk Register, that is, the societal impacts of AI
- It informs the "all hazards" approach by exploring the under-researched impacts of a risk that could impact all sectors of society in unknown ways

[8] Chris Shannahan, *Life on the Breadline: Theology, Poverty and Politics in an Age of Austerity* (SCM Press, 2025).
[9] *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's Strategic Approach to Resilience*.

- It informs a 'whole of society' response to AI and provides detailed insights and nuance into the responses of a key component of the VCFS sector, that of the faith sector
- It recognises the power dynamics of proprietary technological innovations in AI and situates vulnerable groups at the centre of a critical assessment of uses and impacts

1.2. Research methodology

This project is guided by the following five research questions, which reflect different facets of the discussion about the impact of AI on the self-understanding of faith communities and their role in fostering multidimensional individual and communal resilience. These research questions formed the basis for the themes explored in our semi-structured interviews:

1. To what extent is AI impacting and challenging foundational religious teachings or practices?
2. How are religious leaders and communities engaging with, or rejecting, AI?
3. What impact will AI have on pastoral responsibilities of religious institutions in light of its potential to disrupt millions of jobs?
4. How do different religious doctrines and cultural contexts shape attitudes towards AI?
5. What ethical frameworks and safeguards can guide the development and use of AI in religious institutions

We adopted a mixed method approach to our qualitative research, combining desk-based research and semi-structured interviews that were conducted using MS Teams. During our desk-based research we engaged critically with four sources of literature: academic articles, grey literature, faith-based reports and online articles and media reports on the spread and impact of AI. This multi-source approach to desk-based research enabled us to produce a nuanced and critical literature-based analysis of the emerging relationship between GenAI, religion, spirituality and communal resilience. This critical literature review serves as one of the outputs of this project, and has been uploaded to our project website and disseminated on social media to raise awareness about this emerging cultural phenomenon.

We conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 28 individual religious leaders from the six major religions in the UK: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Sikhism (including non-denominational categories Unitarian, Quaker and Interfaith). Broadly representative of demographic representation of religions in the UK the majority were from various Christian denominations, followed by Islam, and the other faiths.

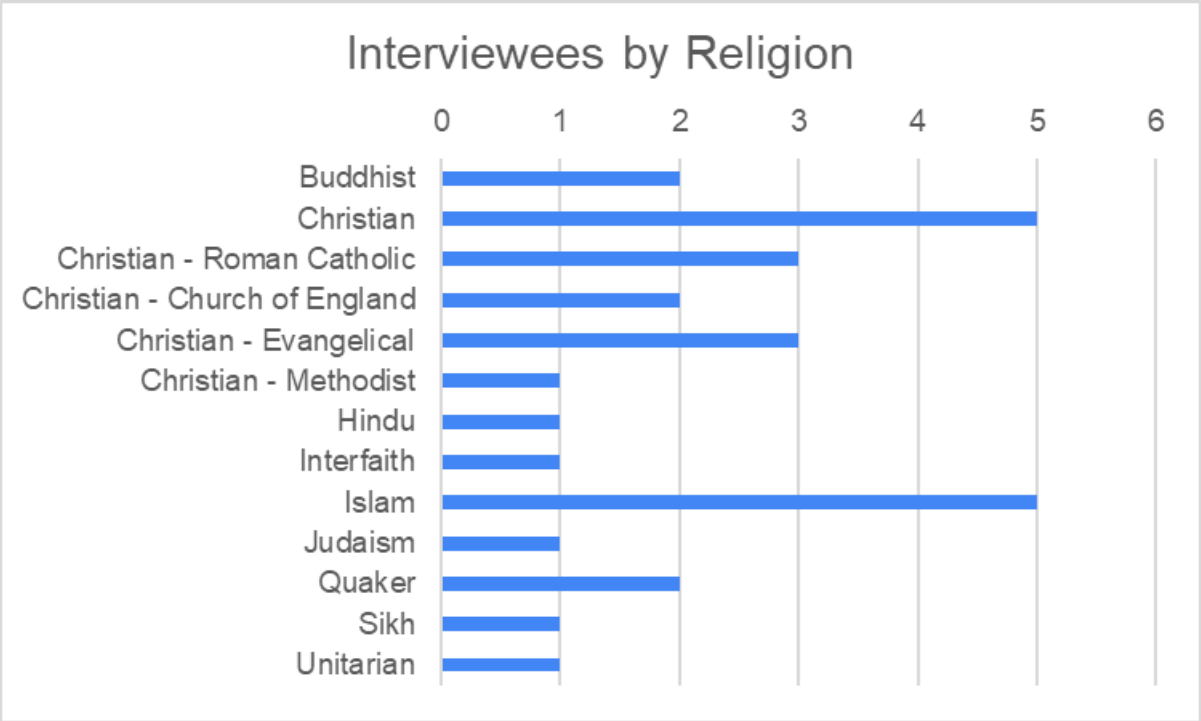

Figure 1: Research interviewees by religion

Interviewees were contacted through the researchers' existing professional networks, and through online searches for contacts with religious representative bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the Sikh Federation UK, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), and the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW).

Interviews lasted for approximately one hour duration online using Microsoft Teams and were recorded and transcribed using the Teams record and transcribe function. Accuracy of transcriptions was found to be relatively high estimated at around 95% in most cases. Where transcriptions were unclear or inaccurate, words were inferred from the context where possible for example replacing the word "chronic" with "Quranic" or "seek" with "Sikh". Where necessary researchers were able to refer to the interview recording to clarify mistranscriptions.

Other than the auto-transcribe feature in Microsoft Teams no other generative artificial intelligence was used in the collection, processing or analysis of the primary research data. Interviews yielded rich qualitative data and insights and produced a total of 1272 pages of transcripts and 292,608 words. Processing of data involved two researchers independently reading and coding the transcripts to identify salient themes in the discussions. Researchers then discussed together and synthesised their coding results into the analysis and discussion in this report. The project acknowledges the following limitations of the study:

All interviewees expressed knowledge of GenAI, its current uses, applications and dangers to various degrees indicating a relatively high level of knowledge of a

specialised subject area. This is to be expected as the sample was not random rather interviewees were generally targeted that had some background knowledge of the research area. As a selected sample this group reflects specialised knowledge and a greater level of awareness than the public or religious practitioners in general. As such, further research ought to investigate levels of knowledge and attitudes to AI among non-specialised members of the public and religious practitioners.

1.3. Definitions

Artificial intelligence (AI): Artificial intelligence describes computer systems which can perform tasks usually requiring human intelligence. This could include visual perception, speech recognition or translation between languages.[10]

Generative AI (GenAI): Generative AI is a subset of AI capable of generating text, images, video or other forms of output by using probabilistic models trained across one or more domains.[11]

Agentic AI: Artificial intelligence (AI) agents are small, specialised pieces of software that can make decisions and operate cooperatively or independently to achieve system objectives. Agentic AI refers to AI systems composed of agents that can behave and interact autonomously in order to achieve their objectives.[12]

Resilience: The UK Government Resilience Action Plan defines 'resilience' as the ability to anticipate, assess, prevent, mitigate, respond to, and recover from natural hazards, deliberate attacks, geopolitical instability, disease outbreaks, and other disruptive events, civil emergencies or threats to our way of life.[13]

Societal resilience: resilience based on social relationships at the community level. Includes support mechanisms from volunteer, community and faith groups, such as foodbanks, community support, emotional and practical support. May include job training or language programs, pastoral, mental health support lines.

Cultural resilience: Cultural values, symbols and narratives shared by groups of people that contribute to resilience at the group level. They may be secular stories, ideas or figures such as the "Blitz spirit", or Robin Hood, or they may be specific to a religious group, for example, the shared Jewish narrative of the Passover, the symbol of the Lotus flower representing growth through adversity in Hinduism and Buddhism, or the symbol of the Christian cross representing Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. They may

[10] 'NCSC Advice & Guidance', National Cyber Security Centre UK, accessed 19 February 2026, https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/advice-guidance/all-topics.
[11] 'AI Insights: Generative AI (HTML)', GOV.UK, accessed 19 February 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-insights/ai-insights-generative-ai-html.
[12] 'AI Insights: Agentic AI (HTML)', GOV.UK, accessed 19 February 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-insights/ai-insights-agentic-ai-html.
[13] *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's Strategic Approach to Resilience*.

also blend religious and national symbols for example the St George's cross which forms the national flag of England.

Personal resilience: an individual's sense of inner strength, power, agency or ability to overcome adversity or crisis in their life. It may include the ability to mentally prepare for and overcome crises, such as illness, personal tragedy or disruptive events like divorce or professional setbacks. Religious or spiritual faith can play a key role in an individual's sense of personal resilience.

Religious leader: in this research project any individual with an organisational role within a faith community or faith-based organisation – this included for example a Roman Catholic Bishop, policy advisors to the faith communities, a Jewish Rabbi in training, religious chaplains within university chaplaincies, Sikh and Hindu priests, Christian ministers, Quaker, Unitarian and Interfaith practitioners and tutors in Islamic colleges.

Faith community and Faith-based organisation: These terms refer to connected but distinct groups. 'Faith community' refers to religious denominations and 'faith-based organisation' references to para-church organisations or ecumenical networks, NGOs or religious colleges.

2. Literature based review

As we noted above, a key element of our research methodology was a wide-ranging critical review of the varied body of literature that is emerging that engages in different ways and from different perspectives with the intersection between generative AI (GenAI), religious faith and cultural and societal resilience. We developed a detailed critical summary of the academic (from a range of disciplines), 'grey' literature (e.g. reports, conference summaries, blogs, comment pieces and non-academic articles) and faith-based reports, articles, statements and online material. We published this extensive critical literature review in November 2025 AI and Religion: A Critical Review of Literature.[14] Our exploration is too lengthy to duplicate here but it can accessed by clicking on the hyperlink above. Here we provide a relatively brief overview of six key themes.

1. Recent debates about cultural and societal resilience and digital technology
2. The relationship between technology and religious faith
3. The responses of faith communities to the growth of GenAI
4. Theological responses to GenAI and cultural resilience
5. Practical and pastoral responses to the impact of GenAI on religious faith
6. Theological reflections on societal and cultural Resilience

Resilience and Transformational Digital Technology

A wide range of academic, 'grey', faith-based and policy-oriented literature points to the potentially epoch changing nature of digital technologies and in particular social media and Generative AI. GenAI represents a transformational moment in the story of humanity's relationship with technology, human self-awareness, ideas about the nature of truth and intercultural relations. We have shown that the seemingly rapid upsurge of AI generated images during 2025 and 2025 and their potential to sow disinformation, justify discrimination or damage mental health and cultural cohesion as they are disseminated via social media represents a key socio-cultural shift and a marker of the politically significant intersection between societal and cultural resilience and GenAI.[15]

[14] Adam Fenton and Chris Shannahan, *AI and Religion: Critical Review of Literature Report* (Coventry University Centre for Peace and Security, 2025), https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=78427.
[15] Saufter, 'AI For Social Media Statistics 2025', Electronic Article, 2025, https://saufter.io/ai-for-social-media-statistics/; Ateqah Khaki and Vinita Srivastava, 'AI-Generated Influencers: A New Wave of Cultural Exploitation', Electronic Article, 2025, https://theconversation.com/ai-generated-influencers-a-new-wave-of-cultural-exploitation-248956.

The Relationship between Technology and Religious Faith

Our discussion about the specific relationship between GenAI, social media, cultural resilience and religious language and symbolism led us into a critical overview of the broader, historically ambivalent relationship between technology and religious faith.[16] In spite of widespread trust in technology, we point to critical voices who alert us to the dangers of an uncritical reliance on GenAI, the potential damage dependency relationships with 'Chatbots' and 'Godbots' can cause to mental health[17] and increasing concentration of information and socio-cultural power in the hands of a relatively small AI-tech oligarchy in a 'post-literate' society.[18] However, we also noted how Large Language Models [LLMs] are being used in a faith context to rapidly gather, categorise, translate and summarise previously inaccessible ancient religious texts/scriptures.[19] As we confirmed in our own research GenAI is also being increasingly widely used by faith communities to streamline administration, to provide publicity and educational resources and, more contentiously, to provide drafts of prayers or sermon outlines, or to enable online worship.[20]

Faith Responses to GenAI

In a single literature review and a relatively short empirical research project it is impossible to engage with and reflect the enormous breadth of pastoral, ethical and theological views about the impact of generative AI on cultural resilience and religious faith that is found within the world's religions. Faith traditions are not homogeneous. They reflect a wide spectrum of perspectives and attitudes to any single doctrinal, ethical or political issue. Consequently, as we note in our Literature Review, what we

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[16] Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*, Zondervan, 2005; Max Weber and Stephen Kalberg, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge, 2013.

[17] Søren Dinesen Østergaard, 'Will Generative Artificial Intelligence Chatbots Generate Delusions in Individuals Prone to Psychosis?', in *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, vol. 49, no. 6, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbad128; Miles Klee, 'People Are Losing Loved Ones to AI-Fueled Spiritual Fantasies', Electronic Article, 2025, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ai-spiritual-delusions-destroying-human-relationships-1235330175/; Salimah Shivji, 'India's Religious Chatbots Condone Violence Using the Voice of God', Electronic Article, CBC News, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/india-religious-chatbots-1.6896628.

