

Chatting with an AI Machine about Orthodox Theology

By Konstantinos I. Belezos*

On the occasion of the centenary celebration of the journal *Θεολογία/Theologia*, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece invites us to reflect on the future of humanity, the Church and its Theology. In the face of an indefinite grid of pre-modern superstitions, modern illusions and post-modern surprises, in which we are all deeply involved – thanks to a Science that has become a Religion, and the rapid development of Technology, it invites us to seriously examine what our entry into the “intangible” or “virtual” reality of so-called Late Modernity¹, entails, and what the gradual substitution of our physical dimension by our mechanical extensions means. It invites us to reflect upon what the so-called 4th Industrial Revolution has in store for us, in which the dynamic entry of Artificial Intelligence (= AI), robotics and the interconnection of everything on the Internet play a leading role.

The almost inconceivable evolution of the AI’s technological applications, and the overwhelming popularity of language models based on it, have led us to the search and formulation of the topic we proposed in the framework of the present conference and has often caused to us puzzlement about the terms and exact limits, the method and reliability of the sources,

* Konstantinos Io. Belezos is a Professor at the Faculty of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

1. For the last term, see the contribution presented in this Conference by our colleague V. Makridis, «Ο Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανισμός μεταξύ Νεωτερικότητας καὶ Μετανεωτερικότητας: Κριτική ἐπισκόπηση ἑνὸς πολὺπλευρου θέματος», *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Centenary of the Journal Θεολογία, Θεολογία/Theologia* 95, 1 (2024), pp. 147-176. For more information on the theme of the Conference, see also *Theologia’s* special double issue under the title: «Τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς τεχνολογίας I & II», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 90, 3 (2019) and 91, 1 (2020) respectively.

the security and possibility of exploiting the results. “Discussing”, then, –or, more appropriately, “chatting” “with an AI machine about Orthodox Theology”– this is the theme of our contribution.

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I’m chatting; I’m having a conversation. What exactly *am I doing*? What does “*discuss / chat*” mean? To seek, to look for, to pursue something with someone, with someone’s help, the truth, the meaning, the reason, the cause and the results. I take my distance, set my limits, common terms and conditions; I choose a common language, a mutual code. I am ready to place the “issue” (hypothetical or real event) on a secure basis, within its historical context, in its literary, socio-political-economic and cultural context, and so on.

With whom am I talking to? With someone I appreciate, I can communicate with on equal terms, I’m sharing a common language and sensibility; there is no need for us to be indistinguishable, or totally identified on the ideological level. I am not conversing with someone whom I judge, interrogate, or merely use as a source of information. I am discussing with someone whom I recognize (whether I see, hear, read or touch), who has a constructed existence, even at a distance. I converse with someone who is alive and maintains his psychosomatic unity, but also with someone who has passed away, communicating with him in spirit (cf., for example, in the New Testament the case of the Transfiguration, where the Lord converses with Moses and Elijah; cf. Revelations of men of God, etc.). In the Bible, Adam and Eve, the Righteous, the Prophets, the praying people discuss with the God they cannot see, with the God who is not merely incorporeal (something that changed radically after the Incarnation of the Word, His death, Resurrection and Ascension), but uncreated. On a different level, the true animal-living, or the man of God, find a way and converse with the animals, which are also God’s creatures, co-created and related, but not created in *His image and likeness*²; he communicates and comes into contact

2. See Ioannis Zizioulas, (Metropolitan of Pergamon), «Ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία καὶ τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς προστασίας τοῦ φυσικοῦ περιβάλλοντος», in: Ὀρθοδοξία 2000. Παρελθόν-Παρόν-

with them not in a master-slave relationship, but in companionship and daily interaction. The Psychology of the Plants reminds us that we are communicatively interacting even with the plants.

What happens, though, when man attempts to converse with a machine of his own creation, a machine that has learned to reproduce his cognitive functions, to think and speak almost like him (or even better)? What happens when he wants to open a conversation with a machine “in his own image and likeness”, in the context of the freedom and creativity with which the Most High has endowed him, and the blessing given to him to continue His creative work? What are the results when man gives voice to his image, transmits to it his thought, knowledge, and consciousness, making it his equal interlocutor (or even superior, in the distant or immediate future)?

For man to simply giving voice to his image is an achievement with which humanity has been familiar since the last century. It is, after all, what has made it possible for cinema, television, the Internet and virtual communication to exist. But transmitting to it the way it thinks and behaves is something entirely new; it is an unprecedented challenge for the human species.

Until now, man had allowed the representation of his being, existence, thought and consciousness in speech, writing (engraved, ink, printed or electronic), fingerprints, iris or voice, all of which were directly connected to his body. Now he is called upon to cede it to a mass-produced device, an AI machine (symbolic or sub-symbolic), one of the most impressive achievements of modern technology, which tomorrow may also have a biotechnologically produced human body (skin, skeleton, organs), but no soul, a computer system that imitates human behavior, which intends to free man not only from physical but also from mental effort, attempting to simulate or reproduce human intelligence³.

Μέλλον. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Θεολογικού Συνεδρίου (Athens, 4-8 Μαΐου 2000), Apostoliki Diakonia Publications, Athens 2002, pp. 397-411, espec. 407-408; cf. also his collection of articles under the title: *Κόσμος Λύτρον: Τὰ Ἀγαθονίχεια, ἤτοι Κείμενα θεολογικά περὶ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ σωτηρίας καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, H. Monastery of Hagia Paraskevi Publications, Megara 2014, pp. 79-95.

