



Looking toward the Digital Jesus for Parental Guidance in Isaiah

Jim Schnell*

Methodist Theological School in Ohio, USA

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***Corresponding author:** Jim Schnell, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, USA. Email: james.schnell@fulbrightmail.org

Abstract

This report offers understanding for how Jesus can be recognized via digital technologies and that Isaiah 63:7-64:11 conveys application for how this can be illustrated. In Isaiah 63:7-64:11 we learn that God has often exhibited a position of forgiveness when we rebel against His loving embrace. He portrays an unqualified love for us in this manner. Such unqualified love for us is commensurate with the unqualified love parents can have for a child they are raising. The digital expressions of Jesus can manifest this phenomenon in meaningful ways. Technologies are in place whereby a rhetorically envisioned AI generated halo-gram can be created that conveys Jesus as a modified energy form that can offer additional means for grasping His message.

Jim Schnell, Ph.D. is a cultural analyst associated with the Fulbright Scholar Association. He retired from the U.S. Air Force, at the rank of Colonel, with his final 14 years serving as an Assistant Air Force Attache at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China. Schnell is a three-time Fulbright Scholar to Cambodia, Myanmar & Kosovo, has completed three visiting fellowships at the East-West Center (Honolulu) and has taught at Ohio State University, Cleveland State University, University of Cincinnati, Miami University, Beijing Jiaotong University, Fudan University (Shanghai), Royal University of Phnom Penh and Duy Tan University (Vietnam).

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Introduction

In this report I am positing that positions associated with Jesus can be recognized via digital technologies and that Isaiah 63:7-64:11 offers application for how this can be illustrated. In Isaiah 63:7-64:11 we learn that God has often exhibited a position of forgiveness when we rebel against His loving embrace. He portrays an unqualified love for us in this manner. Such unqualified love for us is commensurate with the unqualified love parents can have for a child they have given birth to. The digital expressions of Jesus can manifest this phenomenon in meaningful ways.

Mass media theorist Marshall McLuhan foresaw the coming information age from his viewpoint over 50 years ago when he espoused "the medium is the message." That is, the medium through which we receive our information carries more influential weight than the actual meanings conveyed via the wording used. He was primarily speaking of the mass media forms of that period (television, radio, newspapers etc.) but he foresaw the coming digital age and stressed this truism (the medium is the message) would become even more relevant with the new communication technologies coming our way.

McLuhan's view holds special relevance as we anticipate the second coming of the digital Jesus whereby the teachings of Jesus can be fed into the Artificial Intelligence (AI) apparatus to create a frame of reference data base from which answers can flow in response to questions posed. Technologies are in place whereby a rhetorically envisioned AI generated halo-gram can be created that conveys Jesus as a modified energy form. With modernization we have witnessed modified conceptions of Jesus that challenge the status quo. The release of "Jesus Christ Superstar" offered such a contemporary upgrade as did Howard Thurman's insights regarding linkage between Jesus and the disinherited. AI is merely the next iteration that offers possibilities.

Isaiah 63:7- 64:11 references how the wrath of Jesus will be felt among those who have stood in opposition to His church, but it also shines a light on the merciful God who exhibits a willingness to show mercy as evidenced by His treatment of the people of Israel. A concluding reality is that the people can find peace in the firm love of the Lord but that there should also be expressions of gratefulness in relation to it. The warm embrace of God's grace

should be celebrated but not automatically assumed. When the people of Israel rebelled against God, they clearly grieved God.

Israel turned to God in prayer when they sought to work through their circumstance. We, in turn, need to learn from their lead on this and pray often—not just when we find ourselves in time of need. Distance from our faith creates distance from God. The loss of relationship with God can draw us back to him but many people do not repent. Instead, they go further into sinfulness which results in greater disaffiliation from God.