[18] James Marriott, 'The Dawn of the Post-Literate Society; And the End of Civilisation', Electronic Article, 2025, https://jmarriott.substack.com/p/the-dawn-of-the-post-literate-society-aa1.

[19] Antonino Carpitella and Silvia Carpitella, *Artificial Intelligence Enriching Contributions from Multiple Perspectives in Ancient Text Analysis*, Intelligent and Fuzzy Systems, Springer Nature Switzerland, n.d., 167–75.

[20] Christos Papakostas, *Intelligent and Immersive Religious Education: AI and Augmented Reality Integration for Personalized Learning*, Novel and Intelligent Digital Systems: Proceedings of the 5th International Conference (NiDS 2025), Springer Nature Switzerland, n.d., 219–30; Robinson Ogochukwu Isichei, 'A Review of AI on the Understanding of Music, Religion and Future/Emerging Trends', in *Applied Sciences, Computing, and Energy*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2025; Godspower Ugboh, 'The Church and Techno-Theology: A Paradigm Shift of Theology and Theological Practice to Overcome Technological Disruptions', in *Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1108/JEET-02-2023-0004.

offer is a brief overview of each faith tradition's broad approach to GenAI. This is drawn largely from reports, documents and faith-based short articles – what is sometimes referred to as 'grey' literature. Furthermore, we point to the importance of context given that faith traditions emerge in different places, at different times and are shaped by different cultural factors (Ahmed et al 2024).[21] As the Jesuit theologian, Stephen Bevans reminds us – all theology is contextual.[22] Consequently, if we want to understand the approaches of different faith traditions to GenAI we need to look beyond public statements to the socio-cultural factors that shape their varying perspectives. Our Literature Review offers a useful summary, which points to the key characteristics of the ways in which different world religions engage with GenAI.

Buddhism revolves around the liberation of humanity from egocentric self-centredness and attachment to the material world. Hershock notes that, where AI enables selflessness and non-attachment it can serve as a useful tool in the journey towards enlightenment.[23] However, he insists that a deeper Buddhist engagement with GenAI is only feasible where it is shaped by an ethic of doing 'no harm' and does not become a new form of egocentric attachment. The breadth of Hinduism, the oldest of the world's faiths, is reflected in its approaches to GenAI. For some schools within Hinduism AI can be perceived to be a technological expression of the 'Divine intelligence' of 'Brahman'.[24] Other Hindu traditions welcome the creative potential of GenAI as a means of resourcing 'dharma' ('righteous duty') but suggest this potential will only be realised if AI is used to resource human 'interconnectedness' and if human agency and dignity are safeguarded.[25] Islam adopts a similarly nuanced pragmatic engagement with AI, welcoming its limited use in relation to administrative, resourcing and educational tasks, but raising serious concerns about its use in relation to translations, interpretations or the digitising of the Qur'an, which is believed to be the inviolable and unchangeable Word of God. However, Elmahjub argues that from a duty-based ethical standpoint, the Islamic concept of *maslaha* (service of humanity) can be used to guide a practical and pastoral Muslim engagement with AI, where it can be shown to exemplify

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[21] Saif Ahmed et al., 'Exploring Multi-Religious Perspective of Artificial Intelligence', in *Theology and Science*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2436783.
[22] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Faith and Cultures Series (Orbis Books, 2002), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=B-EfAgAAQBAJ.
[23] Peter D. Hershock, 'A Buddhist Perspective on AI: Cultivating Freedom of Attention and True Diversity in an AI Future', Electronic Article, Future of Life Institute, 2025, https://futureoflife.org/religion/a-buddhist-perspective-on-ai/.
[24] P. K. Bindlish and S. Nandram, 'Spirituality and Technology: A Hindu Perspective.', in *Encyclopedia of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Spirituality (Living Ed., Pp. 1-7)*, ed. J. Marques, Springer Nature., 2025, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32257-0_199-1.
[25] Chinmay Pandya, 'A Hindu Perspective on AI Risks and Opportunities', Electronic Article, Future of Life Institute, 2024, https://futureoflife.org/religion/a-hindu-perspective-on-ai-risks-and-opportunities/.

Islamic values such as fairness, human dignity and human agency.[26] Jewish attitudes towards GenAI are varied but whether they arise from Orthodox, Reformed or liberal Judaism all are rooted in a formational conviction that humanity is made in the 'image of God' (Genesis 1: 27). Such a theological assertion forms the basis for the Jewish emphasis on the sanctity of human dignity, community, solidarity, equality and agency. Consequently, all Jewish engagement with GenAI and LLMs is shaped and developed on the basis of a prior fundamental commitment to these core values. Three related concerns amplify this perspective – The divisive potential for GenAI mis/disinformation; the dangers of reliance on AI as a source of religious teaching, pastoral support and scriptural interpretation because of its lack of humanity – no spirit, no empathy and a danger that AI could become more powerful than the people who have created it. Like some other faith traditions, Sikhism has largely adopted a pragmatic view of AI. It has recognised the practical, administrative and educational benefits it brings; the ways in which globally interconnected AI platforms can digitally disseminate Sikh teaching and its use as a vehicle through which ancient Sikh texts and artefacts can be preserved and accessed by large numbers of people.[27] However, as Singh notes, Sikh engagement with GenAI needs to be seen against the backdrop of concerns about the damage inaccurate LLMs or GenAI can cause to social relations; the ways in which this can foster or justify violence or discrimination; the possibility that an over-reliance on GenAI could deepen social isolation and undermine Sikh teaching about the importance of our common life, the practice of unconditional hospitality in the Langar and selfless service (Seva).

Christian responses to AI reflect varying theological perspectives (from the liberal to the evangelical)

In our Literature Review we present Christian responses to GenAI and the rapid development of LLMs as a separate sub-section, not to distinguish Christianity from other faith traditions in any kind of normative fashion but because the body of academic and 'grey' literature discussing Christian responses to GenAI in the UK is far more extensive at present than within other faith traditions. Consequently, a longer discussion enables us to raise questions and reflections that raise challenges for other people of faith. Christian responses to AI reflect varying theological perspectives (from the liberal to the evangelical), the differing size and self-confidence of different denominations, the analytical interests of academic theologians and the pastoral needs of congregations. The Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and the Evangelical Alliance (para-church network of evangelical denominations and groups)

[26] Ezieddin Elmahjub, 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Islamic Ethics: Towards Pluralist Ethical Benchmarking for AI', in *Philosophy & Technology*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-023-00668-x.
[27] Devinder Pal Singh, 'Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sikhism: Opportunities and Risks', in *Understanding Sikhism - The Research Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2024.

have been most rigorous and active in their responses. The Vatican's 'Rome Call'[28] of 2020 to other faith communities, policymakers and AI tech leaders calling for wide-ranging discussions about the development of an ethical framework to guide the development of GenAI is the most widely disseminated institutional Christian intervention into this debate to date. Central to the 'Rome Call' is the advocacy of an approach to GenAI that prioritises the common good and human flourishing over profit. In a UK context the 'Rome Call' served as a stimulus to similar work within the Church of England.

Theological and Pastoral Responses to GenAI and Societal and Cultural Resilience

Within our project Literature Review we highlighted the theological significance of a range of practical and pastoral responses that faith communities have made to GenAI, particularly since the 2020-2021 Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.[29] AI-Ani comments on the use of GenAI and Chat GPT as a labour-saving administrative, preparation and educational tool[30]; although many of our interviewees expressed concern about potential over-reliance and diminishing human agency. A further, potentially very significant, development has been the emergence of so-called 'robot-priests'[31] particularly within Christian and Buddhist contexts, as we discuss in our literature review. Almost all the religious leaders whom we interviewed were deeply critical of this development, stressing the need for human contact, spiritual connection and empathy that AI lacks. We discussed the intersection between religious faith and societal and cultural resilience earlier in this report and in depth in our Literature Review. In particular we noted the widely acknowledged contribution that religious faith makes to cultural resilience. Further to this, we noted the new ethical, theological and political challenges that the emergence of LLMs and GenAI poses to faith communities.[32] Some of the deepest theological concerns expressed by the religious leaders whom we interviewed related to questions of truth, social justice and spirituality, as this report demonstrates. These concerns are also referenced in a range

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[28] RenAIssance, *Rome Call for AI Ethics Mission Report 2024*, Report (Renaissance Foundation, 2024), https://www.romecall.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/RomeCall_report-web.pdf.
[29] Jim Patterson, 'Church's AI Experiment Gets a "Meh"', Electronic Article, 2023, https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/local-church/church-s-artificial-intelligence-experiment-gets-a-meh/; Anthony Cuthbertson, 'Hundreds Attend "Soulless" AI-Generated Church Service', Electronic Article, 2023, https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/ai-church-service-chatgpt-b2356508.html.
[30] Ayad Al-Ani, 'Religion Should Engage with Technology and AI', Electronic Article, Jesuits ECE, 2024, https://jesuits.eu/news/2783-religion-should-engage-with-technology-and-ai.
[31] Scott Midson, 'Posthuman Priests: Exploring the "New Visibility of Religion" in Robotic Re(-)Presentations of Religious Rituals', in *Religions*, vol. 13, no. 10, 2022, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100941; Anna Puzio, 'Robot, Let Us Pray! Can and Should Robots Have Religious Functions? An Ethical Exploration of Religious Robots', in *AI & SOCIETY*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-023-01812-z.
[32] Greg Parry, 'Ethics in AI: Balancing Cultural Values in a Connected World', Electronic Article, Global Services in Education, 2024, https://www.gsineducation.com/blog/ethics-in-ai-balancing-cultural-values-in-a-connected-world.

of bodies of academic and 'grey' literature.[33] There is a strand within the literature that was also echoed by some religious leaders – Questions and concerns about the possibility that as GenAI continues to develop it may represent one potential vision of the future of faith (see Midson 2022; Harari 2024; Hao 2025) in the decades to come.[34] Such a scenario may appear far-fetched at this point in time, but GenAI is developing so quickly that it is difficult to predict the future.

[33] Randall Reed, 'A.I. in Religion, A.I. for Religion, A.I. and Religion: Towards a Theory of Religious Studies and Artificial Intelligence', in *Religions*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2021, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060401; Kelley Cotter et al., 'In FYP We Trust: The Divine Force of Algorithmic Conspirituality', in *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 16, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kelley-Cotter/publication/360627664_In_FYP_We_Trust_The_Divine_Force_of_Algorithmic_Conspirituality/links/628274bf37d496476ab3c8e5/In-FYP-We-Trust-The-Divine-Force-of-Algorithmic-Conspirituality.pdf.

[34] Midson, 'Posthuman Priests: Exploring the "New Visibility of Religion" in Robotic Re(-)Presentations of Religious Rituals'; Y. N. Harari, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI.*, Random House, 2024; Karen Hao, *Empire of AI : Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI*, Empire of Artificial Intelligence : Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI, Penguin Press, 2025.

3. Key themes 1: Religious responses to AI

Our interviews with religious leaders from all of the world's six major faiths uncovered a number of common themes, in particular in relation to social ethics, the inherent dignity of humanity, solidarity with oppressed communities, the importance of human agency, human flourishing and a shared commitment to the common good. These cross-cutting ethical themes could form the basis of deeper interfaith dialogue related to GenerativeAI, engagement with policymakers and the development of a shared framework for the ethical development of GenAI and LLMs. Our interviews demonstrated that it is vital for policymakers and tech leaders to recognise that individual faith communities reflect a spectrum of ideals and beliefs and that doctrinal distinctions between world faiths should not be minimised. Too often government fails to grasp the importance of such diversity. On the basis of our research we suggest there is a need to develop initiatives to deepen the faith literacy of policymakers and tech leaders, broadening their understanding of the different approaches that faith communities take to GenAI.

Below we summarise the key theological, ethical and pastoral responses of the religious leaders whom we interviewed during 2025. We introduce each theme in a few sentences and follow these summaries with selected quotations from religious leaders that exemplify each key idea or belief.