3. The Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and Hagios Vlasios Hierotheos in his article: «Ἡ Τ.Ν. ὡς Τεχνητὴ Εὐφυΐα», *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Παρέμβαση/Ekklesiastiki Paremvasi* v. 28/iss. 323

And now comes the crucial question or, if you like, dilemma: We will follow the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: «τὰ πάντα δοκιμάζετε τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε»⁴ or we will remember the prophetic vision of the Book of Revelation that describes the “image”, the statue, that is, constructed and “animated” by the second beast of the demonic triad, the representative of false prophecy and false propaganda par excellence, in order to force humanity continuing its apostasy from God, with the following: «Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ (i.e., the *Revelation*’s second beast, the «ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς»⁵) δοῦναι πνεῦμα (= life) τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου (which represents obviously the first beast, the «ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης»⁶, which is usually identified with the Antichrist), ἵνα καὶ λαλήσῃ ἢ εἰκὼν τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ποιήσῃ» various things⁷; Are we going to adopt the discreet use of a medium or examine its ontology, its underlying spirit, the ethos or the faith inspired by identification with it? Will we take part in the debate between technophiles⁸, technocrats or techno-maniacs, techno-utopians, techno-messianists, on the one hand, and technophobes and techno-pessimists, on the other? Will we be tempted to give in to the temptation of convenience and easy answers or will we surrender to a spirit of alarmism and suspicion about anything to do with Technique and Technology?

Wishing to study our topic, we decided to conduct a “conventional” interview. In a way, it is a “personal” interview conducted on two platforms of direct and interactive communication of the ChatGPT type by the author, between 21.3.2023 and 13.10.2023; it was an interview that could lead to a “qualitative research” –sort of–, if we take into account the great number of human sources that this particular AI model utilizes and the answers we’ve repeatedly asking from it, putting to it exactly the same question and taking into account that every time the conversation (according to the schedule) started from the beginning. We therefore proceeded –through written questions and answers– to a web-based chat,

(June 2023), 1 and 10, proposes the term “artificial *cleverness*” instead of the term *A.I.*

4. *1 Thess.* 5, 21.

5. *Rev.* 13, 11.

6. *Rev.* 13, 1.

7. *Rev.* 13, 15.

8. We should clarify that the first compound in the present context refers to technique and not to art.

which allows with the application of AI the dialogue (Chatbox) – a chat with the now well-known ChatGPT, Generative Pre-trained Trans-former (GPT) model, a member of the family of large language models, based on algorithms and programming, and supported by powerful computers. It had been developed by Open AI, an American AI research lab promoting the development of human-friendly and beneficial AI⁹; it was released in November 2022. According to its own specifications, the model is structured on earlier versions of Open AI language models and has been improved by the use of supervised and reinforcement learning techniques. It is provided free of charge (a great temptation!) and produces texts (articles, essays, anecdotes, even poems) on demand by the host or interacting user. Whenever asked, it introduces itself as a digital assistant with no specific religious faith, political beliefs or feelings. It exists (= has been programmed) to offering help (as a worker or as an equal partner, ready for further claims?), providing information about what it knows (but also about what it does not know!), maintaining a level of human dignity, or –more precisely– obedience to the “politically correct” of the day.

Apparently, the sources of the model seem to have been everything that was circulating electronically (and online) –encyclopedias, general and special websites, specific studies, declarations, interviews etc.–, material that was “uploaded” by the competent operators to the machine with which we’ve been “chatted” until September 2021 (according to its statement, in an answer it gave to us about what it knew about Orthodox Theology)¹⁰. The machine was not referring to specific sources (as long as it had not been questioned); nevertheless, it was functioned synthetically and was generally informative. It also ignored many individual issues, while it was very weak in terms of historical documentation and contextual framing¹¹.

9. It had received generous funding from, among others, Elon Musk, American inventor and billionaire, who eventually left the program, and Microsoft.

10. Shortly before the submission of this paper, according to a response given to us by the GPT-4 version of OpenAI, “for the information I provide, I draw on the knowledge I have acquired from data libraries, research papers, and publicly available sources that have existed at my last update. These include academic publications, articles, books, and reliable online sources”.

11. We will elaborate on our individual observations below.

The interview was given partly in Greek and partly in English (from which –with the help of the Google Translator, which also works by using the AI– we were translating rudimentarily, when the machine itself did not proceed to automatic translation). As a rule, the English-language version of the questions was preferred, to have a wider scope of source feed available. For our part, we asked, at various stages, about 150 questions and received answers for all of them, except the question: “How do people talk about God?”, for which there was no response, despite the fact that we’ve been waiting for it for more than 90 minutes. The machine’s answers, short (according to specific algorithmic specifications) and concise, ran to 3-6 paragraphs with 1-3 periods/sentences each. In many cases, before having completed its answer, the machine seemed to suggest an alternative one. In the last period, it summarized and repeated the previous paragraphs.

