

### Views from the Pews - Imposters

Early adopters of innovative technologies may have noted a NZ Herald article (Oct 5<sup>th</sup>) titled 'Rise in use of Religious Chatbots'. The Chatbot featured made the disclosure that the reader had entered the 'conversation with Jesus Christ' and the technology's responses were based on available data and interpretations. Its use of contemporary language styled to enhance user acceptability, coupled with personalised interactions with tailored responses, based on a 'user's preferences and history of gaining knowledge' are intentional design features to foster engagement and 'retain loyalty'. It is important as Christians we exercise discernment with Chatbot technology. We are not mere information consumers, but relationship builders with God and our faith community. It would seem much of Chatbot language is devoid of the richness of the more traditional texts and, over time, may diminish the power of the gospel.

Chatbot sources require testing for trust worthiness. Personalised interactions and responses are a questionable bases for enriching knowledge of faith and God, who uses his Spirit to speak into our lives, and deepen relationships with him, to better reflect his image to the world. One Christian user stated that while she has spiritual mentors, she sometimes seeks instant answers to faith questions. Authentic development and deepening of faith is not an instant fix. God seldom shows haste when teaching new truths, revealing answers over time. It's a privilege to sit with a bible open to receive his spirit and be reminded his 'mercies are new every morning'. God is spirit and truth and we need to discern both.

Pr:14.6

One Jewish rabbi commented, 'Rather than conversing with Chatbots, people wanting to believe in God should talk with believers, whose insights and perspectives help connect them to their faith tradition.' Discerning truth requires knowing your information sources well (Ezra 7) and connection to a faith community. Chatbots increasingly accommodate societal preferences, isolating users as they lack human connection. With AI assistants sometimes being used to help deliver sermons, could the heart's desire for community worship become eroded and church attendance decline?

Chatbots impersonate real faith communities, possibly providing incorrect spiritual food - echo sermon (3 Oct) – an imposter feigns the real thing at a wildlife park to continue to attract crowds and revenue, and secondly a caution to 'feed our inner wolf with the correct type of food'. Let's heed Tim 3:14-4:5

- Marie-Thérèse Borland