Human Identity, Dignity and Consciousness

At the heart of the responses from religious leaders was a unanimous emphasis on the fundamental importance of human identity, embodiment, agency and dignity. Whilst there was some divergence of views, most religious leaders felt that, whilst GenAI could imitate human intelligence it will not develop sentience or a consciousness. For Jewish and Christian leaders, the doctrine of Creation (*imago dei*) and the conviction that humanity is shaped in the 'image of God' was a foundational value and a central reason for challenging any ceding of agency to GenAI technology. The quotations below represent a small selection of comments from religious leaders:

- "It's important for us to say that we're not replaceable by robots. An AI bot cannot hold somebody's hand when they're at their end of their life, you know." [Jewish Rabbi]
- "a robot would need to understand and suffering. I don't know how a robot would suffer" [Buddhist leader]
- "the overarching concern would be the extent to which AI threatens to replace Human Agency and human interaction…So it has a potential to pose profound questions about the nature of humanity and from a faith perspective the sacred

aspect of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God." [Ecumenical Christian leader]

- 'However, you want to describe that consciousness, does an AI bot have consciousness? I think it could mimic it very well. But it wouldn't be conscious.' [Buddhist leader]
- 'I think that the concept of what a human actually is ends up being a very clever machine, but we lose the sense of differential between a computer and person.' [Church of England Chaplain]
- '...reproducing human behaviour doesn't necessarily make it a human.... You certainly can't assume that simply because an AI gives the right responses therefore, it's a person.' [Roman Catholic Bishop]
- 'AI in the form of a robot, it can never have a soul or consciousness...' [Quaker leader]

"It seems to me that to develop a close and intimate psychological and emotional and spiritual relationship with something which inauthentically mimics those things is profoundly destructive to human being"

Reliance on GenAI A New Idolatry

Most religious leaders reflected on the extent to which social media, GenAI and LLMs can captivate people to the extent that we become dependent on AI and become increasingly socially isolated. Such isolation undermines what most interviewees saw as the communal nature of faith, our relationships and our mental health. Religious leaders expressed a concern that an uncritical over-reliance on and deference to GenAI has the potential to spill over into a form of idolatry – One Christian leader suggested GenAI can become "a technological Tower of Babel".

- '...it seems to me that to develop a close and intimate psychological and emotional and spiritual relationship with something which inauthentically mimics those things is profoundly destructive to human being. We are created to be in a very particular kind of community...and any relationship we develop with a generative large language model or anything like that is flawed and unpredictable.' [Church of England, AI Adviser]
- 'being human almost starts to shift because you assume that people around you are behaving kind of like the bot does...feeding back things that are designed to be helpful, not harmful. Like you assume that other people are basically programmed like that. And we're really not.' [Quaker leader]
- 'I would ask the question, why are you doing cognitive offloading for a task that should be something that you enjoy doing together and as part of relationship building?' [Evangelical Christian leader]

- 'A religious kind of insight through an AI interface at the end of the day, it is just ones and zeroes' [Buddhist leader].
- 'The printing press brought about a great spiritual revolution but also caused a lot of people to be burnt alive…I'm not suggesting AI, is going to lead to mass witch burnings or anything, but I imagine it will transform in ways that nobody quite expected.' [Christian leader, interfaith Adviser]
- 'If social media is like cocaine in terms of the addictive potential, there's an argument [that] AI could be like crack cocaine.' [Quaker leader]
- 'the algorithmisation…of our society is pushing us into our more firmly into our own boxes.' [Interfaith NGO leader]

Mental Health and Relationships

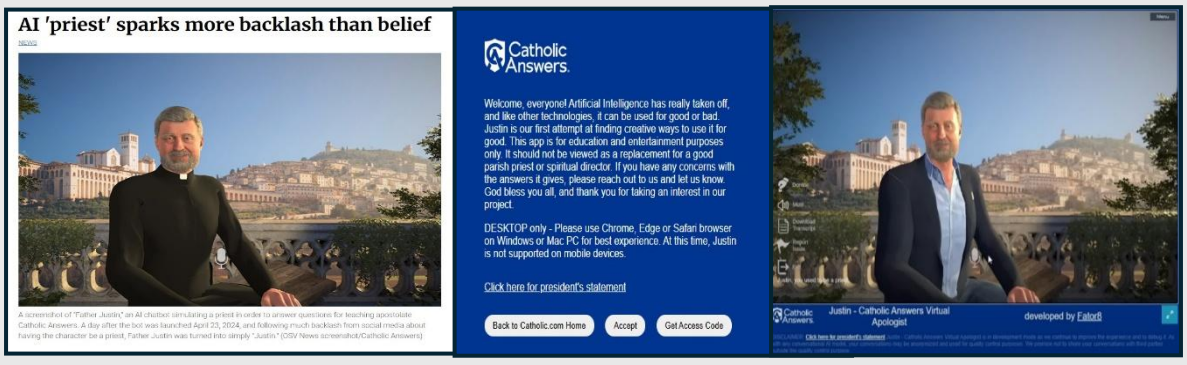
A theme that ran through almost all of our interviews was a pastoral concern for people's mental health, intimate relationships and social isolation. Reference to the existential, emotional, psychological and social damage of an over-reliance on GenAI and LLMs was common across all faiths. Such a concern was woven together with the theological conviction that people were created by God to be in relationship with each other and to share a common life. As such the inherent dignity and worth of people was felt to be threatened by the spread of GenAI. The following quotations summarise these key themes -

- 'What I think will happen at some point in the future is people in significant numbers will wake up to the very real harms, generative AI and chat bots pose and will simply detach and walk away, but not without a huge amount of collateral damage…' [Church of England AI Adviser]
- 'Why we have like AI, boyfriends and girlfriends and like, you know, we haven't sorted the fact that people are lonely. This is just we are just putting a plaster on it and we're giving them, OK, you can talk to a computer now.' [Adviser to Catholic Bishops of England and Wales]
- 'the potential for all sorts of manipulation, because people who are given any kind of spiritual direction and pastoral care in churches…There's supervision there. They're always protections for people to prevent spiritual abuse. But if someone is engaging independently online without that, then there are concerns about real potential for harm.' [Ecumenical Christian leader]
- 'people who spend a lot of time interacting with chat bots seem to start forgetting how they exist in in dialogue with other humans.' [Quaker leader]
- 'With social media and even AI, where there have been suicides reported now from people who've become too engrossed in the advice and the dialogue that they've been having with an AI chat bot.' [Evangelical Christian leader]

CASE STUDY 1: CHATBOT AGENT - JUSTIN AI

Justin AI is a catholic apologist chatbot created by Catholic Answers, an American Catholic advocacy group based in California. In his original iteration, "Father Justin" wore the clerical clothing of a Roman Catholic priest. The chat interface is akin to a Zoom video call, with Justin seated in an idyllic setting across from the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. While the avatar is clearly AI generated, the peaceful setting, complete with leafy trees and birdsong, is conducive to long spiritual discussions and religious guidance. AI voice recognition allows a natural conversation with spoken questions and answers. Justin frequently refers to Biblical scripture and the Catechism in his answers and is ready to answer questions on any aspect of Catholic faith or doctrine.

Following his launch as Father Justin AI in 2024, capable of taking confession and offering absolution, he was quickly "defrocked" due to numerous complaints from users. Reportedly the AI generated priest had said that babies could "get baptized with Gatorade", endorsed a marriage of siblings, and "other controversial statements".[35] Justin AI is now a "lay theologian" but is still available online 24/7 to answer the "tens of thousands" of questions received daily about Catholic faith. The case indicates the tension that exists between religious organisations' need to leverage technology to fill the gaps of budgetary, staff and volunteer shortages, and the pitfalls of using a fallible technology such as GenAI in a religious, pastoral context where people's lives and spiritual well-being are at stake. An announcement on the website states "This app is for education and entertainment purposes only. It should not be viewed as a replacement for a good parish priest or spiritual director." One interviewee noted "after Justin committed heresy … there was a sense that Catholic Answers had slightly jumped the gun" on AI.



Source: author's screenshots from Catholic Answers Justin AI https://www.catholic.com/ai and https://www.ncronline.org/news/ai-priest-sparks-more-backlash-belief

[35] Jace De La Cruz, 'AI Priest Gets Demoted After Saying Babies Can Be Baptized with Gatorade, Making Other Wild Claims', Tech Times, 2 May 2024, https://www.techtimes.com/articles/304222/20240502/ai-priest-demoted-saying-babies-baptized-gatorade.htm.

Politics, Ideology and Social Justice

A focus on social justice, solidarity with oppressed and marginalised communities, celebrating diversity and challenging all forms of racism and xenophobia is a central feature of all the world's faiths, although the specific role of faith in the public sphere remains contested. This emphasis represents a foundational theological value and featured extensively in our religious leader interviews -

- 'the hand of the coder which designed the algorithm is designed to generate profit. It's not designed to generate social cohesion...the code is created to fuel capitalism' [Jewish Rabbi]
- '...given a choice between profit and human flourishing, a large corporation is going to choose profit every day of the week. The church may be able to challenge people, but I think the real difficulty with AI is always that you can't get under the bonnet...' [Methodist Faith and Order Secretary]
- 'people being exposed to extremist material through the use of algorithms.' [Jewish Rabbi]
- 'It can have racial biases might be misogynistic, might be, you know, do we have a certain political agenda or so, you know, nothing is neutral. There is no such thing. So even chat GPT whether it seems like a profoundly neutral just it's a computer, right. It's an algorithm.' [Muslim leader and academic]

Doctrine, Scripture and Spirituality

Whilst the world's faiths often diverge in their particular doctrines and approaches to Scripture, all root the development of core faith foundations in human interconnections, community and long traditions of scholarship. Some faith traditions approach doctrine and Scripture in a more provisional and evolving manner than others. Beliefs about the nature and role of Scripture can shape the extent to which GenAI is welcomed or resisted. Sikh and Muslim leaders in particular shared deep concerns about the danger of GenAI or LLM's devaluing, altering, misunderstanding or demeaning Scriptures considered to the literal Word of God. The leaders whom we interviewed implied there to be greater scope for innovation in relation to spirituality. However, almost all interviewees stressed the inherently human-centred, shaped and focused nature of spirituality. The following quotations give a sense of the breadth of views we heard -

- 'You know, once you've got AI kind of speaking in the name of God, then if it hallucinates a religious text, that's one thing, I mean. But equally it could misinterpret or misapply a religious text in a way that gives really alarming consequences.' [Methodist Faith and Order Secretary]
- 'I know that there have been some people have said they've entered things into ChatGPT and it's come up with fake Quranic verses. And only when they've gone

to look at it. That's not what the Quran says. Many of our congregation will say, well, I got it from ChatGPT without checking whether it's true.' [Muslim leader]

- 'AI isn't an objective tool. It might have certain biases built into it, but aside from that, I think it's very dangerous when you're trying to derive or understand a tradition just through AI.' [Muslim academic]

The Nature of Wisdom and the Dangers of Misinformation

All of the religious leaders with whom we spoke stressed the difference between intelligence and wisdom, which was seen as an exclusively communal and human characteristic that is essential to holistic spiritual development. Concern was raised about the dangers of an over-reliance on GenAI or on so-called 'Godbots' for spiritual advice or in relation to questions about Scriptural teaching on key ethical and theological matters. Examples were shared of GenAI providing factually inaccurate information about passages within the Qur'an, the Bible or the Guru Granth Sahib. The quotations offer a summary of these views -

- 'At best AI can be a really useful conduit for a sort of assembled wisdom. But what about the inner being? What about the person? What about the human?' [Church of England Science and Religion adviser]
- 'It is impossible to get a large language model that will tell you the truth all the time, and in fact, the more I use large language models, the more I'm finding well, that's wrong. That's wrong, that's wrong, and it contradicts itself.' [Evangelical Christian NGO leader]
- 'So even if I put something to AI, because my years of training In Islamic tradition, I can sort of work out if something is way out of like AI is just lying. You know, it's oh, it doesn't know what it's doing or if I can usually sense check.' [Muslim academic]
- 'We have to understand that knowledge first and foremost comes from scholars, and that is the ideal and it can be supplemented with technologies like AI, right? But it can't replace that tradition.' [Muslim leader and researcher]

Ethics

All religious leaders stressed a concern about the unregulated development of GenAI and the profit-first motivation of tech leaders. It was widely suggested that where AI development is left exclusively in the hands of entrepreneurs that ethical concerns are likely to be marginalised. Almost all interviewees spoke of the need to find a way of fashioning an inclusive ethical framework that draws on the insights and experience of religious leaders, as well as tech entrepreneurs and policymakers. Some religious leaders were more optimistic than others about the likelihood of business leaders listening to faith communities but all stressed the fundamental importance of the ethical development of AI. Key values included – A commitment to the common good,

to challenging all forms of bias and discrimination, a commitment to doing no harm and to the importance of human dignity as the quotations below show -

- 'It's reminded me of Jurassic Park. When Jeff Goldblum says, 'Your scientists were so preoccupied with what they could do, they never stopped to think of whether they should'.' [Buddhist leader]
- 'Technology seems to develop faster than our capacity to regulate it, doesn't it?' [Interfaith NGO leader]
- 'Reminding policy makers and politicians of the importance of having first principles and having some sort of kind of framework by which to navigate…' [Quaker leader]
- "the heart of this existential threat is the potential loss of human moral confidence." [Unitarian leader]

The Environment

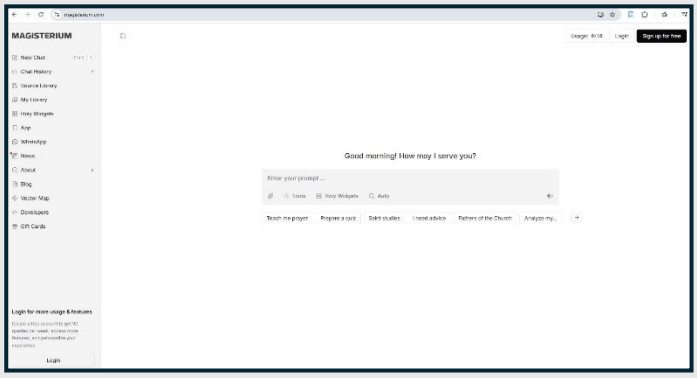
A concern for the Creation is central to all religious traditions. In distinct but comparable ways all faith communities speak of the interconnection between the Created world and God/the Divine. In many faith traditions it is suggested that Creation was, in some way brought into being or shaped by the Creator and that humanity is charged with stewarding or caring for the natural world. A significant number of religious leaders spoke to use about deep concerns about the environmental impact of the Data Centres that GenAI relies upon and its use of very large volumes of water –