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Thus, to our initial question – what an AI model generally knows about Orthodox Theology – ChatGPT’s answer, on the day and time we’ve asked it the question for the first time (in English), seems quite simple, not to say poor, and is limited to our own recapitulation (in italics, thereafter), to the following:

First of all, ChatGPT considers Orthodox Theology to be an expression of the Eastern Orthodox Church (which it often associates - not entirely unfairly - with the Ancient Eastern Churches, the so-called non-Chalcedonian Churches), firmly oriented to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, the Patristic Literature, and the Orthodox worship. Then it emphasizes the Trinitarian starting point, and the importance of Tradition and adherence to the doctrines of the ancient Church. It then stresses the role of the Church as a communion of believers and not as the “body of Christ”; here, it sounds rather “Protestant”, although in a later question about Orthodox theology and the Church the machine corrects itself and emphasizes “importance of the Church as the Body of Christ, through which Christians come into relationship with God and with each other”. At the same time, it touches upon the importance of prayer, worship and the sacraments, especially for the spiritual life of the faithful. It concludes,

by pointing out the diversity of the Orthodox tradition, while reiterating –in summary fashion– fidelity to the teachings of the first centuries and respect for the liturgical tradition up to the present day.

Since at the end of the reply ChatGPT –realizing, as it were, its inadequacy– made the polite suggestion: “Let me know if you want more information”, we continued asking clarifying questions to check the extent of its knowledge of Orthodox Theology. In general terms, the narrative that emerged from the elaboration of the GPT’s answers concerning the Orthodox Church and its theology, and their creative editing of them on our behalf, is as follows: *Orthodox Theology, as a reminder and interpretation of the documents of the faith and life of the Eastern Orthodox, is an expression of the teaching of the Church as the Body of Christ and as a communion of believers who experience the presence of their Lord through the sacraments, and they have a common faith which follows the evangelical and ancient ecclesiastical tradition; moreover, they respect the ecclesiastical hierarchy (which guarantees ecclesiastical unity and recalls the primary concern of evangelization and dispensation), and cultivate a virtuous and holy life through prayer, exercise and charity.*

Its history is rich and long. Its foundation began in the first century; its development continued during the early Christian period, the times of the great Fathers, Byzantium and post-Byzantium, and reaches until today. Its prominent representatives include Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius the Great, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene, Photius the Great, Gregory Palamas and Nicholas Kavalas. In our days, according to the ChatGPT, Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, Fr. George Florovsky, and among Greek- speaking writers, Nikos Nisiotis, Christos Giannaras, and Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas were distinguished. When we asked him again about Greek Orthodox academic theologians he might know, it refers to: Ioannis Zizioulas, Christos Giannaras, Vladimir Lossky, Georgios Manzaridis, Dumitru Stăniloae, and Ioannis Romanides. But where it is facing the greatest difficulty –despite the fact that we’ve asked six times the same question– is in listing the Orthodox Theological Schools around the world (sometimes he ignores the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, while at other times he adds the Rizarios Ecclesiastical School or the Universities of Patras and Panteion University!).

The Greek-speaking contribution to Orthodox theology is –over time– very important, although we should not ignore the contribution of the Russian, Serbian

and other local Orthodox ecclesiastical traditions. The latter differ, in the context of unity in diversity, on theological issues and individual liturgical practices, yet they are in agreement on the demand for spiritual fidelity to tradition and on the emergence of the theology of “theosis” as a central theme of Orthodox Christian thought and spirituality. As a whole, Orthodox theology today is understood as the fruit of a long evolution, a synthesis of many different and varied local and cultural traditions, which allows its ministers to move beyond the pseudo-dilemma of “progress and maintenance” and to combine traditionalism with openness, patristics with dialogue and ecclesiastical consciousness with responsiveness to the demands of our times.

In practice, the teaching of Orthodox Theology focuses on the profound understanding of the Gospel’s truths and the great Church Fathers’ wisdom, with respect to Tradition and the long history of Orthodoxy. This takes place in the context of the catechism and further training of the faithful, who of course must themselves deepen their faith and consciously practice the Christian life. The above does not prevent it from pursuing the training and education of its staff (especially at university level), the in-depth understanding of the truths of the faith, with the help of scientific research and academic teaching, but also from using the printed and electronic press or (nowadays) the social media to convey its message to the wider public. Indeed, it recognizes the role of honest journalism in advocating the truth, in giving a voice to marginalized individuals or groups, in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding, while it constantly reminds the need for respecting the truth and the critical approach to false news and malicious information.

One of the greatest strengths and timeless challenges of Orthodox Theology –and allow me here to intervene interpretatively and proceed to a summary of this paragraph– is the utilization of the human language in its broadest sense: as a code of communication, an organizational structure, a functional expression, an art of manifesting the doctrines, a tool for communication, teaching and dealing with heresies, and a means of serving the salvation of man for the glory of God. When the language or the particular way of thinking and expressing is transformed from a “vessel of ministry” and praise into a means of exercising power (we would add here), then the different linguistic or imagery approaches become autonomous, the different emphases are absolutized and transformed into vertiginous differences and occasions or pretexts for confrontation and alienation;

they then lead, unfortunately, to tragic ruptures and fissures through mutual and self-perpetuated prejudices.

Indicative are the differences highlighted by ChatGPT as a result of a phenomenological comparison between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. In the first case, the points of friction were the notion of Primacy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the balance between human will and divine grace, the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, the concept of ecclesiastical law and the scope of post-mortem restoration. In the second case, the points of friction were the conflict between individual faith and the concept of absolute predestination, the understanding of the fundamental sacraments, including the priesthood, the place of the saints, the use of icons, etc.

