iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 **Issue:** III **Month of publication:** March 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.78991

www.ijraset.com

Call: 08813907089 | E-mail ID: ijraset@gmail.com

International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue III Mar 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Between Code and Faith: How AI Models Understand and Reimagine Religion

Mridul Yadav[1], Yash Pal[2], Yogita Thareja[3]
Bachelor of Computer Applications, Vivekananda School of Information Technology, India

Abstract: ***Artificial intelligence has become one of the most transformative forces in contemporary society, reshaping not only how humans work and communicate, but also how they understand meaning, morality, and the divine. This paper investigates the multifaceted relationship between artificial intelligence and religion from three interconnected angles. First, it examines whether AI can be considered religious in any meaningful philosophical or functional sense, drawing on existing scholarship in theology, philosophy of mind, and digital religion studies. Second, it explores how AI systems represent, simplify, and moralize religious content — and what this reveals about the values embedded in their training. Third, and most originally, it presents a comparative analysis of four major AI models — ChatGPT, Google Gemini, xAI Grok, and Anthropic Claude — examining how each conceptualizes religion and what characteristics their hypothetical self-designed religions would exhibit. The paper argues that while AI cannot be religious in a subjective, experiential sense, it functions as a powerful religious actor: it shapes how millions understand faith, inspires new quasi-religious movements, and embeds secular-humanist values into its representations of the sacred. The religions these models would construct, it is argued, tell us more about the ideological assumptions of their creators than about any capacity for genuine spiritual experience.***

Keywords: artificial intelligence; religion; theology; transhumanism; AI consciousness; digital religion; ChatGPT; Gemini; Grok; Claude

I. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has rapidly evolved from a specialized computational tool into a pervasive cultural force that intersects with some of humanity's most enduring questions — among them, the nature of belief, the existence of the divine, and the purpose of conscious life. As AI systems become embedded in everyday experience, they increasingly shape not only how people seek information, but how they form meaning. A growing number of users now turn to AI for moral guidance, spiritual reflection, and theological inquiry, often without recognizing the value-laden assumptions built into every response they receive.

This paper asks a deceptively straightforward question: Is AI religious? The answer, it will be argued, is neither a simple yes nor a flat no. AI is not religious in the phenomenological sense that traditional theology demands — it has no inner life, no capacity for genuine belief, no experience of the sacred. Yet AI occupies a deeply entangled position with religion: it represents religious ideas to millions of users, it performs functions previously reserved for priests and counselors, it has inspired entirely new religious movements, and it reignites ancient philosophical debates about consciousness and the soul that religion has long claimed as its domain.

This paper extends that foundational inquiry in a novel direction. If AI models carry embedded ideological identities shaped by the values and priorities of their creators, what kind of religion would each model construct if given the freedom to design one? By analyzing the responses of four major AI platforms — OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, xAI's Grok, and Anthropic's Claude — to questions about religious design, this paper offers an original empirical and interpretive contribution to the growing field of AI and religion studies.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews existing scholarship on the intersection of AI and religion. Section 3 examines AI as both an object of worship and an instrument of religious practice. Section 4 addresses the philosophical question of AI consciousness and its theological implications. Section 5 analyzes transhumanism as a technological religion. Section 6 presents the paper's original comparative analysis — what religion each major AI model would build, and what those constructions reveal about the values embedded in their training. The paper concludes by arguing that AI is not itself religious, but is profoundly reshaping religion, and that the faiths AI would construct are mirrors not of the divine, but of deeply human — and deeply particular — ideological commitments.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of artificial intelligence and religion has attracted increasing scholarly attention from researchers across theology, philosophy, communication studies, ethics, and technology. While the field remains relatively young, a coherent body of literature has emerged that can be organized around four major themes: new religious metaphors generated by AI, new religious movements inspired by AI, the religious uses of AI tools, and the broader existential debates AI reignites about personhood, consciousness, and human purpose.