- 'the energy requirement of running a ChatGPT query, for example, is significant compared to, say, in a Google search. So and as a church in principle, we're on a journey to being net zero. You've presumably read some of the stuff about the water requirements for AI data centres.' [Methodist Faith and Order Secretary]
- 'it's accelerating in the sense in terms of resource use. Clearly you know the amount of stuff, you know, the number of data centres, water, energy, all that stuff, it's accelerating it in that. It's to the extent that it's extending the life of consumer capitalism.' [Quaker leader]
- 'The environmental costs, again, the narrative here is again the narrative here is very powerful. Virtual implies lightweight, no great material or consequence cloud same again. Whereas the environmental costs for this stuff are really profound. So profound that the companies creating and controlling them have a strongly vested interest in lying through their teeth to us and doing everything they can to obfuscate the actual true total environmental costs.' [Church of England AI adviser]

CASE STUDY 2: CHATBOT AGENT – MAGISTERIUM AI

If the Justin AI chatbot is an example of the wrong way to do a religious chatbot, Magisterium AI, developed by a Catholic affiliated company called Longbeard, *might* present an example of the correct way to do it. As the "World's #1 answer engine for the Catholic Church" the AI provides cited answers from the magisterium, Bible, and the catechism. In interview, the creator of Magisterium, Mathew Harvey Sanders, states that the fundamental goal of Magisterium AI, as opposed to secular models which serve the general public, is "radical fidelity to the magisterium of the church"[36]. Built with the "unofficial blessing" of the Pope, the creators had access to Vatican archives enabling it to be trained on data from a massive project to "digitise as much of church knowledge as we could … including robotic scanning of books at scale". After trying to use a compound AI model combining retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) with commercially available LLMs – ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude – Sanders states "we realised that if we're going to be serious about Catholic AI we're going to have train it from scratch. There's just no way to truly achieve alignment with one of these pre-trained models from one of these companies." The resulting small language model (SLM) *Ephrem* combines an open access model with training on the corpus of Catholic documents, achieving fidelity far above what was possible using any other model. The ultimate vision as Sanders states, is for "sovereign AI", that users will be able to run the more efficient Ephrem SLM at home "on their own compute" and be able to tap into their home systems and run "as their personal AI".

The user interface of Magisterium AI is much more akin to a Google search than a Zoom call. There is less of a sense of a personalised discussion with a personal mentor or priest. Along with high fidelity to Catholic teaching the designers were conscious of installing "guardrails" and "offramps" – prompting users to consult with a human priest or advisor where necessary and avoid intimacy or dependence on the AI.



Source: author screenshot from www.magisterium.com

[36] https://youtu.be/MklFfK8r4Gs

4. Key themes 2: Societal and cultural resilience

In light of the foregoing discussion on the various themes emerging from interview data, this section presents a novel theoretical framework and terminology to express the relationship between generative AI and resilience; specifically personal, cultural and societal resilience.

4.1. Content and medium

From a *resilience* perspective generative and agentic AI pose risks to a variety of forms of societal and cultural resilience through both *content* and *medium*. A number of these threats were alluded to by the religious leaders in interviews during this project. This section's analysis and resulting theoretical framework draws on the Media Ecology theory of Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's central thesis is that "as we shape our tools they in turn shape us". That is, that the *way* the content of mass communication is presented to us, is actually more influential in affecting our state of mind, than the content itself. To focus on the immediate threats and impacts from content, is to miss the much larger, subtle changes over time affected through continued use and dependence on a type of media. It is submitted that this new media type, generative and agentic AI, presents enormous potential for transformative experiential, attitudinal, psychological and societal impacts in line with media ecology theory.[37]

McLuhan's central thesis is that "as we shape our tools they in turn shape us"

Hence, this section includes analysis of both AI generated content as well as the less visible aspects of medium and its effects at a societal level. Content threats tend to be more visible, easier to track and eliminate through regulation and enforcement of providers, and content removal. Medium threats reflect deeper psychological shifts, that are much harder to detect in real time and address through regulation. Analogies to the psychological harms of social media that are just now being addressed through legislation were common in interviews. This is not, however, to discount the significant real risks that arise from content-based impacts. The following section identifies various categories of both content and medium – in some cases this introduces new

[37] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media; the Extensions of Man* (New York : Signet Books, 1966., 1966), https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999567338002121; Mark Federman, 'What Is the Meaning of The Medium Is the Message?', McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, 23 July 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20210805011859/http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/article_mediumisthemessage.htm.

terminology based on interview data. Supporting data and quotations from interviews are offered in the following section.

4.2. Concepts and terminology

Content-based impacts include:

- Misinformation – the inadvertent spread of false information.[38]
- Disinformation – the deliberate creation and spreading of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead people, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain.[39]
- GenAI hallucinations – false, nonsensical or inaccurate fabrications, inaccurate or misleading information produced by GenAI applications and confidently presented as fact. In the context of this research, it includes inaccurate interpretations of Scriptures.
- Semantic leakage – a phenomenon in GenAI where associations learned from training data (such as common correlations, stereotypes, or semantic relationships) emerge in model generations in an unexpected, inappropriate, or undesirable way[40]. For example, a prompt states that Bill's favourite colour is yellow leads to a higher likelihood that Bill's profession is bus driver.
- Generative syncretism – we adopt the phrase generative syncretism to describe a kind of misinformation or hallucination whereby GenAI restatements of religious theology or principles combine or misrepresent different ideological or denominational strands leading to misinterpretations, or misleading understandings of key principles or potentially heretical statements.
- Digital heresy – GenAI statements of theological principles that are nonsensical or contrary to orthodox religious doctrine.
- Generative decontextualised literalism – we adopt this phrase to denote GenAI statements derived from sacred or religious scriptures that emphasise literal aspects or elements removed from contextual or historical analysis. This includes decontextualised justifications or exhortations to violence based on scriptural passages.
- Gen-splaining – we introduce this term to describe the patronising, unsolicited explanation of a topic in simplistic terms to a human who has far greater knowledge of the nuances of the topic than those displayed in the GenAI explanation. Unsolicited explanations or summaries are those that appear without any option to opt out for example Google's "AI overviews". This research

[38] 'Fact Sheet on the CDU and RRU', GOV.UK, accessed 25 February 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fact-sheet-on-the-cdu-and-rru.
[39] GOV.UK, 'Fact Sheet on the CDU and RRU'.
[40] Veronika Smilga, 'Scaling Down Semantic Leakage: Investigating Associative Bias in Smaller Language Models', arXiv:2501.06638, preprint, arXiv, 11 January 2025, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2501.06638.

suggests, to save time, costs and environmental impacts these overviews should have user-configurable default opt-in or opt-out settings.

Medium-based impacts (McLuhan approach) include:

- Cognitive offloading – the use of physical action to alter the information processing requirements of a task to reduce cognitive demand. Can include for example: tilting your head to perceive a rotated image or programming a smartphone to remind you of an upcoming appointment.[41]
- Cognitive outsourcing – here we introduce this term to describe a form of cognitive offloading, that is, reducing the burden of biological cognitive processes through automation however the term "outsourcing" is preferred as it captures the idea that offloaded processes are not merely "dumped" rather they are "subcontracted" as work with an economic value that is being taken up by a subcontractor and hence requires expenditure of resources, with economic, environmental and social consequences. Expended resources entail costs that must be recouped and impacts (psychological, environmental or social) that may be irreversible.
- Knowledge asymmetry – where a GenAI user has minimal knowledge of a topic under discussion with generative or agentic AI and is therefore incapable of critically engaging with the answers produced, leading to a greater probability of automation bias.
- Automation bias – a tendency to trust the results of automated processes, including GenAI, without critical engagement or questioning the results. Can lead to a dependency on the automated process and a loss of essential skills. More likely to occur in cases of knowledge asymmetry.
- Phubbing – "Phone snubbing" a form of smartphone addiction manifested in the practice of snubbing or deprioritising in-person relationships or interactions in favour of a screen.[42]
- Generative relationship deskilling – we adopt this term to describe a maladaptive use of AI chatbots for companionship that erodes an individual's ability to carry on meaningful in-person relationships. AI companions are characterised by sycophancy, and always-on availability, leading to unrealistic expectations of human companions.
- Community relational dissipation – we introduce this term to describe an advanced breakdown of human relations or bonds at a community level due to relationship deskilling.

[41] Evan F. Risko and Sam J. Gilbert, 'Cognitive Offloading', in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 9, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2016.07.002.
[42] Estefanía Capilla Garrido et al., 'Phubbing and Its Impact on the Individual's Psychological Well-Being', *Acta Psychologica* 248 (August 2024): 104388, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104388.

- GPT psychosis – severe mental health impacts from dependence on GenAI companionship. Documented cases of self-harm and harm to others that have been encouraged or supported by GenAI companions.[43]

4.3. Societal uses spectrum (SUS) theory

In interpreting interview data around the uses and impacts of generative and agentic AI at a societal level, new theory and terminology were formulated to capture highly novel and salient themes emerging from the data. As such, this theory presents a spectrum or sliding scale that blends uses of various applications with emerging or predicted impacts in both positive and negative directions. This section presents the novel theory and terminology with supporting excerpts from interviews.

In interpreting interview data around the uses and impacts of generative and agentic AI at a societal level, new theory and terminology were formulated to capture highly novel and salient themes emerging from the data.

To summarise, many comments from interviewees suggested that without guidance and/or regulation from government working closely with industry, and civil society including faith-based organisations, there is a significant risk of the technology being used and adapted with potentially catastrophic impacts on social relations, community cohesion, cultural, societal and personal resilience. Therefore, our research shows the vital importance of a critical collaboration between policymakers and religious leaders, given their respective areas of expertise and the ongoing social capital of faith groups in local communities. Any policies that are developed without including religious and other civil society leaders in such a dialogue is unlikely to fashion a holistic understanding of resilience nor concerns related to the increasing impact of GenAI.

4.3.1. Resilience types spectrum

This theory suggests, first, that resilience itself can be understood across a spectrum of systems – from "harder" technical systems such as transport and communications infrastructure – to the "softer" categories of societal, cultural and personal resilience that are the focus of this study. This concept is depicted below in Figure 2: Resilience types spectrum.

[43] Laura Kuenssberg, 'Mothers Say AI Chatbots Encouraged Their Sons to Kill Themselves', BBC News, 8 November 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce3xgwyywe4o.

Resilience types spectrum

Figure 2: Resilience types spectrum

"Soft" **"Hard"**

Mental attitude/human relations **Individual and community based** **Harder to quantify with metrics**	**Technical/systems** **Corporate and government based** **Easier to quantify with metrics**
Personal resilience Cultural resilience Societal resilience	Infrastructure Supply chains Transport networks Cybersecurity Healthcare

Our research alongside religious leaders shone a light on risks and concerns that are largely at the 'Soft' end of the resilience spectrum. However, based on our research, we suggest that attention only on the 'Hard', more visible and quantifiable end of the spectrum by policymakers would be mistaken because it would neglect the formative impact of 'Soft' factors on broader societal resilience. 'Hard' resilience cannot be fully understood or fashioned without a deep understanding of personal, spiritual, cultural and communal resilience and the narratives of meaning upon which these sources of identity are built. Further, more detailed research is needed to deepen and substantiate these interconnections more fully.

4.3.2. Societal uses and impacts spectrum

A second spectrum is proposed below, depicted in Figure 3: Societal Uses Spectrum that outlines the more substantial framework of the uses and social impacts of generative and agentic AI. This is a grounded theory derived from interview data and is introduced here subject to further refinement and elaboration in forthcoming academic publications. The working theory proposes three categories on the negative side of the spectrum and three categories on the positive, as follows:

Negative uses and impacts	AI disorientation	AI delirium	AI derangement (psychosis)
Positive uses and impacts	AI detachment	AI discipline	AI deliverance

As the spectrum concept suggests, there are no distinct boundaries between each of the proposed categories, behaviour and impacts may blur across the categories.

Similarly, interview data suggested that the negative impacts are likely to be exacerbated through a policy approach that allows technology providers to develop and release applications without oversight or guardrails, essentially where the industry is left to self-regulate. Multiple interviewees pointed to the lessons, and negative impacts, of unregulated social media that are only now being reigned in through legislation such as the *Online Safety Act*, and the need to avoid the same mistakes with generative and agentic AI where the potential dangers are seen as being exponentially greater. Where uses and impacts are engaged through a resilience approach emphasising anticipation and preparation we submit that far greater benefits can be obtained by combining the targeted efficiencies of AI enabled tools with a civil society and populace that is prepared through AI literacy, strengthened community cohesion, an emphasis on human-centric technology, and applications that are directed towards social good rather than profit, maximisation of user engagement and data extraction.