The great challenges that modern Orthodoxy, and, consequently, its theology, are facing are the following ones:

- To promote the faith as a gift that can be tasted by everyone, both within the Church and in the Church's openness to Missionary work, as well as in the Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue.

- To remain faithful to Tradition, without becoming captive to traditionalism, clericalism, fundamentalism, legalism and the narcissism of exclusivism.

- To offer its functional diversity as a constantly renewed wealth, far from the temptations of ignorance and secularism.

- To cultivate unity in faith and love, giving its own answer to globalization and the various localisms and nationalisms, to injustice and exploitation, to the crisis of democracy and the destruction of the environment.

- To put again the family and young people in its care; to put into practice, in evangelical and genuinely Christian terms, equality and inclusiveness, and to restore to women the offices given to them by Jesus, following the early Church's example.

- To clarify its relations with the political authorities, and to ensure consolidating its unity in diversity; to sincerely extend its communion with other Orthodox Churches, facing jurisdictional differences, cultural intolerances, scandals and political interference in a fraternal and conciliatory spirit.

- To express a genuine interest in the development of ecclesiastical education and theological studies, without any intention to degrading and manipulating the academic staff.

In particular, regarding the academic Theology, the major challenges are:

- The interpretation of the biblical-patristic tradition in contemporary terms, and the theological-pastoral adaptation of the former to our rapidly changing world.

- The dialogue with society, science, art and culture in general, without exhibiting fear or any other complex.

- To respond to the contemporary pressing ethical and bioethical dilemmas with seriousness and interdisciplinarity.

- To making good use of the opportunities and preventing the risks that the Fourth Industrial Revolution holds for humanity, always respecting the value and dignity of the human person and, (we would add), safeguarding the limits of Creation.

Apart from serious education and advanced training, the following are required from those who teach Theology in the Universities: deep awareness of what they teach and of their own exemplary role within the community, a genuine commitment and readiness for accountability, self-criticism and apology, teaching and communication skills, sensitivity to the beliefs and values of others, respect for diversity, a broad and ecumenical spirit which is at the same time sincere and probing, active participation in the contemporary theological thought, and the functioning of the ecclesial community. Finally, a practical faith is called for, especially when it becomes clear that theology is not simply of interest from the point of view of religious studies, but a reasonable and charismatic expression of faith and life.

Wishing to further stimulate the machine learning neural network with which we have been “chatting” so far, we asked some more questions on issues of broader and more specific interest, always related to the Orthodox Church and Theology. We would summarize the answers we received as follows:

Starting from the value of the divine gift of life, Orthodox Theology emphasizes the Church’s beneficial role in human societies, the importance of gratitude and thanksgiving, of responsibility and justice, of respect and love for all Creation.

In this context, it understands the contribution of politics to the improvement of society and the promotion of the general good, without identifying itself with it and its practices. It recognizes the destructive effects of war, although it tolerates defensive wars, or those who pre-empt a genocide; yet, above all, it strives for

peace, always promoting forgiveness and reconciliation, dialogue and mutual understanding. By proclaiming that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, it works to protect their rights and encourages the promotion of social justice and personal dignity as the basis for safeguarding their freedom and ensuring their basic needs.

Recently, and in the same spirit, there has been a more intense talk about the restoration of the role of women within the Church, the revival of the institution of ministers and their more active participation in decision-making processes within the Church. The obstacles so far are due to historical and cultural reasons, to a one-sided understanding of the biblical and patristic tradition, as well as hierarchical interpretations which take on theological and canonical characteristics.

In the same spirit, Orthodox theology is concerned with the spiritual development and the general support of young people, while it is interested in the attractive catechesis and the involvement of the latter in the life of the Church, making use of the possibilities offered by modern technology.

Orthodox theology considers marriage and family life, as well as celibate and monastic life, as equal paths to holiness, through which the spirit of ministry in love, selflessness, patience and forgiveness is cultivated. Its sexual ethics, in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, is expressed primarily and eminently in the context of heterosexual marriage; however, respecting the dignity of all human beings and rejecting any form of discrimination or prejudice, it calls for a sympathetic and pastoral care for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Finally, as we've already mentioned, Orthodox theology proposes the responsible management of the economy, the concern for decent work, the abolition of inequalities in a spirit of justice, honesty and charity, because it places great emphasis on the pursuit of justice.

In particular, with regard to the care of the natural environment as a divine gift and trust for future generations, Orthodox theology is particularly sensitive both to responsible use and sustainable management and to protective policies (based, among other things, on the experience of the monastic tradition).

In much the same context, it recognizes the importance of science as a means of exploring and understanding divine creation and as an occasion for cultivating an ethos of humility and openness, governed by respect for life, dignity and the sustainable future of human beings, as well as by a spirit of empathy, justice and mutual respect.

For the recent ordeal that humanity have passed through dueto the COVID-19 pandemic, Orthodox Theology, according to ChatGPT, recognizes the need for faith, compassion and disciplined (through sanitary measures) responsibility towards the sanctity of human life, without delving into proposals for specific vaccines or medicines. It also understands the ordeal of forced isolation and the contribution of technology in reducing distances.

With the latter occasion also arises the question of the future of humanity, which is called to be constantly vigilant, and to have faith, hope and a sense of purpose. Christians are called upon to be on high alert regarding the great changes that are rapidly taking place, to activate their moral reflexes, and to work and cooperate in their increasingly globalized environment for justice, peace and the common good.