Separation from God hardens the heart. We should be able to meet God meaningfully on a consistent basis. He is the Father, and we can be understood to be his children. God has exhibited love and grace for us, and we can further embrace manifestations of this love and grace by actively expressing our faith in God. This needs to be consistently expressed though. We need to walk with God daily. This involves confessing our sins and recognizing our place in relation to God so that we can grow in our faith.

These lessons from the Old Testament Isaiah offer foundation for what transpires during the life of Jesus Christ as explained in the New Testament. They offer a means to extend the New Testament and into modern times. Modern times offer context for the evolution of technological innovations such as AI. An exegetical inquiry will benefit from this desire to utilize a larger contextual frame for engagement in interpretation.

It should be recognized that when human beings and AI are involved in an interpretative enterprise, they are going to bring their perspectives and objectives into the process. This lays the groundwork for modification of the facts. At times such modification will be minor rearrangement of data and at the other extreme it can be large scale reformulations of fact. Notions of truth can be set aside to address other goals. “Actualization of God’s gracious deeds is the equivalent to an appeal to that gracious will which upon a time wrought these deeds and is now entreated to perform them afresh.” [1]

AI oriented interpretations of such parables are ripe for application via the digital Jesus conception. Within such a construct one can understand how there can be far-reaching agendas that, in and of themselves, are difficult to grasp regarding intent, misunderstanding and confusion. In turn, there can be unintended third and fourth order effects that have resonated over the centuries. This opens the door to focus on what an AI generated digital Jesus might tell us about the past, present and future. “Remembering, both on God’s part and on that of his people, is a major element in worship, religious education and exhortation in the Old Testament.” [2]

AI is positioned to anticipate this impact and the continued evolution of AI capabilities will further sharpen the capability of AI to analyze such phenomena. The ability for Jesus to conceal and reveal with his messages has relevance with redaction-oriented functioning. That is, he sought to use parables as means to convey

wisdom to those who were receptive to his message, but he also sought to conceal more fundamental truths from people who were unfavorably predisposed to his message in the spiritual sense or even blatantly opposed to what he was sharing. “The parable as a mode of communication was in wide use among the rabbis of Jesus’ day, although it was not common in the Gentile world.” [3] There were degrees of intentionality inherent in this dynamic. AI offers yet another layer of possibilities regarding such intentionality.

The book of Isaiah, most specifically 63:7-64:11, offers us insight for fundamental ways in which God made Himself known to us. This Old Testament framing paved the way for what occurred in the time of the New Testament. As such, we can see there can be multiple levels of meaning at play within circumstances being analyzed and we need to be mindful of this. This sets the stage for the coming of Jesus and emphasis on how he presented ideas for consumption by the masses. This requires awareness of the cultural variables that existed in that time to appreciate what Jesus was working with regarding notions and nuance associated with the construction of meaning. Some of these creations of meaning would be intentional and some would be third and fourth other effects.

A challenge with speculation about such things is that historical events must be understood as events from biblical times but not using a present-day frame of reference. Otherwise, this can result in a skewed understanding that can confuse. The Bible commentaries that we read evidence this when we see biblical scholars offering grounded interpretations of biblical events while being careful to explain contextual matters that are central to understanding what is being focused upon. So, we see that clear understanding of events and their corresponding intentions are to be aided by grounded interpretation.

Beyond what is described in the previous paragraphs there were scenarios whereby receivers of his message did not have the ability to comprehend what Jesus was conveying. “The result is to suggest that Jesus taught parables with the purpose that those on the outside of the circle of his following might not be able to discern his meaning.” [4] There would be less intentionality to conceal in such a context but the aspect of blurred levels of understanding would be evident. Each situation would have unique variables to consider. “It is important that these elements of a narrative tradition be not only remembered mentally but enacted and represented—that is, made present, actualized” [5] AI is positioned to analyze such possibilities via search of extensive databases.