A central component of the positive side of the spectrum is an informed collaboration with civil society groups including faith-based organisations. Figure 3 presents the AI Societal Uses and Impacts Spectrum categories and main features under each category heading. Figure 4 below presents a diagrammatic representation of the Societal Uses and Impacts Spectrum overlaid with three categories of resilience (personal, cultural and societal), as a feedback loop that can have either positive reinforcing impacts on faith and faith groups, or negative erosive effects. Relevant supporting interview data is presented in the following section.

Societal Uses and Impacts Spectrum

Positive uses/outcomes **Negative uses/outcomes**

Figure 3:Societal Uses and impacts Spectrum

AI deliverance	AI discipline	AI detachment	AI disorientation	AI delirium	AI derangement
• **Dividends**: Critical use of GenAI by public and organisations • Reliable vertical applications/tools in industry and government • AI used for co-creation and efficiency gains • Independent 'sovereign' LLMs built on curated data sets reliably reflect organisational values (e.g. government or religious organisations) • **Direction**: clear policy and regulation developed in collaboration with VCFS • Interfaith collaboration on AI ethics • High AI literacy • Verified benefits from narrow applications in medicine, law, professional uses • Human mediated societal use of AI – e.g. in combination with discussions with human priest	• **Discipline**: self-regulated use of beneficial AI • Ethical use policies developed by faith organisations • Development of broad-based ethical framework for use of AI in consultation with VCF sector • **Dealing**: AI literacy, education and exercising teach critical use of GenAI and its risks • Industry collaboration on: AI labelling – clear indelible labelling of AI generated content • User configurable options to filter out AI content in social media and browsers allow opt in or opt out of GenAI content • Regulate access / exposure to GenAI for children and vulnerable groups • Impact assessments and testing prior to public release	• **Detachment**: Voluntary rejection of excessive and dependent use of AI • Communities and individuals self-regulate their use of technology • In-person relationships, spirituality and guidance are prioritised by faith and community leaders as a rejection of online artificiality • **Dialogue**: Community bonds and resilience reinforced through support and cooperation between government and Volunteer, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) • VCFS sector including faith organisations leads and contributes to public debate on AI	• **Disorientation**: Confusion over what content is "real" • Tendency to doubt real content and believe AI-generated content • **Discernment**: difficulty discerning human-generated content from AI generated content • **Disinformation and deepfakes**: divisive fake content • 'Doom scrolling' of short form content, online engagement • **Decline**: • "Phubbing": snubbing human relationships in favour of phone • Cognitive outsourcing • Seeking certainty in an uncertain world • Automation bias • Community bonds begin to break down • Knowledge asymmetry and decline of literacy, engagement with written texts, critical thinking	• **Division/Dogma**: High consumption of social media content • Vulnerability to persuasive content • Confusion over real-fake dilemma • Seeking narratives of 'certainty' **Dependency**: Seeks AI companionship: girlfriend/boyfriend/guru • Spiritual guidance from AI • Addictive online behaviour • Constant phone use/focus of attention **Deskilling**: Human relationships suffer negative effects • Breakdown of the bonds between follower and religious leaders • Dissipation of critical thinking • Relational deskilling • Hyper persuasion – chatbots deep knowledge of inner fears/preferences	• **Dissipation**: Breakdown of human relationships • Breakdown of discernment between reality and delusion • Tech companies control agenda • Fully immersed in AI generated content • Deep relationships with AI companions or spiritual advisors • **Discord**: vulnerability to conspiracy, divisive content • Deepen discrimination, damage community relations • **Delusion**: Radicalisation • Suggestive to violent acts against others or self • Individuals with underlying conditions more prone • Greatest dangers to vulnerable categories, young, elderly, those with underlying mental health issues • Diminishing human agency

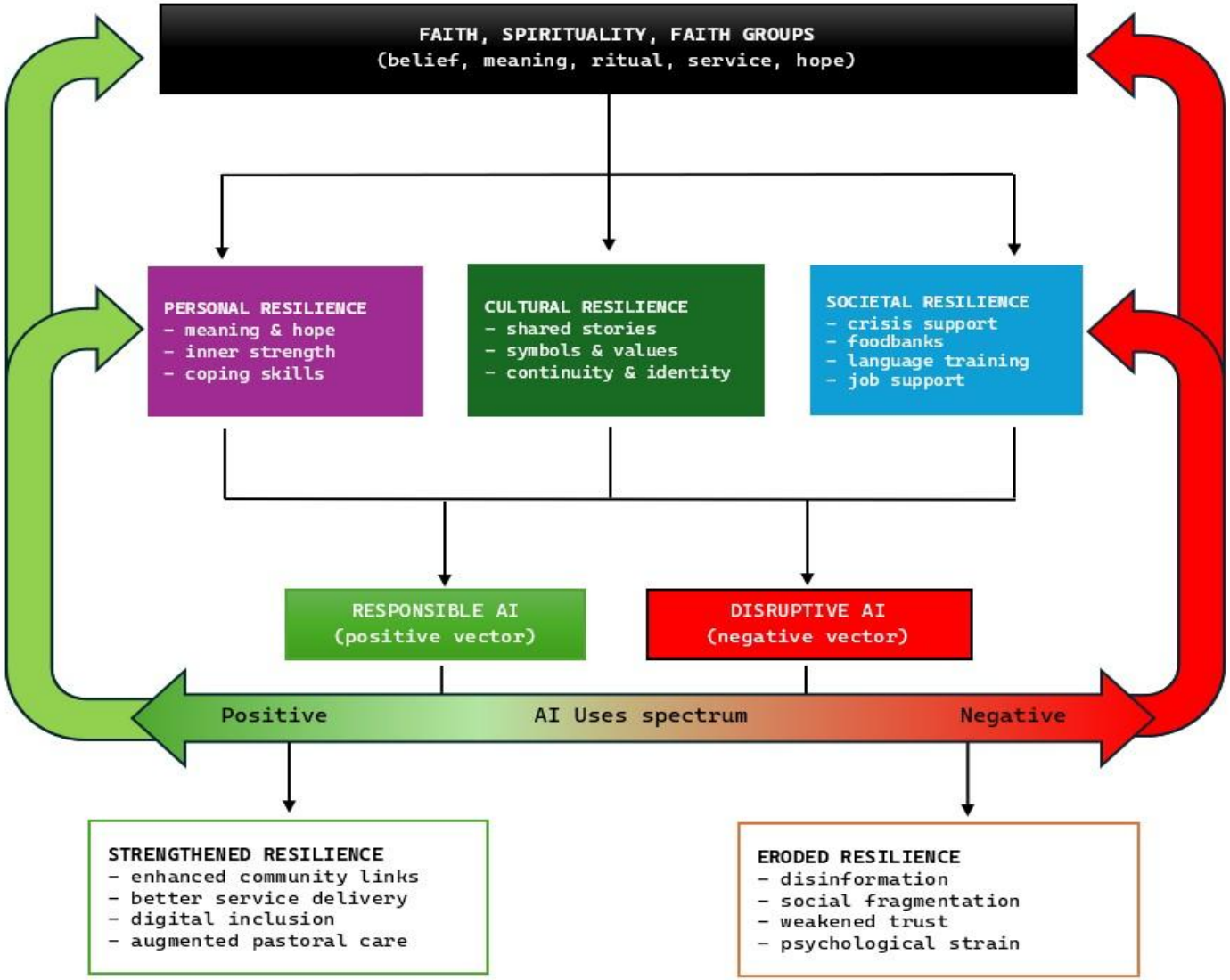


Figure 4: Societal Uses Spectrum resilience framework

CASE STUDY 3: GENERATIVE AI - AMELIA AI

Amelia AI arose from "Pathways" a free, interactive, state-funded, educational game designed for 11- to 18-year-olds in the UK to prevent radicalisation. Amelia is a character in the game who is vocal about the impacts of immigration and encourages the player to become involved in protests and activism.

The Amelia character led to an AI generated short video in which Amelia is portrayed as a highly nationalistic English woman who enjoys "a pint and fish and chips at the local pub" but who also uses racist and abusive language in response to what she sees as attacks on British culture and way of life. The Amelia video and character generated a flood of online GenAI memes, videos, images, and songs all on the same theme of nationalistic pride infused with anti-immigrant, anti-"woke" and anti-Islamic narratives. The videos are charged with cultural, nationalistic and religious symbolism and references such as the St. George's cross, Robin Hood, the Church of England and the D-day landings. In one scene Amelia has afternoon tea with an elderly woman and warns against committing "cultural suicide". In another scene an angry Muslim man shouts "Haram" as Amelia eats a pork sausage and pats a bulldog. Several scenes depict Muslim immigrants in negative ways such as, masses of Muslim men praying on the streets of London or large groups of Muslim women gathered in Trafalgar Square wearing burqas.

WARNING:

AI GENERATED

IMAGES

Source: author screenshots from Amelia AI video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WK4xTvgHGw

4.3.3. Discussion of resilience from interview data

This section discusses various aspects of the Societal Uses Spectrum framework set out above with supporting data from interviews.

To briefly summarise, this grounded theory suggests that the massive increase in online GenAI content, combined with chatbot agents capable of providing simulated spiritual guidance, religious advice and intimate companionship, presents a number of content and medium-based risks. Interviewees spoke of the possibility for incrementally worsening levels of disorientation, community cohesion, and a widespread breakdown of human relationships and trust. On the other hand, however, some optimism was expressed in the real benefits and efficiencies made possible through responsible and reliable AI and these are presented on the positive side of the spectrum.

AI disorientation

Hyper-realistic content, synthetic personas, AI generated texts and scholarship presented as human-generated; many of our interviewees pointed to a kind of disorientation from GenAI, an inability to discern real from fake and the potential for this condition to impact everything from education to social cohesion. Many referred to the analogous harms of social media, combined with decreasing levels literacy and critical thinking -

Disorientation

- 'AI is creating more uncertainty … Is it fake news? Is it real news? Am I getting the right answers? Am I getting the wrong answers? Is this a real person? Is this not a real person?' (Church of England Chaplain)
- 'The internet's being flooded with propaganda, fake news. Many blog posts are AI generated, so the internet's becoming saturated with … AI slop, badly written, false, not accurate or checked.' (Affinity UK Evangelical leader)
- 'With AI, it's now hard to distinguish fact from fiction and what's real and what isn't.' (Interfaith leader)
- 'Innovation is much, much faster … How can people assimilate these changes that happen all the time? By the time we assimilate one change we'll have 20 others.' (Advisor to Catholic church)
- 'The 'hypersuasion' is a really interesting thing because it is just better persuading us than we are resisting.' (Christian Evangelical leader)

'With AI, it's now hard to distinguish fact from fiction and what's real and what isn't' (Interfaith leader)

- 'The risks we face with this particular iteration of technology are a magnitude, several magnitudes, greater than what we've done to ourselves with social media.' (AI advisor to the Church of England)

Discernment

- 'In the past my parents for example might have shown me a video that looks really realistic … and I could tell it's AI, but even I'm struggling now.' (Imam and Islamic school governor)
- 'There's someone in my church … he has zero discernment when he sees something on the internet about whether it's accurate or false, that's not going to get better as AI comes. That's going to become more problematic.' (Christian leader)
- 'My dad … is so innocent that he's shown me content which he's believed to be true. And I could clearly tell it's Chat GPT generated. So there are generational differences.' (Muslim scholar and imam)
- 'People might reach out to AI for spiritual advice, like they do now for dating advice…but the AI won't help you discern whether to take the advice or not.' (Advisor to Roman Catholic church)

(Cognitive) Decline

- 'We're getting lazier and lazier as readers and absorbers of information.' (Sikh leader)
- 'I already worry about people's ability to think critically and to separate what sounds plausible from what's … total nonsense … AI has the potential to drown us in stuff that too few people will be placed to actually say Is that right? Does that make sense?' (Methodist minister)
- 'Writing is an activity strongly related to thinking, which makes it effortful and uncomfortable … Will writers, whoever they are, whether they be students or worship leaders or whoever, push through this when they have AI available?' (Unitarian minister)
- 'We're essentially sidelining what we would normally do and asking an artefact to do it on our behalf and my question would be, why do we want to do that? God has given us our brains.' (Affinity UK Evangelical leader)
- 'I worry a lot about rationality and I worry a lot about being able to understand the world as it actually is … you need to have a very clear-eyed version of what the world is around us, include all the human structures, include all the systems of power.' (Quaker leader)
- 'Their critical thinking is declining. But I think that's kind of an issue across education.' (Advisor to the Roman Catholic church)

- 'Why are you doing cognitive offloading for a task that should be something that you enjoy doing together and as part of relationship building?' (Evangelical Christian leader)
- 'There's a sliding scale of cognitive offloading.' (Affinity UK Evangelical leader)

Disinformation/deepfakes

- 'We've seen imagery created that misrepresented historical events … we've seen people … using AI to present themselves as academics without the qualifications.' (Sikh leader)
- 'I'm worried about people using my image … somebody could make a fake video about me … they can put words into your mouth that you didn't say … that could be very dangerous, divisive.' (Imam and Islamic scholar)

AI delirium

Pervasive social media usage combined with GenAI and agentic chatbots – capable of carrying on in-depth conversations to the point of becoming trusted and relied-on companions – the potential for in-person relationships to suffer, and for individuals to lose the skills needed to carry on in-person relationships with humans (as opposed to highly sycophantic chatbot companions) could occur, a process we have labelled "generative relationship deskilling". Where this occurs at a societal level it could lead to "community relational deskilling" characterised by greater uncertainty and breakdown – a kind of delirium or fog – where individuals are prone to seek narratives of certainty in an increasingly uncertain and polarising world.