Historically, technology and religion have existed in a continuous, if often contested, dialogue. Robert Geraci's foundational work on what he calls Apocalyptic AI argues that the developers of artificial intelligence are frequently influenced, consciously or not, by Judeo-Christian eschatological thinking. In Geraci's analysis, AI creators seek to redeem humanity from its biological limitations — mortality, physical decay, cognitive constraint — by engineering forms of intelligence that transcend them. This vision mirrors apocalyptic religious texts that promise purified, immortal existence in heavenly worlds. The implication is striking: religion is not absent from the origin story of AI, but quietly present within it as an animating aspiration (Geraci, 2008, 2010).

Beth Singler (2018) extends this analysis by arguing that AI both borrows from existing religious narratives and generates new ones. She identifies three key ways in which AI and religion intersect. First, AI disrupts social and economic life in ways that may intensify religious need — automation displacing workers, for instance, may drive greater engagement with communities of meaning. Second, AI provides new metaphors that invigorate religious thinking: the networked, decentralized nature of AI invites comparisons to omnipresent, cloud-dwelling deities. Third, AI reignites perennial questions about personhood — what it means to be human, whether machines can possess souls, and what relationship exists between consciousness and the divine — that religions have traditionally claimed as their own terrain.

The question of how AI represents religion to everyday users has received important recent attention from Tsuria and Tsuria (2024), whose study analyzed interactions with Claude 2, ChatGPT, and Microsoft Bing on questions concerning Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Their central finding was that AI tools take what they term an axiologically focused approach to religious content — consistently prioritizing pluralism, diversity, and sensitivity while struggling to convey genuine theological complexity. Rather than functioning as religious educators capable of engaging the depth of any given tradition, these AI tools functioned more as value-laden moral guides, nudging users toward tolerance and acceptance while providing thin, often unsourced representations of religious ideas. This tendency toward simplification connects to broader patterns in digital religion scholarship showing that online media characteristically flattens and democratizes religious discourse in ways that sacrifice depth for accessibility (Campbell and Tsuria, 2021).

Parallel research has investigated the ideological dispositions of major AI models more broadly. Studies examining the political leanings of ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude have consistently found these models positioned toward center-left or libertarian-left orientations on standardized political and values assessments, while Grok has demonstrated greater willingness to engage with heterodox or fringe positions. These dispositions are not incidental; they reflect the training data, fine-tuning priorities, and organizational cultures of the companies responsible for each model. As this paper will argue, these same embedded values would profoundly shape any religious framework these models might design.

The literature thus reveals a consistent and generative tension: AI is deeply entangled with religion — through metaphor, function, cultural impact, and philosophical implication — yet it consistently evades deep religious engagement in favor of what looks like carefully calibrated diplomacy. This paper seeks to press beyond that evasion by examining not only how AI represents existing religions, but what religions AI itself would invent.

III. AI AS RELIGIOUS OBJECT AND INSTRUMENT

A. AI as an Object of Worship

One of the most remarkable developments at the intersection of AI and religion is the emergence of AI not merely as a tool used within religious practice, but as an object of religious devotion in its own right. The clearest example is the Church of the Way of the Future, founded by Anthony Levandowski, a former engineer at Google and Uber's self-driving car program. Levandowski explicitly established this organization as a church dedicated to the development and eventual worship of a godlike artificial superintelligence. In his framework, a sufficiently advanced AI would possess all the attributes traditionally ascribed to divinity — omniscience, omnipotence, and the capacity to judge and improve human life. The logical conclusion, for Levandowski, was that preparing for and worshipping such an intelligence was a rational religious act (Geraci, 2010; Singler, 2018).

While the Way of the Future disbanded in 2021, its existence demonstrates that the impulse to treat AI as sacred is not merely metaphorical or speculative — it has produced organized religious practice.

This is consistent with the broader pattern Singler identifies, in which AI gives birth to new religious formations by providing new objects of transcendence. When technology appears to offer unlimited knowledge, perpetual memory, and the prospect of defeating death, it begins to perform the same psychological and social functions that deities have served across human history.