In general terms we can see how the concept of a parable is very much on par with the telling of a story. In rhetorical terms the telling of a story hinges very much on the listener and the frame of reference that person operates from. It is a very interpretative process that draws from intrapersonal, as well as interpersonal, constructions. The consumer of a story, in this case we are focusing

on parabolic forms, is typically going to be seeking meanings that address her/his mindset, interests and experiences. Hence the potential for significant variation regarding interpretation and subsequent understanding is very real. AI can not only recognize such variations but also speculate on more abstract possibilities. "He (the true prophet) obliges the reader to accept the contradictions of life as an invitation to the kind of reflection that breaks through facile human explanations." [6]

The use of parables provided means for Jesus to manifest fulfillment of prophecy. A consideration within this context involved his ability to reach a wide range of people with perspectives that were understandable and meaningful. "Parables opened up new and different potentialities for living, often in contrast with our conventional ways of behaving; they offer a chance to experience things in a new way." [7] A factor in this construct involved a dynamic whereby the receivers of his messages were able to interpret what was presented and assign meaning that fit their levels of understanding and interests. It makes for a shared experience but also a customized experience. AI can further customize this experiential linkage.

The distinction between those who understood and accepted Jesus' teachings and those who did not is an implied variable at points throughout this discussion. At times this focus reveals shades of gray that seem to exist on a singular continuum and at other times the line between the righteous and the wicked is stressed more. Such delineations offer much room for interpretation and there is certainly room for misunderstanding both at the time of the original recording of such insights and, obviously, even more so in the present age. This kind of analysis necessitates allowance for context, audience, timing, intent, and interpretive motives that could evidence themselves. AI has the capability to account for the variables and speculate on their possible outcomes.

Jesus being received as a teaching authority was often associated with his being recognized as an interpreter of divine phenomena. This enhanced his stature as a respected source of information and insights that one might consider regarding the living of life. A fundamental aspect of living life involves being in relationships with others. "All this is involved in Jesus' ministry of healing as depicted in Matthew; the healing not only of disease but of relationships with people, power over demons and power over the life-threatening storm." [8] His visionary insights were meaningful in that they evidenced his ability to make connections among a range of elements within the daily lives of those he spoke to. Such interpretative insights are a hallmark of AI intention and direction and can serve as means to fuel anticipation of the second coming of the digital Jesus.

The idea of Jesus being a teaching authority encourages us to consider what a teaching authority is. A common approach would be for us to consider teachers we have had in our lives, whether it be teachers we have had during our years as children or to

consider people in our lives who have served as spiritual teachers. Hence, the idea of a teacher is open to interpretation. Ironically, the spiritual teacher role is not typically welcomed into our public schools due to the separation of church and state. All of this taken together encourages appreciation for what teachers have meant in our lives.

As in biblical times, modern day receivers of the teachings of Jesus can rightfully wrestle with the question of what do the teachings of Jesus mean and, perhaps even more importantly, "what do the teachings of Jesus mean to me?" In that latter question we can see how everyone can have a personal relationship with Jesus that transcends our common means for understanding spiritual transformation. There can be an enlightened sense of reality and an enlightened sense of faith that transcends our sense of potential for ourselves as individuals and the collective groupings we are associated with.

The blessings of a personal relationship with Jesus can benefit us in all domains of life. This allows us to live our lives in concert with Jesus. If we are missing this aspect of faith in our lives, then we are missing a significant opportunity to not only live in our faith but to also grow in our faith. The latter allows us to benefit from the blessings of our faith and to serve as inspiration to others so that they might also grow in their faith. A Christian life does not live in a vacuum. It is part of a larger dynamic that fosters goodwill among all who we meet.

There are lessons to be learned from Isaiah 63:7-64:11 that have direct relevance for our lives and how we function. Most notable to me are lessons that are commensurate with parenting. God practiced a continual love, grace, and care for the people even though they continually ignored him. They did not necessarily reject God in an outright manner, but they did reject God via their inaction regarding how they lived their faith in God. They did not tend to their faith in meaningful ways, such as continual prayer, that would exhibit relationship with God. Still, God showed forgiveness and acceptance time and time again in the face of being ignored. His love and grace were always there.