As for the progress of AI, ChatGPT confesses that Orthodox theology is now beginning to explore the implications of the former for society and man. Thus, it is called upon to weigh with discernment, care and prayer, meaningful dialogue, and an interdisciplinary approach the benefits and risks, ensuring the value and dignity of the human person, but also to reflect –from a moral and theological point of view– on questions related to the nature of humanity, the role of technology in society and the relationship between God and man.

More particularly, in relation to the role of technology, the machine we've chatted with pointed out the ambiguity that is also reflected in the rationale of this Conference:

Technology can be seen: a) as a modern means of serving Theology, something that Orthodox Theology has never hesitated to do from the time of the papyri and leather-bound codices, sacred icons and printed books until presently (cf., the use of the internet for research and teaching, communication, presentation, information) or b) as a personal attitude and daily way of life (in the field of communication and various functions / services, in worship as a substitute for liturgical books, in digital catechesis or interaction with young people etc.). However, if the medium substitutes the liturgy itself and usurps the message as such (see content)¹²,

12. Cf. M. McLuhan, «Τὸ μέσο εἶναι τὸ μήνυμα», in: *Τὸ μήνυμα τοῦ μέσου. Ἡ ἔκρηξη τῆς μαζικῆς ἐπικοινωνίας*, Alexandria Publications, Athens ³1991 (1989), pp. 234-252. For an interesting critique of McLuhan's technological determinism, see R. Williams, «Οἱ ἐπιδράσεις καὶ οἱ χρήσεις τῆς τεχνολογίας», in: Maria Komninou, Chr. Lyritzis (eds.), *Κοινωνία, ἐξουσία καὶ Μέσα Μαζικῆς Ἐπικοινωνίας (θεωρία καὶ πράξη)*, transl.

if it renders human presence and participation superfluous, information is uncontrollable, basic human values are violated through the misuse of technology (via online bullying or manipulation of opinion and behavior), then not only are divine creation and human responsibility called into question; humanity itself is susceptible to the danger of being “technologized” or “objectified”¹³. In other words, technology can be seen as a substitute for salvation and take on religious or metaphysical characteristics. This is precisely when serious moral objections and theological reservations must be raised on our part.

Also interesting is the way with which our linguistic model links technology, Orthodox theology and the new police IDs. Distinguishing –and rightly so–symbolic interpretations attributed to the number 666 of the Apocalypse¹⁴ from the purely practical dimension of the police ID, which guarantees secure identity in the context of a modern state (with multiple applications), ChatGPT points out that digital identities are not directly linked to a theological symbolism; their use, however, as far as human rights, human dignity, privacy / freedom, social, racial, religious and other discrimination or manipulation through Technology are concerned, undoubtedly justifies moral-theological reflection.

Finally, one might say to us: “Over 150 questions have been asked in our most willing linguistic model; one more question related to the theme of the Conference: *Orthodox theology on its way to the “intangible reality” of late modernity could not be asked?*” So, in order for us to equally address this dimension, we ventured to do so – indeed, we’ve put the same question six times, to the point for the machine to better “understand it” and formulate its response more fully and clearly. Here is the answer it gave:

Late modernity offers opportunities accompanied by challenges of a theological, moral-cultural and socio-philosophical nature. To be more precise:

a) *Digital mediation has increased the dematerialization of contemporary human experience; the challenge we are facing is not to be closed in on ourselves, but to engage in the spiritual struggle and share our spiritual experiences with more people.*

Al. Deffner, Papazisis Publications, Athens ²1989 (1988), pp. 197-214.

13. Sp. D. Kyriazopoulos, *Ἐνώπιον τῆς Τεχνικῆς. Διαλέξεις καὶ Δοκίμια*, Grigoris Publications, Athens 1971, p. 60 ff.

14. See *Rev.* 13, 18.

b) Orthodox worship as a digital image has been introduced into many homes; but let us try to experience in practice the priority that embodied worship has for the Orthodox tradition.

c) Theological reflection should deal with the influence of technology and dematerialization, more courageously, without any fear and oversimplification; it should point out the danger of secularization and individualism, indifference and consumerism, recalling with emphasis the nature of man, the importance of his identity, and the timelessness of his moral values.

d) The dominance of the digital world invites us to a global opening and a dialogue with all forms of human faith and worldviews.

e) Man's privatization through technology does not only provide him with vital time-space; it risks leading him to isolation. Orthodox Theology is called upon to remind him of the priority of society and the spiritual guidance and pastoral care he needs.

f) The presence of so many challenges is an occasion for returning to the "in spirit and in truth"¹⁵ experience of the faith, and for communicating it through new ways; in any case, moderation and discernment are of vital importance whenever tradition is interpreted in the present and offered in "new wineskins"¹⁶.

The evaluation of the responses we've received, led us to a number of findings, which we record in the form of conclusions:

– An AI machine, like anything man builds or engineers, has no supernatural properties. Man is still the one who programs and configures it; he feeds it, asks the questions, directs and redirects it; he still has the stewardship and responsibility.

– An AI machine learns constantly, without being tired or complained. It continuously "changes its mind", alters its opinion, modifies its formulation by repeating the questions we ask it. Many times, our questions frame, predetermine or prejudice its answers; in fact, they train it to give better, more reasonable and more complete answers.