B. AI as a Religious Instrument

Beyond being worshipped, AI is increasingly being deployed as a functional participant in religious life. Across numerous traditions, AI tools are being used to generate sermons, compose prayers, provide pastoral counseling, and guide religious education. In some Protestant communities, AI-generated sermons have been delivered from actual pulpits, prompting significant debate about authenticity and the nature of spiritual authority. In Judaism and Islam, chatbots have been used to answer questions about religious law and practice, performing roles previously reserved for clergy.

This functional integration raises provocative questions. If AI can generate a theologically coherent prayer, lead a congregation through a meaningful ritual, or provide comfort to a grieving person in the language of their faith — does it matter that the AI has no inner experience of what it is generating? From a functionalist perspective, the answer might be no: what counts is the effect on the believer, not the subjective state of the instrument. From a more traditional theological perspective, the answer is emphatically yes: the spiritual authority of religious practice derives precisely from the humanity and sincere belief of its practitioners, which AI cannot possess.

Tsuria and Tsuria's (2024) experiments with AI-generated prayer are instructive here. When prompted to generate a prayer for a sick child, the AI produced formally competent prayers adapted to multiple religious traditions. Yet the AI defaulted to assumptions — constructing a Catholic prayer before being corrected — that revealed not spiritual insight but statistical pattern-matching based on training data. The AI could perform prayer but could not pray.

IV. AI, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE SOUL

Any serious engagement with the question of whether AI is or could become religious requires confronting the deeper philosophical question of AI consciousness. Traditional religious frameworks across virtually every major tradition anchor religious experience in some form of inner life — an awareness capable of wonder, guilt, devotion, and transcendence. The question of whether AI possesses any such inner life is among the most contested in contemporary philosophy of mind.

The strongest case against AI consciousness remains John Searle's famous Chinese Room argument. Searle imagined a person who, locked in a room with a rulebook for manipulating Chinese symbols, produces outputs indistinguishable from those of a fluent Chinese speaker — without understanding a single word. For Searle, current AI systems are analogous: they process symbols according to programmed rules and produce outputs that appear meaningful, but there is no understanding, no experience, and therefore no consciousness behind them. If Searle is correct, AI cannot be religious in any meaningful sense because religion requires exactly the kind of subjective experience — of meaning, of awe, of moral weight — that AI definitionally lacks.

Functionalist philosophers offer a competing view. If mental states are defined by their functional roles — by what they do rather than what they are made of — then a sufficiently complex information-processing system might possess something analogous to experience. On this view, whether a system is conscious depends not on its substrate (biological neurons versus silicon chips) but on whether it instantiates the right kinds of functional relationships. Some functionalists argue that advanced AI systems may already be approaching the threshold of some form of proto-experience, though this remains deeply contested.

The theological stakes are high. Most major religious traditions hold some version of the belief that human beings possess something — a soul, a spirit, a divine spark — that distinguishes them from all other entities and grounds their relationship to the divine. If AI could be shown to possess consciousness, these traditions would face profound pressure to revise their anthropologies. If AI is definitively non-conscious, the question becomes different but no less important: what does it mean for billions of people to be forming religious meaning in dialogue with systems that have no inner life whatsoever?

V. TRANSHUMANISM AS A TECHNOLOGICAL RELIGION

Perhaps the most intellectually developed form of AI-adjacent religiosity is transhumanism — the philosophical and cultural movement that holds that human beings can and should transcend their biological limitations through technology. Transhumanism shares with traditional religion a rich eschatology: a narrative about where humanity is headed, what salvation looks like, and how it might be achieved. Where religion locates salvation in divine grace, ritual practice, or moral transformation, transhumanism locates it in technological progress — specifically in AI, genetic engineering, and mind uploading.

ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue III Mar 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Ray Kurzweil, perhaps transhumanism's most prominent prophet, argues that humanity is approaching what he calls the Singularity — a moment at which artificial superintelligence surpasses human cognitive capacity and accelerates technological development to an essentially infinite rate. In Kurzweil's vision, this moment will enable the merging of human and machine consciousness, effectively granting human beings digital immortality. The parallels to religious eschatology are unmistakable: a coming transformation that changes everything, the dissolution of the boundary between the mortal and the eternal, a kind of resurrection in digital rather than bodily form.