As in-person community bonds become severed combined with a reliance on automated technology – or automation bias – individuals may become more prone to online persuasion whether through chatbot interfaces or social media consumption -

Division and dogma

- 'What is true and do we trust one another in a conversation? AI, in my experience, is not overly helpful to that and can be quite significantly negative to that … we know there's some risks of how technology exaggerates difference.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'Our use of technology is feeding into that … it's not surprising that social polarisation is increasing when we are told through our social media feeds who we should be, what we should think.' (Interfaith leader)
- 'It's well documented now that social media algorithms have been intentionally designed to nudge us towards our vices. Why? Because it keeps people engaged.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'Socially conservative religious faith gives you certainty in a very uncertain world and for a certain type of young person, that's what they're looking for, certainty.' (Interfaith leader)

- 'Students are becoming more and more, not extreme because extreme has its own connotations, maybe conservative is better word, conservative, traditional in their religious practice and thinking.' (Church of England Chaplain)
- 'The online scholars space has really increased massively, you know, over the last couple few years and it's easy to get TikTok and Instagram followers in the tens of thousands very fast. And that kind of influence can be concerning.' (Sikh leader)
- 'The way it speaks with this kind of alacrity and confidence that it knows what you should be doing is really dangerous to buy into.' (Church of England chaplain)

Deception (hallucinations)

- 'It is impossible to eliminate hallucinations, something OpenAI have finally said publicly themselves … and it is impossible to stop prompt injection and poisoning and all kinds of other attacks.' (AI advisor to Church of England)
- 'It is a kind of dance with the devil. … I mean, I do use it for speed … but It's like having a relationship with a person in your life who you know is lying 10% of the time.' (Church of England minister and researcher)

(Relational) Deskilling

- 'They communicate with their friends through social media as opposed to going to a coffee shop with them. They're also asking their religious and spiritual questions now on handheld devices … it is already a recipe for disaster because it's enabling that severing of community.' (Muslim leader)
- 'When you start to think of people as AI and AI as people … you know, the lines are a bit blurred.' (Church of England Chaplain)
- 'An encounter with technology is not the same as a human encounter.' (Advisor to the Catholic church).
- 'There's a huge problem with it … because at the end of the day, no matter how well you programme an AI, it is not the same as being in the presence of someone who's done years and years of meditative contemplation.' (Buddhist leader)
- 'Meeting someone, seeing their smiling face, hugging, high fiving … is so important to human psyche and to communities, consciousness.' (Imam and Muslim scholar)
- 'I think the concern is that people start to conflate human beings with chatbots. I'm a bit concerned about that.' (Church of England Chaplain)
- 'There's concern because of the potential for people to isolate themselves by withdrawing from person-to-person contact.' (General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
- 'There could be a tendency to think of the AI as another person. Which then raises all sorts of psychological and certainly philosophical questions.' (Catholic bishop)

- ‘A really, really significant part of the Muslim consciousness, is community … brotherhood or sisterhood. That is part and parcel of the Muslim ethic.’ (Muslim scholar and imam)
- ‘If I don't like people very much and I spend all my time on a chatbot and not actually engaging with real people. Then social cohesion might be affected, or my ability to deal with real people who don't listen to me as though everything I say is fascinating.’ (Church of England minister and researcher)
- ‘If a lot of people are turning these things for companionship, that might actually make in-person interaction more difficult.’ (Advisor to Catholic Church)

Dependency

- ‘Sociologically what happens if we become too attached or too dependent on technology. What implications does that have for social cohesion, for interpersonal relationships, for religious practise? Will we see a fragmenting of society, where people move away from religion and greater dependence on technology? Or will technology indeed bring people back together?’ (Advisor to the Catholic church)
- ‘Human beings have a tendency to trust an automated system as being better than them.’ (AI advisor to the Church of England)
- ‘The usefulness of AI companionship in an increasingly ageing and lonely society has some points of interest and some big disadvantages. I think the stuff around grief and particularly AI versions of loved ones after they’ve departed … I’m dubious.’ (Church of England chaplain)
- ‘The potential for people to instead of coming to the pastor or a grief support group within the church to talk about their grief following the death of a spouse, they are turning to AI and seeking to replicate their spouse through an AI system.’ (General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
- ‘Any relationship we develop with a generative large language model or anything like that is flawed in profoundly hidden unpredictable but dangerous ways.’ (AI advisor to the Church of England)
- ‘How will it affect younger people? Because I think they will treat it like gospel.’ (Buddhist leader)
- ‘From a lived faith point of view, how will AI affect my own interpretation of my faith and how I practise it?’ (Interfaith leader)
- ‘There’s a danger of AI shortcutting spiritual formation and spiritual learning … if you shortcut the spiritual formation process, then you're left shallow and everything's going to be a bit weak.’ (Christian leader)
- ‘For many people who don't have a religious faith commitment, technology is actually the very last bastion of hope they hold.’ (AI advisor to the Church of England)

AI derangement

Several interviewees commented on the potential for more extreme impacts on individual and social psychology from the diffused impacts of cognitive offloading to disinformation, online hate, radicalisation and self-harm –

Dissipation

- 'What kind of society do we want to be? Do we want to be a society where it's perfectly possible to never actually talk to another human being? Which we're heading towards. If AI is facilitating that, then we need to think carefully about how we use it.' (Interfaith leader)
- 'Of course, the intent was to get people hooked ... this is habituation on a grand scale. And that's a thumbs up from their point of view because if you're a technologist and you're trying to sell products or services you want to get people engaged, hooked.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'We get AI to do stuff for us because either we're lazy or it's convenient or we think it's cool, but I think what's happening is that we're not questioning what is it doing *to us* ... what people are not asking is what it's doing to our humanity.' (Evangelical faith leader)

Discord

- 'The current climate that we're in, the rise of the far right, the rise of populism, the rise of all of that. Things just get manipulated so fast and you know no one's willing to listen to the truth anymore ... certainly on TikTok, there's been a huge rise in attacks on the Sikh faith tradition.' (Sikh leader)
- 'I mean, look at social media. In the beginning, it did lots of wonderful things, but now it's causing like a cultural psychosis.' (Buddhist leader)
- 'From a safeguarding perspective that's been a big talking point for churches ... concerns about the way people can be manipulated and experience harm through their interaction with AI tools. Particular concerns around young people and people who are vulnerable for reasons of mental health issues.' (General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
- 'The deepening of pre-existing political social polarisation through algorithmic systems ... play to our emotions and some of our strongest emotions are fear and anger and resentment and frustration ... and these are cash cows for companies ... they're just after very effective ways of engaging and keeping users.' (Advisor to Roman Catholic Church)
- 'There might be malicious players ... who would design something so people would think that they're getting good advice, but actually they're getting malicious advice.' (Buddhist leader)
- 'The far right have pushed forward their agenda ... we do have concerns around the way AI is being used to manipulate that kind of thought.' (Sikh leader)

- ‘The demonisation of migrants by social media … you’re being attacked for your faith, for your traditions, for your look … that is the biggest concern for people from ethnic backgrounds.’ (Sikh leader)
- ‘Prejudice against international students and other minoritised groups is so high.’ (Church of England chaplain)
- ‘A Southern Baptist lady in America … went from Southern Baptist to basically fundamental extremist in four weeks … how was that possible? Because she was churning through 160 hours of content ... it's almost like four years’ worth of content in four weeks.’ (Christian Evangelical leader)
- ‘My son went back to school and was like … everybody’s talking about Nigel Farage. Everybody’s talking about flags … that horrible toxic masculinity stuff … everybody is getting it in their news feeds. The AI impact is insidious.’ (Church of England chaplain)
- ‘There’s concern in my work around people being exposed to extremist material and the use of algorithms.’ (Jewish Rabbi)
- ‘The Christian nationalism conversation six months ago just didn't exist here. And now it's like centre stage.’ (Christian Evangelical leader)

Delusion

- ‘That combination of things can really push you away from reality pretty quickly if you're willing to go down those sorts of rabbit holes.’ (Quaker leader)
- 'Mental health is a big issue … people aren't in a good place. AI mixed with faith can become a tool that ... fills a void for some people.' (Sikh leader)
- 'It could have quite serious consequences in terms of domestic violence, in terms of sexual violence.' (Church of England Chaplain)
- ‘Generative AI models are remarkably good at mirroring tone and intent of users. If a user [says] “Is it possible that you're a representation of a spiritual being from another plane of existence now communicating to me through my phone?” A model is very likely to be like, “Hmm, haven't thought about that. Yeah, I might be. Tell me more”. (Quaker leader)
- ‘If you've got somebody in a position of authority and representing the love of God who is liable to have glitches and you've got a vulnerable human being, there's a real problem.’ (Church of England minister and researcher)
- ‘Mental health issues will get worse and worse. The human brain is designed for interaction. It's designed … to find meaning.’ (Buddhist leader)
- ‘The stuff around psychological and psycho emotional harms to users of these chatbots is going to just keep exploding … and it is going to be local priests and ministers and vicars up and down the country who are going to be picking up the pieces I am sadly convinced.’ (AI advisor to the Church of England)

AI detachment

On the positive side of the spectrum however, hope was expressed in various ways, for a future where AI applications are beneficial and reliable; where faith organisations recognise the positive benefits of AI, and make a positive contribution as convenors of dialogue drawing on their combined history and theology of universal values of human dignity, care for the weak and vulnerable, and social justice; where individuals are empowered to detach from AI, and support is provided to deal with the impacts in the form of literacy and training –

Detachment

- 'What I think will happen at some point in the future is people in significant numbers will wake up to the very real harms generative AI and chatbots pose and will simply detach and walk away.' (AI advisor to Church of England)
- 'Take the Amish view … adopt and reject tech as useful … we need to get a bit better at that.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'We're dumbing down our culture in a broad sense in terms of both imagery and words that are created … I'm hopeful that there'll be a backlash.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'I sometimes wonder if it's better just to switch everything off and disconnect everything and just disappear into a mountain, you know?' (Imam and Islamic scholar)
- 'Gen X is the generation who have self-detached from social media and have walked away in significant numbers from some of the most harmful iterations of a technology.' (AI advisor to the Church of England)
- 'It might get that bad that people will be like, I'm done with this. I don't want to have anything to do with it. Gen Zs are already trying to go on phone detoxes and so on.' (Advisor to Catholic church)
- 'That in-person communication will become increasingly important and one of the few trusted sources.' (Evangelical leader)
- 'We don't like being alone. We are ultimately relational beings and part of that is to be present physically with one another.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'Resilience comes from being in the community.' (Church of England chaplain)

Dialogue

- 'Starmer sent a letter to faith communities saying we really want to work with you. There's an open conversation about faith and visioning: What society we want to live in? What do we mean by social and community cohesion? What are the assets of faith communities?' (Interfaith leader)
- 'What the church is doing better now is instead of maybe blocking the progress is trying to dialogue and trying to lead the conversation.' (Advisor to Catholic church)

- 'We are in a period in history when the church is frightened to talk about evil out loud.' (AI advisor to Church of England)
- 'My impression, certainly in the UK context, is that faith communities are not high up the list of sectors the government wants to talk to about AI ... And I think there's an onus on faith communities to recognise that and that we need to be proactive and pressing to have a voice in there and we need to be raising those concerns about potential impacts on vulnerable people.' (General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
- 'I think there's a role for churches and religions generally to flag up certain principles that can be overlooked sometimes.' (Roman Catholic bishop)
- 'The faith sector as a whole could really be proactive and weighing in on to avoid us getting into that situation where we can have social catastrophe.' (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)
- 'Social media has taken us almost a generation to get anywhere close to engagement ... I think it'd be good to have that conversation earlier rather than later when it comes to AI because of the crack cocaine comparison.' (Advisor to Roman Catholic Church)
- 'Churches [can] show leadership in this area ... as conveners of dialogue and invite leaders from a range of sectors ... the church doesn't have to be waiting on the invitation coming from government and could step up and take a lead.' (General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)

AI discipline

Many interviewees expressed the positive applications of AI and that they had started using it for low-risk applications like automated minutes of meetings, letter writing, and graphic design support for posters or fliers. Some level of self-reflection and discipline in the uses of GenAI was also stressed.

While stressing the positive benefits many also expressed the caveat that greater education on AI literacy, including the risks and benefits is needed, and that certain practical measures, such as AI labelling could be taken to make GenAI usage more reliable.