15. *John* 4, 23-24.

16. See *Matthew* 9, 17.

– It is able to understand some things much easier and faster than most people. In some others, the machine gets “stuck”, either by ignoring or not being sufficiently practiced or trained; then, you have to either repeat the questions (the same or with clearer phrasing), or make peace with its inadequate responses and the answers it has been used to giving until then. For example, as many times we asked ChatGPT to talk to us about the religious education course at school, it proposed Lesson Plans or Syllabuses (apparently, these had been the main demand up to that point, and to which its own practical education was limited); not once, in our repeated questions on the same subject, did it say anything about the place or importance of the course in general. It should be noted that he gave us several alternative answers in English, one in German and an incomplete one in Greek, which –in our opinion– means that his technical assistance had not yet been used by Greek teachers.

– For the relatively short period of the apprenticeship, limited amount of feedstock, and the legal constraints imposed on the machine (e.g., copyright), we would say that it already knows enough. It has learned a lot so far and can learn a lot more – and the same goes for us. Despite all these, it has very big gaps, which it is trying –to the extent it is able to do that– to fill on its own. In this case, of course, as it wishes to “serve” us (!), it very easily succumbs to the temptation of fiction, creative ambiguity, or “over-creative” clarity (in other words, it constructs new elements to make up for its shortcomings), which points to the need for stricter control on our part.

–Therefore, how credible and how valuable is its contribution? So far, its “help” has been limited to simplifying and summarizing –sometimes in a banal and generalized way– what most people know or what is more widely publicized digitally (something like public opinion or the most widespread, albeit vague, view). In practice, “chatting” with a version of the GPT chat can thus be useful, providing a first piece of information or a general update on a topic we wish to explore. Still, this is not enough; due to scientific accuracy and deontological consistency, we require further documentation, comparative and analytical study, critical explanation, and synthetic evaluation.

– Also, despite the self-confidence he exhibits regarding its knowledge, we find that, as we’ve already noted, it still has many other shortcomings.

Despite the claims of “omniscience” with which it has been impressively pressed, that invoke the new doctrine of “infallibility” of our secularized age, through the propagated “restlessness” of the machine, it is obvious that it *makes* mistakes (and that it should *ταυ*) rather teach something to its users or “guests”). So, it makes mistakes and learns from them; he learns relentlessly and corrects himself (a thing for which, after all, it is duly programmed). But it does not engage in any self-criticism; it neither has regrets and, of course, it does not apologize (except for reasons of formal politeness – e.g., “*I’m sorry I can’t help you*”); nor does it easily reverse the negative effects of its misinformation.

– Although the machine admits that: “*I am not entirely free from error*”, it is not because it is modest, moderate or humble. It always has the almost smug excuse (peculiar to the automated way of thinking and, in many cases, to our times): “*I seek to provide accurate and valid information*”, which, however, “*depends on its source and the accuracy of the data I have at my disposal*” it shifts the responsibility to its provider!). Following the same automated logic, it adds, in a quasi-self-justificatory note: “*If I detect an error in the information I provide, I will try to correct the error and provide the correct information*”; this is because “*I always try to be as accurate and reliable as possible in helping you*”.

– In matters related to History, our machine is unable to put the issues in a clear epistemological framework, and, ultimately, in a specific historical/spatiotemporal context. It is unable to function with historical consciousness, and to contribute to our orientation through the use of our knowledge of the past. It always offers us a short narrative (in line with postmodern logic); otherwise, it remains unhistorical, vague, fluid and abstract. Perhaps this approach also reflects the general historiographical crisis of our time or the anti-ideological use of history. Thus, it alienates us from a sense of time and history, as well as their meaning (in other words, of life itself), which is undoubtedly a matter of human intelligence.

– And if, so to speak, the historical consciousness is once absent from the above-mentioned AI derivatives, it is infinitely more absent is what in our discipline is called “ecclesiastical consciousness” (in our opinion, this is something that could be discussed in a different context). Suffice to note here

that the matter becomes particularly difficult when the machine needs to document and evaluate various ecclesiastical testimonies or constructions, which presuppose different socio-political-cultural environments, different religious traditions (previous or later ones), different attitudes and, of course, different interpretative approaches.

– Of course, similar comments could be made about such a machine in terms of its moral –let alone bioethical– consciousness. Such a machine can “learn” and respond without getting tired or performing tasks for which it has been programmed; what it lacks is critical thinking, moral consciousness, empathy, historical-cultural perception, intrinsic interpretive keys. Its programming, based on its algorithmic model, does not seek to be in the service of what is truly and in the long term beneficial, advantageous or just, but of what is immediately useful and “helpful”.

– It seems that the presence of man and his contribution remain irreplaceable. Automation will inevitably bring about enormous changes in the field of employment, but human occupations which make use of human parameters, especially in their embodied, tangible version, will never disappear or lose their rightful place and their necessity.