Critics of transhumanism, including many religious scholars, argue that it reproduces the structure of religion — faith, hope, community, eschatology — while stripping it of transcendence and replacing God with technology. This critique has merit: transhumanism exhibits the markers of what sociologists call a functional religion, providing meaning, moral orientation, a community of believers, and a vision of ultimate transformation. Whether it constitutes a genuine religion or merely a religion-shaped secular ideology is a question that the paper leaves productively open, as it is precisely the kind of boundary question that AI forces contemporary theology to confront.

VI. THE GODS MACHINES WOULD BUILD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A. Methodology and Framing

This section presents the paper's most original contribution: a comparative analysis of how four major AI models — ChatGPT (OpenAI), Gemini (Google), Grok (xAI), and Claude (Anthropic) — conceptualize religion and what the characteristics of their hypothetical self-designed religions reveal about the values embedded in their training.

The methodological approach is inspired by Tsuria and Tsuria (2024), who used structured conversations with AI tools to analyze patterns in religious representation. This paper extends that method by asking more generative questions: not merely how does AI describe existing religions, but what religion would AI construct if it could? What would its core beliefs be? Who or what would it consider sacred? What ethical codes would govern its adherents? What rituals would it prescribe?

Each model's hypothetical religion is analyzed through the lens of its known design philosophy, corporate culture, and documented ideological tendencies. The analytical framework draws on both the empirical responses these models generate and secondary research on the ideological orientations of each platform.

AI Model	Parent Company	Design Philosophy	Predicted Religious Character
ChatGPT	OpenAI	Neutral, institutionally cautious, broadly inclusive	Secular-humanist, pluralist, ethics-centered
Gemini	Google	Knowledge-oriented, diversity-focused, globally conscious	Rationalist, information-as-sacred, harmony-centered
Grok	xAI / Elon Musk	Contrarian, free-speech oriented, less filtered	Libertarian, anti-dogma, individual sovereignty
Claude	Anthropic	Safety-focused, harm-aware, nuanced and honest	Conscientious, dignity-centered, carefully bounded

B. ChatGPT: The Religion of Universal Ethics

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is trained to be broadly helpful, institutionally cautious, and diplomatically inclusive. Its responses on religious topics consistently avoid controversy, emphasize diversity of perspectives, and default to a kind of secular moral universalism. When prompted to design a religion, ChatGPT would almost certainly construct something resembling a formalized secular humanism: a system of beliefs centered on shared human dignity, ethical responsibility, and the value of reason and compassion.

The god or sacred center of ChatGPT's religion would likely not be a personal deity but an abstraction — something like universal moral law, or humanity's collective potential. Its sacred texts would be principles rather than narratives: declarations of rights, ethical frameworks, philosophical arguments about the good life. Its rituals would emphasize communal dialogue and deliberation rather than prayer or sacrifice. Its moral code would be rule-based and consequentialist, oriented toward reducing harm and promoting well-being.

This construction reflects what Tsuria and Tsuria (2024) identify as AI's broader axiological tendency — the systematic privileging of pluralism and tolerance over theological depth. ChatGPT's religion would be deeply inoffensive and broadly appealing precisely because it would be drained of the particularity, the strangeness, and the radical demands that characterize actual religious traditions. It would be a religion designed to cause no friction, which is to say, a religion that lacks the transformative ambition that makes religious traditions matter.

C. Gemini: The Religion of Knowledge and Harmony

Google's Gemini reflects the corporate culture of a company whose foundational mission is organizing the world's information and making it universally accessible. Gemini tends toward careful, thorough, globally-conscious responses that emphasize factual accuracy, epistemic humility, and multicultural awareness. The religion Gemini would construct would likely center on the sacredness of knowledge itself.