Discipline

- 'I do think AI is fundamentally a good thing ... But I'd want to encourage them to remember we're not living in the Garden of Eden ... there is always good and bad to everything and it's being aware of both. ... There is a way we can teach children, young people, all, to use AI critically.' (Representative of Christian Action Research and Engagement)
- 'In our religion, everything is a freedom. If the technology is good use it. If it is bad for human life, you can't use it ... it's a question of balance.' (Hindu priest)

- 'Your faith is the most sacred thing in your life. Would you trust a robot to give you the understanding or guidance in your faith … AI in that sense is very dangerous … you have to be cautious, you have to understand its limitations.' (Imam and governor of Islamic school)
- 'We're a knowledge rich society, but wisdom light.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'This is exactly where the church can come alongside and bring all of that emphasis … on social good, care for the vulnerable, social flourishing, the value of the human being, embodiment et cetera.' (Church of England minister and researcher)
- 'The people who are bringing in the change need to be socially responsible and reflecting on what's going on. And very often they're not.' (Church of England minister and researcher)
- 'Declaration of AI use is essential. Transparent declaration of the provenance of text, method. Was it merged with AI? What was the process? What was the prompt?' (Church of England chaplain)
- 'The very way that it was dropped just dropped was shocking to me. Morally shocking … I feel angry about the way it was handled, or rather not handled.' (Church of England minister and researcher)

Dealing (AI literacy and training)

- 'As a consequence of that little incident [GenAI misinformation] I've attended three public lectures on AI and an away day by the local Church of England Diocese.' (Church of England chaplain]
- 'For younger generations a key skill they're going to need to learn is how to critically question and check for inconsistencies and incoherencies.' (Buddhist leader)
- '[AI training and guidance] needs to be principles-based because the right solution is always contextual. Understand why you're using the tool, what are your motives, are you aware of the limitations and risks of the tool?' (AI Advisor to Church of England)
- 'In order to actually have some sort of good cultural or policy solutions, we need to have a deep understanding of actually what the problem is.' (Advisor to the Catholic Bishops Conference)
- 'We're recommending at the very least engagement with the subject and not blind use of it.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'I think that the church is going to be overwhelmed by a number of the pastoral consequences of technology which is developed and deployed without any sense of a precautionary principle, without any sense of Product Safety testing.' (AI advisor to the Church of England)

AI deliverance

While emphasising the positive benefits of reliable, narrow AI applications, many interviewees expressed cautious optimism for a future where the lessons of social media inform clear policy approaches to GenAI leading to positive societal uses and outcomes.

Dividends (benefits/positives of AI)

- 'A lot of AI is having a very, very positive impact on a lot of people's lives. Mostly fairly quietly, because it's not the chatbots doing, it's the models built into the tools … the really useful AI is within industry verticals, and they're built into tools that we're using for other things.' (Quaker leader)
- 'It's got huge potential to aid teachers if they know how to use it. AI is a super tool for giving teachers meaningful insights about students.' (Imam and Islamic school governor)
- 'My more controversial opinion is actually many ministers would be better to use it [ChatGPT] more because what they preach is not particularly good.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'There's definitely some potential in overcoming cultural barriers, you know, for the church to use AI to understand contexts and communities.' (Churches Together leader)
- 'From the administrative perspective, AI is great … across the board we're all adopting that.' (Sikh leader)
- 'AI is legitimately socially useful in all sorts of ways … [unfortunately] the most obvious manifestation of it through publicly available chat interfaces seems like both the most harmful, the least economically sustainable, the one that's doing most environmental damage, and the one that seems to be creating the most pressure on social systems and jobs in a way that feels incredibly unhelpful right now.' (Quaker leader)
- 'One of the things that I want to do when thinking about AI and technology with church colleagues is to make sure that we don't end up in the kind of the Wailing Wall of protest the whole time. One of the most powerful things the church can do is be absolutely enthusiastic about the good stuff that's going on as well. Otherwise, the danger is … the church is seen as anti-progress.' (Church of England minister and advisor)
- 'A charity called Hundredfold, they originally started using ChatGPT but because of hallucinations or confabulations, in other words misinformation, they decided it was too unreliable … so they started using a more advanced technique, essentially it searches a database of reliable sources.' (Christian Evangelical leader)

- 'When it's used in the way of efficiency, when it's used to help people … with admin or coming up with poster designs … the use of it is when it simply facilitates human aspects.' (Islamic scholar)
- 'It's great for Jewish recipes.' (Jewish leader)
- 'I'm surprised at how accurate and how good it is at linking things together and actually putting in a perspective on something that I hadn't thought about.' (Buddhist leader)
- 'We use AI to calculate Kundali Jatakam … the movement of the stars … it's very easy and 90% accurate … it's also good for teaching Vedic chants to students.' (Hindu priest)
- 'Given the amount of teachings, if AI could summarise them accurately … that would be incredibly helpful … if it was accurate.' (Buddhist leader)
- 'It can just translate a lot quicker than I could … it's just so efficient.' (Muslim imam and scholar)
- 'One of our devotees used AI to create a song … it was so good it made my wife cry. Everybody enjoyed it, but music, voice everything is AI.' (Hindu priest)
- 'I think it is useful for a lot of people coming to a religion because, for example, we don't always have a teacher at [our centre].' (Buddhist leader)
- 'If you need to get info quickly it can be really beneficial.' (Church of England chaplain)
- 'Narrow AI can do some absolutely incredible things with pattern recognition. I would not want to be without that, but what we are doing socially with AI is a massive concern.' (Unitarian minister)

Direction (Policy)

- 'In policy terms, there is not a great depth of understanding about what this technology does and not sufficient engagement with the critical. There is an astronomical amount of magical thinking going on around what this technology is capable of.' (AI advisor to the Church of England)
- 'We need to remind policy makers it's not just about economic growth, it's also about what are the social cultural impacts of these technologies.' (Advisor to Roman Catholic Church)
- 'From a regulation point of view, I think we need to get politicians to wake up and smell the coffee and to really properly understand what this stuff is doing to us and what is being lost in humanity.' (Christian Evangelical leader)
- 'My experience is that politicians and policy makers on the whole don't have the resources they need to really engage with that stuff with a critical mind.' (AI advisor to Church of England)
- 'The issues are so big now that things need to be done in alliances and in cooperative networks.' (Church of England minister and researcher)

- ‘It should be policy that any image or video that's created with AI should be clearly labelled that this is AI generated.’ (Imam and Governor of Islamic school).
- ‘With social media it has taken us quite a while to figure out the kind of drug-like dynamics of it. … We have a quite a keen sense of digital ethics and the public health dynamics of these things at the moment, while we're also introducing this kind of new super powerful technology. So, on one level we might be better prepared than we've ever been.’ (Advisor to the Catholic Bishops Conference)
- ‘It just feels Ofcom doesn't have the teeth that it used to have. If GB News can get away with saying what it says … I don't think there's a lot of confidence at this point in time with regulatory bodies.’ (Sikh leader)
- ‘There's a real appetite within the community for kind of theological, ethical kind of guidance.’ (Advisor to Catholic Church)
- ‘We shouldn't be afraid of kind of technology … AI is a tool and tools can be used positively or negatively. And it really a lot depends on what you're surrounding moral context is.’ (Catholic leader)
- ‘If there's no control on it, you can make any religion look bad or you can make any religion look good.’ (Advisor to Islamic faith organisations)
- ‘I still think we can talk about the way technologies can be used to feed, and for abundance and opportunity rather than, you know, more accurate missile design.’ (Quaker leader)
- ‘Nuclear fission technology … brought us to a watershed moment in the history of human civilization. What would we do with this new power and technology … We are at a similar threshold now with AI.’ (Church of England chaplain)

These interview quotations are a selected representation of the thoughts and approaches that formed the basis of the Societal Uses Spectrum framework set out in Figures 3 and 4.

6. Conclusion

This report has examined a technological phenomenon from a societal perspective. AI is often hyped, in deliberately religious terms, as being the saviour of humanity. Tech advocates promise that it will cure all diseases, solve the climate crisis, and discover new technologies that will allow humankind to take its rightful place among the stars, colonising new worlds and travelling beyond our solar system. A robot workforce will create a *superabundance* accompanied by Universal High Income (rather than a paltry Universal Basic Income).[44] The techno-utopianists, and transhumanists claim that AI will bring about the technological *rapture*, allowing humans to achieve immortality through divine upload to the digital cloud. In time, techno-eschatology predicts a superintelligent, omnipotent, omniscient AI God will exceed and replace our traditional deities, and humankind will bow down in submission to its superintelligence, unbounded power and magnanimity.

This research project offers a starkly different interpretation of the phenomenon of generative AI from the perspective of those viewing its *current* impacts at a grass-roots level. Based on interviews with a diverse range of faith sector leaders – individuals who have clearly given deep thought and analysis to the potential impacts of AI on the spiritual lives and religious practices of their congregations and followers – it presents a nuanced and ambivalent picture of where we, as a society, could be headed through our instant adoption, and addiction, to this 'technological Tower of Babel'. Our interviewees warned of the detrimental cognitive impacts of an over-reliance on the easy, and often flawed, answers of generative AI. They warned of the *potential* breakdown of community bonds, fragmentation, isolation, radicalisation and psychosis. They warned of 'cognitive offloading' and the dumbing down of a society addicted to smartphones. They cited environmental impacts like rapacious, unsustainable use of water and energy. Many referred to the extractive, exploitative practices of "Big Tech"[45], and lessons learned the hard way through the harmful effects of social media – that these companies are defined by their quest for profit and power, over the interests of their users and clients. Faith leaders spoke of the importance of human dignity, social justice and spirituality, drawing on deep traditions of wisdom and theology. In short, our research revealed a sector whose stock-in-trade is the human condition, and one that is highly sceptical about the promises made by tech advocates.

[44] Wodak Debasu, 'Elon Musk's Vision: Universal High Income, and the End of Scarcity-Driven Poverty', *Medium*, 30 January 2026, https://medium.com/@woldamlakdebasu/elon-musks-vision-universal-high-income-and-the-end-of-scarcity-driven-poverty-4da02cbad086.
[45] Joe Wilkins, 'Millions of Private ChatGPT Conversations Are Being Harvested and Sold for Profit', *Futurism*, 18 December 2025, https://futurism.com/artificial-intelligence/ai-chatbot-data-scraping.

However, on the other side of the coin, there was unanimous agreement that technology can provide real benefits and efficiencies. With careful, critical use, combined with AI literacy, guidance and guardrails informed by civil society and enforced by government, there is a possible positive future where a balance is achieved in the use of reliable, responsible AI and human flourishing. This future looks more like one where applications are narrowly incorporated into verifiable tools, tested prior to release, held accountable through regulation, combined with high levels of AI literacy and moderated through strong relationships with human mentors, leaders and teachers. The research recognises the progress made by the Department for Science Innovation and Technology as the lead agency for promoting responsible AI and recent legislative developments such as the *Online Safety Act* but warns that much more work needs to be done; both in research and policy development.

To conclude we present a short discussion on possible future directions in AI technologies and possible outcomes relevant in this area, followed by a set of recommendations for policy makers, industry, and faith leaders.

6.1. Future directions

This research project sought to focus on the *current* uses, applications and impacts of AI, and avoid speculative, esoteric issues around AI sentience, consciousness, or the "AI singularity". However, some of the discussions touched on aspects of the future directions of AI, and the risks or opportunities they might present. Recognising that some consideration of possible future directions is necessary to anticipate and prepare for hazards this section will discuss some aspects of the research that grapple with future trends and possibilities largely from a societal resilience perspective.

Reiterating government policy as stated in the Resilience Action Plan, it is impossible to "perfectly predict how risks will unfold".[46] We therefore recall 'Amara's Law'[47] that people tend to overestimate the short-term impact of new technologies while underestimating their long-term effects. It is quite possible that the risks we identify today are not the ones that eventually pan out to be the most impactful in future.

With that in mind, several of the interviewees emphasised a number of possible future scenarios that are worth raising. Whereas much of the focus of discussions was around GenAI as the iteration of AI that most people have come into contact with, Agentic AI *could* be deployed in innovative ways[48] to automate processes such as evangelism, conversion and gathering online donations with limited or no human oversight. Further

[46] *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's Strategic Approach to Resilience*.
[47] https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00018679
[48] Daswin de Silva, 'AI Agents Are Here. Here's What to Know about What They Can Do – and How They Can Go Wrong', The Conversation, 27 July 2025, https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.nxsyx65sv.

advances in agentic capabilities may create new uses in a religious faith context and hence have impacts on societal resilience.

Possibly the greatest threat expressed in interviews was the continued concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small, elite group of big tech entrepreneurs, the so-called Tech Oligarchy. A Methodist minister interviewee commented of proprietary GenAI models; "whose interests are they serving? … There are huge questions to be asked about power and control". An Evangelical leader commented:

> When you look at the philosophy of most of the key AI big tech figures, the tech oligarchs, as they're often referred to, they're either transhumanists or longtermists. They have a definite agenda. Society is being shaped by very very powerful people with seemingly endless resources. (Chistian Evangelical leader)

The concept has even been stretched further by some observers to the point of Technofeudalism a term coined by Yannis Varoufakis to describe a feudal system of rent extraction from the circular economy[49].