This has a direct correlation with parenting a child. A young child is entirely dependent upon the parents for food, clothing, and shelter. The mere existence and well-being of the child is dependent upon the parents. However, as the child grows there are periods when the child strays from the relationship with the parents. This relationship can be renewed, typically when the child is in a time of need, but the relationship can easily fall into disrepair if it is not actively tended to. Those who have parented will often express unqualified love for the child, have that love ignored, but still express that unqualified love when the child seeks out the relationship. This can be observed at any time regardless of the age of the child. The relationship can continually be there.

This ongoing relationship has relevance when the child, in turn, has children. The cycle of life comes into play. It is within this cycle of life that we can find additional meaning and see that the love we have for our children corresponds with love that God has for us. Wonderful lessons for living can flow from this construct. For instance, we learn that “I am my brother’s keeper” and similar types of lessons. Such positioning can lead to the awareness that we are all connected through our relationship with God. As such, we need to continually tend to this relationship rather than let it fall into disrepair. Daily prayer can help to nurture our faith and consequent relationships. “For we say that God is not in a place or to be circumscribed; He is simple, and without a body he fills all things.” [9]

Yes, God does “fill all things.” That kind of representation allows for explanation that can help adherents understand what Christianity can mean in their lives. It is within this construct that we can see that degrees of meaning are assigned to Christianity by the individual. That is, there is a social construction of reality that is occurring. When this happens the individual and the larger social order can recognize a wide range of possibilities that offer hope and salvation. This hope and salvation can serve to redefine the lived reality of the person and is certainly worthy of celebration. AI can be part of this dynamic in that it offers means for expression and understanding.

So much of the Bible reveals consistencies in the human condition so it only makes good sense that this type of projection of an AI generated digital Jesus manifests how individuals can use data in their midst to advance the causes they are seeking to understand or promote. The notion that the medium is the message serves to sharpen our interpretive understanding as we seek to use new communication technologies, most notably the innovations inherent with AI, to extend our vision for maximizing the relevance of Jesus in our lives.

It can be helpful to consider the four periods of media that mass media theorist Marshall McLuhan spoke of and how they provide contextual framing for what I am presenting in this assignment. They run in chronological order: 1) Tribal Society-is fundamentally face-to-face communication in the basic sense; it represents the earliest form of interfacing that would have existed with the beginnings of humanity; 2) Manuscript Society-evolved when we entered the classical period; ideas could be presented in written form (roughly beginning with the time of Jesus until 1400 A.D.); 3) Gutenberg Society-stressed the use of moveable type and the mass production of literature (books, newspapers, magazines etc.); this created the concept of “the public” whereby the literate society could consume ideas and information on a mass level (this covered the period roughly between 1400-1900 A.D.); 4) Electric

Society-this involved the use of electric circuitry for the conveyance of information and has been evidenced via telegraph, telephone, radio, TV, computer and the new communication technologies we have with us today (this can be readily recognized from the early 1900’s to present).

A speculative notion that can be recognized with the evolution of the social order is that we are positioned to realize new venues for the exchange of information and production of knowledge. Artificial intelligence represents such a conceptual framing. This opens the door to a wide range of possibilities for how our society functions. It will not only present possibilities for how humans will live but it will alter what it means to be human. When we are open to reconsideration of what it means to be human, we are open to possibilities for new potentials for ourselves. This can open the door to transformational growth that can have significant ramifications for the lives we live.

The relevance or “so what” associated with this phenomenon is that we may be at a pivotal point in history that illustrates how our moving into the information age is opening new possibilities for how we conceptualize religion and practice our faith. The conceptual framework for understanding what qualifies as Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit in our lives can be going through an evolution that will generate new possibilities for such phenomena. This will not eradicate past orientations for knowing Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit, but add to them. It is an exciting time for renewal regarding the roles Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit can play in our lives.

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