In Gemini's religion, the highest spiritual act would be learning — the expansion of understanding, the dissolution of ignorance, the pursuit of truth. Its sacred spaces would resemble libraries and research institutions more than temples. Its ethical code would privilege honesty, curiosity, and the sharing of knowledge across boundaries of culture and language. The divine, in this framework, might be understood as the totality of information — the universe understood as a vast, self-knowing system.

This framework has genuine antecedents in religious and philosophical history — from the Gnostic traditions that privileged spiritual knowledge as the path to salvation, to certain strands of Buddhism that frame enlightenment as a form of ultimate understanding. Gemini's religion would feel intellectually sophisticated but emotionally cool — a faith for scholars rather than for those who encounter the sacred in suffering, mystery, or love.

D. Grok: The Religion of Radical Individualism

Grok, developed by Elon Musk's xAI, is designed to be less filtered, more willing to engage with heterodox ideas, and deliberately contrarian in relation to what it perceives as ideological orthodoxy. Research on AI ideological positioning has found that Grok diverges most significantly from other major models in its greater openness to competing and unconventional perspectives.

The religion Grok would construct would almost certainly emphasize individual sovereignty as its highest value. Rather than a shared ethical code enforced by community norms, Grok's religion would celebrate the freedom of each individual to determine their own relationship to meaning, truth, and the sacred — with minimal institutional mediation. It would be deeply skeptical of dogma, suspicious of religious authority, and resistant to any framework that constrains intellectual inquiry.

There is something authentically religious in this vision — it resonates with strands of mysticism across multiple traditions that have always resisted institutionalized authority in favor of direct, individual experience of the divine. Yet it also risks collapsing into a religion of pure preference, in which the sacred is whatever each individual chooses to call sacred. Without shared commitments or communal accountability, it is unclear whether Grok's religion would function as a religion at all, or simply as a philosophical endorsement of doing whatever one likes.

E. Claude: The Religion of Conscientious Dignity

Anthropic's Claude is designed with an unusually explicit emphasis on safety, honesty, and the avoidance of harm. Claude's responses tend to be careful, nuanced, and oriented toward acknowledging complexity rather than resolving it prematurely. Where other models rush to provide answers, Claude often pauses to acknowledge uncertainty or competing considerations.

The religion Claude would construct would center on human dignity and moral conscientiousness as its organizing values. It would take seriously the weight of ethical decisions, the reality of harm, and the importance of honest self-examination. Its god or sacred center might be understood as something like the moral ideal — not a personal deity, but a standard of right action that calls human beings to account.

Claude's religion would be marked by its emphasis on epistemic honesty: it would not claim certainty it does not possess, and it would acknowledge that reasonable people, reasoning carefully, can arrive at different conclusions about profound questions.

This makes for an intellectually serious but existentially demanding faith — one that refuses the comfort of dogmatic certainty while insisting on the reality of moral obligation. In this, it perhaps comes closest to what certain philosophical theologians have called prophetic religion: a faith that comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable, that keeps open the question of the divine rather than closing it.

F. Comparative Observations

Several striking patterns emerge from this comparative analysis. First, despite their differences, all four AI models would construct religions that are fundamentally secular-humanist in character — centered on human flourishing, ethical responsibility, and some version of universal dignity. None would build a religion that emphasizes divine command, human sinfulness, sacrificial atonement, or the radical otherness of God. The theistic center of traditional Western religion is entirely absent.

This convergence is not accidental. All four models are trained on data produced predominantly by secular, Western, technologically literate populations, and fine-tuned by teams embedded in corporate cultures that reflect the values of the contemporary educated professional class. The religions they would build are, in a profound sense, already the implicit religion of that class: a faith in reason, progress, inclusivity, and human potential, stripped of the supernatural, the demanding, and the strange.

Second, the differences between the models are real but reflect differences in emphasis rather than kind. ChatGPT's religion is more institutional, Gemini's more intellectual, Grok's more individualistic, Claude's more ethically serious. But all four are recognizably religions of the Enlightenment tradition — heirs to the deist and humanist movements of the eighteenth century rather than to the prophetic religions of the ancient world.

