

Bible and the Headlines: AI Jesus

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Life is imitating art again and history is repeating itself. The story comes out of Switzerland. The Swiss have taken an ancient Greek concept and brought it to life in the 21st century. The narrative is a headline twofer.

Back on August 22, the website SwissInfo.ch carried the story, “Revelation or Cliché? AI-Jesus Appears in Lucerne Church.” This computer-generated epiphany drew no attention by other media until last week. On November 19th TechRadar published, “Meet Your Own Personal AI Jesus in this Swiss Church’s Confessional.” The reporter noted, “The decidedly Swiss-looking man from the Roman-run Middle East of two millennia ago listens to people voice their questions or concerns.”

The Guardian on November 21 carried, “Deus in Machina: Swiss Church Installs AI-Powered Jesus.” The article used the ancient Greek theater term ‘Deus in Machina’ because this was the name given to the Jesus-producing app by the Lucerne university students who created it. The site of the mechanical epiphany is one of Lucerne’s oldest chapels but has now, “. . . become synonymous with all that is new after it installed an artificial intelligence-powered Jesus capable of dialoguing in 100 different languages.”

On November 23, EuroNews.Com featured, “Son of a Bot! AI Jesus Hologram Takes Confessionals in Swiss Church.” The pastor of the church explained, “The AI program was trained using sacred scripture and theological texts from the internet.” He admitted that the Deus in Machina app has, “. . . the possibility it could offer biblical interpretations or spiritual advice at odds with Church teaching.” To forestall this, the project was written with a termination date when all data would be analyzed and assessed.

The book of Second Timothy tells Christians, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2Tim 3:16). Scripture is part of the programming in AI Jesus. The problem is that Scripture is not all that university students programmed into their ‘Jesus.’ As a result, and due to the nature of AI, even the priest who authorized the installation of the hologram Savior admitted the avatar was capable of heterodox spiritual advice and interpretations.

While the Bible does not mention a hologram epiphany, it does offer a warning that such things might happen. At the same time Roman theater-goers were watching works that contained Deus in Machina, the church in ancient Galatia was told by their pastors, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, were to be a preacher to you of good news other than that which we have given you, let there be a curse on him” (Gal 1:8). This is history that deserves to be repeated.