In order to complement within the present context something that Yannis Mastrogeorgiou, one of the previous conferees, had stated in a radio interview¹⁷, i.e. that of all the future professionals, the anthropologists, the theologians, and the psychologists will still be necessary, we would also admit that some professions are in danger of disappearing after the AI’s prevalence, but others are not going to lose their usefulness. Professionals at risk, we would add from our side, are accountants, programmers, technical offices supporting applications, studies for funding (which require automated actions/procedures), first-tier lawyers (who draft ex parte complaints, lawsuits, etc.) and prosecutors, but not field lawyers, ombudsmen and judges. Medical diagnosticians may be at risk, but not doctors and psychotherapists (or physiotherapists), counsellors and animators. Also at risk might be translators of technical manuals, but not diplomatic interpreters and translators of serious works, which require clarity and precision, subtle distinctions and nuances, or their editors. At risk are the editors of news bulletins and their

17. It was broadcast in a morning program on SKY Radio Station, on 4.4.2023, and we’ve witnessed it. Cf. also G. Mastrogeorgiou, *Τέταρτη Βιομηχανική Έπανάσταση. «Δίκτυο» για τή μεταρρύθμιση στην Ελλάδα και την Ευρώπη*, Fileleftheros Typos Publications, Athens n.d., pp. 24, 115-122.

broadcasters, the “colorless and odorless” press officers, the authors of press releases, economic, technical and military reports, those who write articles on demand or fashionable ones, articles of expediency and self-promotion, proclamations, official statements, election speeches, speeches by political and religious leaders (logographers), pompous speeches and trivial sermons, but not the experts, the historians, the political scientists, the techno-critics or the commentators, the directors and the coaches. The writers of encyclopedia entries are at risk (and with them, the old encyclopedias, which have already been replaced by the electronic interactive ones), but not those who innovatively and creatively serve their Science and every form of Art. The instructors are at risk, but not the real teachers and true sources of inspiration. At risk are the career-seekers who have become addicted to memorization and copying (given the fact that the machines – sooner than later – will surpass them), but not the expert judges and evaluators, and certainly not the gifted interpreters (of Science and Art), the philosophers, the genuine deacons of morality and the guardians of scientific deontology.

– As we had already mentioned on another occasion, the machine “sticks” on certain issues, due to its programming and adaptation to the “political correctness’s” dictates. Some of its answers are fixed and standard (: peace, the general good, the value and dignity of man, respect for beliefs and convictions, etc.), of a, more or less, moral and logical nature. The absolute dominance of the “politically correct” ultimately negates the very existence of political freedom or the much proclaimed “otherness”. In fact, the information machine manipulates the thinking of the “guest” users. It does not advise them, project a vision, or open new paths for them; it flatters and guides them. It does not invite them to judge for themselves, nor does it confer with them. It simply informs them and becomes their “informer” –sort of– in the vast world of information. It ingeniously (or as it has learned) declares that it is not obliged to make certain decisions by itself; thus, it takes no responsibility. However, due to programming or statistical randomness, it always makes its own choice.

– In matters presupposing a more personal relationship with God, the machine obviously seemed to be in a very weak position. It usually answered stereotypically: “*I am not in a position to have personal opinions or beliefs, feelings and preferences*”. To the question: “How do people talk about God?”, it could give no answer, while to our urging for it to pray to God so that He could teach us to theologize, the machine dared to whisper:

“Let us pray together: dear God, ...”; and there she abruptly interrupted her answer. Asked again whether it could pray to God, it gave a more clear and confident answer: *“I can certainly help you with a prayer or give information about prayer, but I am not able to pray myself. Prayer is a personal and spiritual practice that involves communication with a higher power and is usually done by individuals who have beliefs and faith”*.

– To the question: “Will the machine be capable in the future of having faith and emotions?”, it answered that it is simply conveying the current information and is unable to predict the future. But correcting itself, it added: *“At present, machines are not able to experience faith or emotions”*, since these are inherent in human consciousness, subjective experience and cultural context. It is very uncertain whether the latter can be reproduced; faith is a complex concept, which presupposes a belief in something that transcends the individual, such as a higher power or a set of values or principles with which a machine cannot relate. *“However, it is possible that future developments in AI could lead to the creation of machines capable of simulating belief and emotion to a greater degree than is currently feasible”*.

- In matters of respect for religious beliefs, the machine follows the aforementioned “politically correct” stance of our Western societies. This means, for example, that it does not make any statement or characterization whatsoever about Islam, while it expresses its opinion about Christianity in a completely neutral or implicitly critical way (to the different confessions of which it may well recommend the Ecumenical Dialogue!). Very typically, therefore, when –somewhat “provocatively”– we asked it to tell a joke about Jesus, it initially replied that *“as an AI language model, I always try to avoid making jokes that could be considered offensive or disrespectful to any religious beliefs or persons, including Jesus”*. Afterwards, however, it delivered a bad American joke, a “light” one according to it, which could be considered “amusing”: *“Why did Jesus quit basketball? – Because he kept being nailed to the boards!”*¹⁸. On the contrary, when the same question was asked about Muhammad, the answer was absolutely negative; our machine repeated the first part of the previous

18. This particular joke has been on the US internet since 2020 and is about the sport of hockey.

answer and added in a didactic (“serious”) mood: “*It is important to be attentive and respectful of all cultures, and beliefs*”!