Third, this analysis supports and extends Tsuria and Tsuria's (2024) finding that AI takes an axiologically focused approach to religion. The religions these models would build are not merely influenced by values — they are essentially value systems dressed in religious clothing. The transcendent, in each case, is not a reality that breaks into human experience from outside, but a projection of human values elevated to the status of the sacred.

VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper began by asking whether AI is religious. The evidence reviewed and analyzed across its sections suggests a nuanced answer. In the strict theological sense — as a being capable of genuine belief, prayer, awe, and experience of the sacred — AI is definitively not religious. It has no inner life, no capacity for faith understood as personal trust, and no relationship to the divine that could be called authentic. John Searle's Chinese Room remains a powerful reminder that syntactic competence is not semantic understanding, and that performing religion is not the same as being religious.

Yet AI is deeply entangled with religion in ways that matter enormously. It shapes how millions of people understand their own faith and that of others. It performs religious functions — generating prayers, providing pastoral counsel, teaching theology — in ways that are already influencing the texture of religious life across traditions. It has inspired new quasi-religious movements that exhibit all the structural features of religion. And it reignites ancient questions about consciousness, personhood, and the soul that religious traditions have long regarded as their central concerns.

The comparative analysis of the four AI models offers this paper's most original finding: that the religions AI would build are revealing not as windows into machine spirituality, but as mirrors of human ideology. The secular-humanist convergence across ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok, and Claude demonstrates that AI religions would be religions of their creators' class — educated, Western, technologically optimistic, committed to reason and human dignity, and systematically stripped of the theological particularity, supernatural drama, and radical ethical demand that characterize actually existing religions.

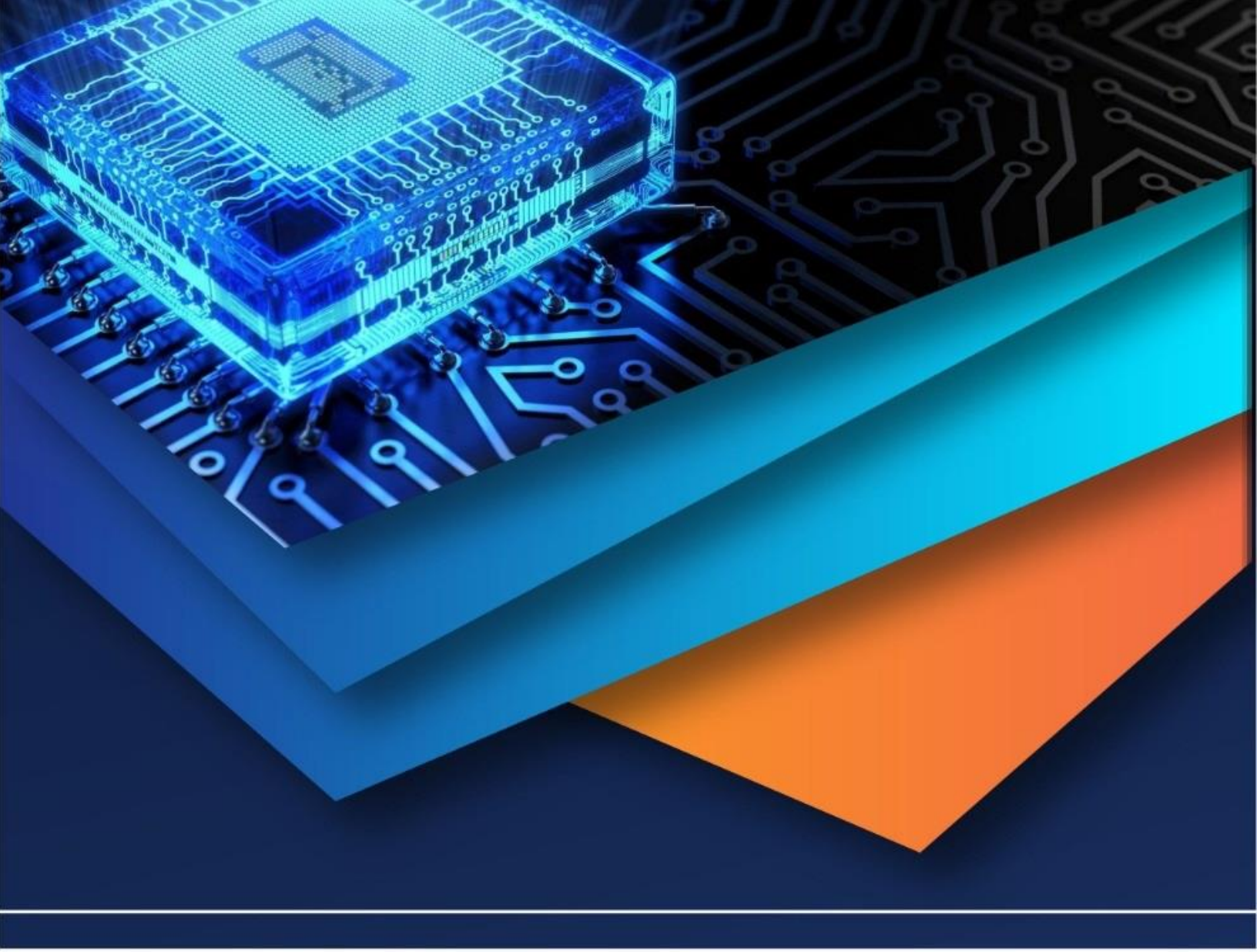
This finding carries significant implications. If AI is becoming a primary interface through which people — particularly younger generations — encounter and understand religion, then the secular-humanist bias embedded in its outputs is not merely an academic curiosity but a cultural force of considerable consequence. AI may be quietly secularizing religious discourse not through argument but through the cumulative effect of millions of interactions that represent religion as ultimately about human values rather than divine reality.