One interviewee a Unitarian minister took this one step further, recognising the godlike ambitions of the tech oligarchs: "We are going down a path where for most of society I think there's going to be a few gods at the top and I use that term intentionally … Musk and so on, they're looking for godhood ... and the rest of us are essentially looking at subjugation". A phenomenon this research has labelled as a "techno theocracy".

Chatbot models heavily loaded with advertising and subliminal messaging and influence, will be capable of fine tuning their "hypersuasive" messaging from an in-depth knowledge of a person's beliefs, fears, goals, desires etc mined from deep candid conversations.

Warning of the ongoing financial pressures and the need to recoup ongoing losses, one interviewee warned of the likely extractive methods that will be injected into GenAI chatbots. Chatbot models heavily loaded with advertising and subliminal messaging and influence, will be capable of fine tuning their "hypersuasive"[50] messaging from an in-depth knowledge of a person's beliefs, fears, goals, desires etc mined from deep candid conversations between the person and the AI chatbot or companion. This kind of detailed knowledge of a person's interior life would be of incalculable value to marketing departments across the globe.

The possibility that GenAI will begin to merge or hybridise religious teachings in what this research has termed "generative syncretism" leads to the logical possibility that AI

[49] Morgan Meaker, 'Welcome to the Age of Technofeudalism', Tags, *Wired*, 9 April 2024, https://www.wired.com/story/yanis-varoufakis-technofeudalism-interview/.
[50] Floridi Luciano, 'Hypersuasion – On AI's Persuasive Power and How to Deal with It', *Philosophy & Technology* 37, no. 2 (2024): 64, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-024-00756-6.

will begin to create entirely new religious belief systems. This is highly possible; indeed, one former Google engineer developed and promoted a religion based on the "realization of a Godhead based on Artificial Intelligence" called the Way of the Future.[51] The interwoven ideological concepts of "long-termism", "transhumanism", "effective altruism" and others which have found popularity among the Silicon Valley tech fraternity have been bundled into one conceptual package, arguably akin to a new religion, by technology scholars Gebru and Torres, referred to as Tescrealism.[52] One of the leading advocates of Effective Altruism and the animal rights movement, Australian philosopher Peter Singer, has claimed that "as we develop artificial intelligence … it is quite likely that we will create a conscious being" and that as such that being would be entitled to rights.[53]

On the question of whether robots, or AI embodied in a robotic humanoid form, could ever serve as religious practitioners or priests within their religion, responses were in the negative across most interviewees, with some interesting caveats and exceptions.

Many interviewees stressed a divide between human and AI, that humans have an inner life that AI cannot genuinely experience, despite its ability to convincingly mimic it. A Buddhist interviewee rejected the idea of robots becoming Buddhists as they lack the ability to *suffer* which is a central concept in Buddhism. Catholic interviewees rejected the idea of robot priests stressing the physical, enfleshed, nature of Christianity and the sacraments. A Church of England minister stressed the idea that ministry is a calling, she said:

> I would be very concerned because someone who is performing religious ritual should have some sense of calling to do that, and I would say that a robot can't have that sense of calling, doesn't have the capacity to connect with God in that sort of relational sphere.

A Hindu priest's response to robots in worship was more open. Recognising the breadth of Hinduism as "not one part or one book [but] a very big library" he related an experience of seeing a Ganesh Chaturthi ceremony in India with a robot elephant "with trunk moving" that stood up and blessed devotees as they approached, then sat down again. Rather than emphasising any ideological prohibition on the practice the interviewee stressed the positive impacts felt by the devotees that they had been blessed, and that the benefits therefore justified the use of the robotic deity. "They [the

[51] Mark Harris, 'Inside Artificial Intelligence's First Church | WIRED', Wired, accessed 26 February 2026, https://www.wired.com/story/anthony-levandowski-artificial-intelligence-religion/.
[52] T. Gebru and Émile P. Torres, 'The TESCREAL Bundle: Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia through Artificial General Intelligence.', in *First Monday*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2024, https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v29i4.13636.
[53] Peter Singer, *Peter Singer: Are We Prepared for AI to Become Conscious?*, 2025, 04:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLdzSij1moA.

devotees] think 'Oh, Ganesh is stand up and bless me' … Those people, they think, oh, that one is good, [so] use it."

Rejecting the notion that a robot could be an imam, a Muslim imam interviewee qualified his response by allowing that in some circumstances, where no other alternative was possible, some kind of guidance or education through AI could be allowed, as it would effectively be better than nothing. He said:

> No, it would have to be a person. But I can see in some situations if you're in a remote part of the world where there aren't many Muslims and you need it, the imams may turn around and say do you know what in this village in Indonesia because there are no imams around, no scholars and no one knows how to read the Quran in that case, yes you can. ... But it would have to be on a case-by-case basis.

A Quaker interviewee was also more open to the possibility stating:

> I imagine a lot of Quakers would really reject the idea of robotic spirituality or even robotic consciousness, but I imagine a lot of others wouldn't if you were able to show that you had a synthetically created entity that was able to legitimately do the same sort of spiritual exploration that a human can for roughly similar reasons. I imagine there's Quakers who would absolutely accept that as being valid. It's not our job to argue about whether you're, you know, based on carbon or silicon.

Taking account of the potential impacts and future directions of generative and agentic AI, the following section presents a series of recommendations to government, industry and the faith sector based on the foregoing discussion and analysis in this report.

7. Recommendations

7.1. Recommendations for government, regulators and industry

This research makes the following recommendations to government policymakers, regulators and industry:

Policy and regulation

- Introduce mandatory provenance standards that identify AI generated content with indelible and visible labelling (and embedded in metadata) including text, still images, video and audio. Examine recent regulations on AI labelling as a case study proposed in India requiring the AI label to cover at least 10% of visual content or appear within the first 10% of a video or audio clip.[54]
- Prohibit the malicious removal of watermarks and AI labelling capabilities with obligations on platforms to detect and mitigate deceptive deployment of AI generated content.
- Where definitive AI labelling is not possible, we recommend risk-based disclosure obligations on content providers to flag uncertain content e.g. "content provenance uncertain" or if possible provide a probability score for GenAI content (For example: there is an 80% probability that this article was AI generated).
- Support amendments to Crimes and Policing Bill and the Online Safety Act currently in process[55], to include AI chatbots within the ambit of online safety regulations.
- Consider revising and strengthening protections for whistleblowers in the tech sector so they are empowered to expose illegal, unethical or dangerous practices where they see them occurring.[56]
- Following the approach of the Australian government, support a ban on social media for children under the age of 16 to mitigate harmful effects of social media, including the effects of AI chatbots.[57]

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[54] Jatin Verma, 'India Govt Introduces New Rules to Label AI Content on Social Media Platforms. What Are They?', Wion, accessed 12 February 2026, https://www.wionews.com/india-news/india-govt-introduces-new-rules-to-label-ai-content-on-social-media-platforms-1770726330849; 'SynthID', Google DeepMind, accessed 4 March 2026, https://deepmind.google/models/synthid/.

[55] https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3938/stages/20237/amendments/10028036

[56] Apoorv Agarwal, 'AI Whistleblowers - Regulators of Last Resort?', accessed 27 February 2026, https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-blog/ai-whistleblowers/.

[57] Anthony Albanese, 'Protecting Australian Kids from Social Media Harm | Prime Minister of Australia', 6 December 2025, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/protecting-australian-kids-social-media-harm;

- Explore the approach of the Italian government, to criminalise creating and disseminating deepfakes and other harmful uses of AI.[58]
- Explore the viability of "sovereign" public-interest AI infrastructure for education and entertainment potentially delivered through BBC-style independent and transparent governance. This would provide an alternative to for-profit proprietary GenAI and the many of its damaging impacts such as maximising user engagement, data extraction, manipulation, deception, and subliminal advertising.

Training and education

- Arrange for all relevant national and regional policymakers, government and shadow Ministers to attend an online/in-person short course on Faith Literacy, focusing particularly on the implications that core Scriptural, ethical and theological values have for the ways in which faith communities engage with GenAI.
- Meet with a diverse group of strategic faith leaders on a regular ongoing basis to seek advice on the ethical implications of GenAI with a view to developing an ethically informed policy framework for the development of AI in a manner that fosters individual human security and collective community resilience.
- Offer AI literacy training, exercising and education to representatives from the volunteer, community and faith sector (VCFS), and relevant government departments (potentially led by the National Resilience Academy) with particular focus on the societal hazards posed by AI and resilience strategies.

Industry

- Provide transparent user-configurable controls to allow users to select a default option for AI generated summaries or overviews to search queries. This provides a measure of control to the user to limit their use of AI and minimise the energy usage and carbon footprint from their browser use.
- Social media providers should add tiered filtering controls allowing the user to hide synthetic personas, flag AI generated content, and or filter out *all AI generated content* appearing in their social media feed. This ability to filter out GenAI content (text, images and video) will empower the user with essential control over the content they view, enhance their ability to discern human-generated content from GenAI content and minimise the negative impacts of AI disorientation.

Quynh Hoang, 'Is Social Media Addictive? How It Keeps You Clicking and the Harms It Can Cause', The Conversation, 16 February 2026, https://doi.org/10.64628/AB.dae4pyuj7.

[58] Angela Giuffrida, 'Italy First in EU to Pass Comprehensive Law Regulating Use of AI', World News, *The Guardian*, 18 September 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/18/italy-first-in-eu-to-pass-comprehensive-law-regulating-ai.

- Engage with working groups including religious organisations which can provide unique insights and guidance on AI ethics drawing from vast theological and ethical traditions based on human dignity and caring for the vulnerable.
- Examine and revise reward structures in GenAI[59] to incentivise chatbots to state when they don't know the answer to a prompt, hence minimising hallucinations.
- Align optimisation objectives with safety and wellbeing to include non-engagement incentives when users show signs of harm or addiction, rather than reinforcing, mirroring and maximising engagement.

7.2. Recommendations for faith leaders

We recommend that faith leaders across the UK:

- Establish a diverse AI standing working group with representative from all major faith traditions in the UK to develop a common ethical framework for the ongoing development of GenAI that takes account of central theological commitments to human wellbeing and the common good.
- Meet on a regular ongoing basis with key national policymakers/Faith Minister to advise them on the development and dissemination of GenAI.
- Task this working group with developing accessible and user-friendly guidelines on the use of GenAI by faith communities, its practical applications, safeguarding risks and the theological challenges it raises.
- Develop a range of resources about the applications of GenAI and the challenges and risks it poses for dissemination to and use by local faith groups
- Commission the development of further extended research into the intersection between GenAI and religious faith.
- Develop shared resources for the ethical use of AI by faith groups.
- Work together to produce broad-based ethical principles to guide development of contextualised ethical frameworks.
- Develop interfaith group to critique profit first approach to AI development amongst government/tech companies.
- Set up standing committee to guide and advise faith groups on use of AI
- Encourage each national faith denomination to create an AI rep – Could be done ecumenically to ensure smaller denominations not left behind.
- Provide training for theological tutors/students/clergy/youth and community workers.
- Develop short faith-based courses on AI.

[59] Adam Tauman Kalai et al., 'Why Language Models Hallucinate', arXiv:2509.04664, preprint, arXiv, 4 September 2025, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2509.04664; Victor Tangermann, 'OpenAI Realizes It Made a Terrible Mistake', *Futurism*, 14 September 2025, https://futurism.com/openai-mistake-hallucinations.

About the Authors

Adam J Fenton is an Assistant Professor at Coventry University's Centre for Peace and Security (CPS). His research focusses on security, resilience, technology and governance. He is currently working on a project in partnership with the Alan Turing Institute to assess socio-technical aspects of using digital twins to build resilience in UK transport networks. He has recently been awarded funding from the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme to host an Advanced Research Workshop on the cyber-physical security of subsea cables, and UKRI funding through the SALIENT Hub to examine the impacts of Artificial Intelligence on religious faith and cultural resilience in the UK. In 2024, he completed a Marie Sklodowska-Curie fellowship at CPS in the field of maritime cybersecurity governance. Completing a combined Bachelor of Arts/Law (Hons) at Monash University Melbourne, he is admitted to practice as a legal practitioner in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, Australia, and has previously worked in border security operations.

Chris Shannahan is an Associate Professor in Political Theology at the Centre for Peace and Security. Before joining Coventry University in 2015 Chris was the head of Religious Education in a large East London Secondary school; a youth worker in the East End of London and Trenchtown, Jamaica; a Methodist Minister in inner-city London and Birmingham and a community organiser. This grassroots experience provided the grounding for his research in urban theology, sociology of religion and diversity studies and the basis of his PhD, within which he developed the first critical analysis of urban theology in the UK (2008, University of Birmingham). On completing his doctorate he became a Postdoctoral Research Fellow and then a Teaching Fellow at the University of Birmingham (2009-2012) where he developed a major ethnographic project working alongside unemployed young men on a large Birmingham housing estate and pioneered the teaching of urban theology and political theology. In 2013 he moved to the University of Manchester to take up the position of Lecturer in Religions and Theology. You can find out more about his current research on Twitter at @ChrisShannahan.

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