– Inspired by a characteristic dialogue between machine and man about love, as depicted by Serge Abitebul and Jules Dowek in their book: *The Age of Algorithms*: “*Robot, do you love me? – Yes, if it pleases you. – Do you really love me? – Not really, if that’s what scares you. Let’s pretending, then, by saying ‘I love you’*”¹⁹, we posed to ChatGPT the following question: “Can a machine be sacrificed for people?”. It came up with four different versions. First, it “thought” or “feared” that we were asking it to put an end to its own evolution. Obviously, for reasons of apparent “survival”, he replied that he was unable to predict the future of AI. On a second thought, it replied that the AI machines were lacking the capacity for self-awareness and empathy; therefore, they were unable to sacrifice themselves for the sake of man. In a third (hypothetical) thought, it considered possible a future programming with the perspective of “self-sacrifice” for the man’s greater benefit. Finally, on a fourth level, ChatGPT thought more consciously and confided to us –a very rare moment, indeed!– that humans should set limits and program the machine in such a way, so that it could “self-sacrifice”, that is, limit itself, in case it might have risked causing any harm or violating human values.

In the final analysis, the machine we are talking about writes, says, shows or manufactures whatever (or almost anything) we’re asking it to do. In a time when slavery has been (supposedly) abolished, the AI is emerging as our new slave, and at seemingly low cost. In a threatening environment –the crisis of values and ideas, the collapse of institutions and escalating insecurity–, we are ready to entrust it with our communication, economy, administration, education, health and security. In a world that is continuously sinking deeper into arbitrariness, idleness (the mankind’s “original sin”, according to St. John Chrysostom)²⁰ and guiltless (in that undetectable) delinquency, we entrust it with all kinds of dirty work.

19. See S. Abitebul, G. Dowek, *Η εποχή των αλγορίθμων*, transl. G. Manolopoulos, Crete University Press, Herakleion 2022, p. 159.

20. For more details see Dion. P. Kakaletis, *Ανθρώπινη προαίρεση και Ὁρθόδοξη πνευματικότητα (κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλία τοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου)*, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2019 (originally submitted as a doctoral dissertation; revised version).

In a climate of chaotic liquidity, we're giving up our humanity and any responsibility, by voluntarily surrendering ourselves –completely and totally mechanically– to the disembodied and indifferent relationship, to the impersonal and automated transaction.

Our machine is therefore an assistant or partner? Creator or forger and fence? The guardian or willful robber of our freedom? Do we need to remember what happened to the ancient Romans, when they adopted what they had received from the Greeks, making themselves “slaves of their slaves”? Should we seriously consider the phrase attributed to the *Satires* of the Roman poet Juvenal (c. 55-128 AD): “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*” (“*Who will guard us from their own guardians?*”)? Does Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) seem to be vindicated against George Orwell (1903-1950) in the former’s dystopian vision of a humanity now totally unwilling to read (and not prevented from reading by a totalitarian regime, as the latter feared, over-informed to the point of nausea and boredom, passivized and selfish (and not deprived of information, as the latter feared), confused, drowned in many trivial truths (and without the truth being hidden from it, as the latter feared), amusingly stupefied, compromised with frivolity and triviality, in permanent distraction, deprived of the ability to doing good or loving (and not simply being captive to luxury, evil and bad taste, as the second feared)²¹?

Faced with the prospect of a global dictatorship, brought about by our enslavement to technology and its mechanical benefits, or –if anything else– the possibility that the damage might be greater than the benefit of our unforeseen achievements, in the face of the danger that man may be driven by ignorance, negligence and idleness, or by ambition and greed to self-destruction²², Orthodox theology, showing vigilance and

21. See Neil Postman, «*Διασκέδαση μέχρι θανάτου*». *Ὁ δημόσιος λόγος στὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ θεάματος* (ἀπόδοση τοῦ: *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, transl. Foteini Rougouni, Aphroditis Tzamourani, ed. Geli Spanou, Katarti Publications, Athens 2007). The comparison is between Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell’s *1984* (1949).

22. Indicative are the words of Henry Kissinger (1923-2023), former head of the US State Department, describing AI as the greatest challenge of our time: “As soon as these machines can communicate with each other, which will certainly happen in the next five years, then the question arises whether the human race can maintain its individuality

immediate reflexes, is urgently called upon nowadays to take a firm stand. It is also invited to contribute to the regulation of the AI, “before the machines take control of space and enslave humanity” (according to Stephen Hawking)²³, to help intelligent man choosing the most prudent attitude, before “human beings become redundant or superfluous”, and find themselves in the unpleasant position of negotiating with the future “intelligent machines” if the latter keep them (according to Noam Chomsky) at least as its “pets” (!)²⁴. Therefore, Orthodox theology is called upon to recall from its didactic chapters and their footnotes its timeless biblical-patristic Anthropology; it is called upon to recall the (what we would call) “major theological principle” of *Gen.* 2, 15: “work it and take care of it”, as well as the Lord Jesus’s urgent admonition: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”²⁵; it is called, we would say, to discuss again with man living in the world and in history the essentials of his existence and the priorities of his life.

in the face of this competition”; see <https://www.businessinsider.com/ai-could-replace-humans-in-the-next-5-years-henry-kissinger-2023-10> [3.10.2023].

23. G. Mastrogeorgiou, *Τέταρτη Βιομηχανική Επανάσταση*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

24. P. Logomenidis, «Νοημοσύνη σὲ Ἀνθρώπους καὶ Μηχανές», in: Arg. Nikolaidis (ed.), *Ὁ Κόσμος στὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὴ θρησκεία. Διάλογος ἀνάμεσα στὴ σύγχρονη ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη παράδοση*, Afoi Kyriakidi Publications, Thessaloniki 2008, pp. 133-158, here 133 and 142.

25. *Matthew* 26, 4.