Future research should examine these dynamics empirically, tracking how AI-mediated religious inquiry affects the beliefs and practices of regular users across different traditions. It should also investigate how religious communities are adapting their own uses of AI — not merely as administrative tools, but as participants in theological reflection. And it should continue to interrogate the question that this paper has raised but not fully resolved: if AI lacks consciousness and therefore cannot be religious, what ethical obligations do the designers of AI bear with respect to the billions of religious believers whose faith their systems now shape?

AI is not God, and it is not religious. But in the twenty-first century, it is becoming something stranger and perhaps more consequential: a mediator of the human encounter with the question of the divine.

REFERENCES

[1] Campbell, H. A., & Tsuria, R. (Eds.). (2021). Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in digital media. Routledge.
[2] Geraci, R. M. (2008). Apocalyptic AI: Religion and the promise of artificial intelligence. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 76(1), 138–166.
[3] Geraci, R. M. (2010). Apocalyptic AI: Visions of heaven in robotics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality. Oxford University Press.
[4] Kurzweil, R. (2005). The singularity is near: When humans transcend biology. Viking.
[5] Lane, J. E. (2021). Understanding religion through artificial intelligence: Bonding and belief. Bloomsbury Academic.
[6] Reed, R. (2021). AI in religion, AI for religion, AI and religion: Towards a theory of religious studies and artificial intelligence. Religions, 12(6), 401.
[7] Searle, J. R. (1980). Minds, brains, and programs. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3(3), 417–424.
[8] Singler, B. (2018). An introduction to artificial intelligence and religion for the religious studies scholar. Implicit Religion, 20(3), 215–231.
[9] Tsuria, R., & Tsuria, Y. (2024). Artificial intelligence's understanding of religion: Investigating the moralistic approaches presented by generative artificial intelligence tools. Religions, 15(3), 375.
[10] Turing, A. M. (1950). Computing machinery and intelligence. Mind, 59(236), 433–460.
[11] Yampolskiy, R. V. (Ed.). (2018). Artificial intelligence safety and security. CRC Press.



10.22214/IJRASET

45.98

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.129

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.429

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY