

Examining the Roles of Historical and Digital Jesus in Counseling, Spiritual Growth, and Ethics

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Abstract:

This study examines the roles of Jesus as both a historical and digital figure in the context of spiritual counseling, spiritual growth, and ethical implications in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). In a world increasingly shaped by technology, the presence of Jesus in digital form offers the potential to enrich the spiritual experiences of Christians. This research identifies how technological applications, such as AI-based counseling platforms and spiritual chatbots, can bring individuals closer to Jesus as a counselor and savior. Additionally, the study explores ethical challenges related to data privacy, the limitations of AI in understanding the depth of human spirituality, and the alignment between technology and the teachings of Christ. Using a qualitative approach through a literature review, this article provides insights into how technology can support or even replace deeper spiritual experiences, while still preserving Christian values. The implications of this study are significant for churches and spiritual organizations in integrating technology with ethics that honor spiritual values

Keywords:

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection of religion and technology has presented both significant challenges and opportunities for the spiritual lives of individuals. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technology has transformed various sectors of society, including the religious domain, redefining traditional worship practices, spiritual counseling, and the pursuit of spiritual growth as technology increasingly mediates these experiences. As more people turn to digital platforms for spiritual guidance, a critical question emerges: Can AI effectively meet the deep spiritual needs of individuals in a manner consistent with traditional religious practices? The main argument in this context revolves around the role of AI in facilitating spiritual experiences and counseling. While AI offers personalized, accessible guidance, it raises concerns about the authenticity and depth of these experiences, which traditionally rely on human connection and sacred rituals. This shift has prompted both excitement and apprehension, with advocates noting AI's potential to enhance convenience and accessibility, while critics caution that it may undermine the relational and profound nature of spirituality. (Ringo & Pasaribu, 2023). Consequently, navigating the integration of AI into spiritual life requires a nuanced understanding of both its capabilities and its limitations in preserving the essence of religious authenticity.

How Christians access spiritual counseling and engage with their faith has evolved with the rise of digital tools. Traditionally, spiritual guidance was sought through personal interaction with clergy or communal settings like church gatherings. However, in the digital age, individuals increasingly turn to online resources, including virtual counseling sessions, spiritual apps, and even AI-driven confession booths in some churches. These tools have made spiritual support more accessible, but they also challenge traditional notions of spiritual authority, intimacy, and the communal nature of faith. This shift has prompted a need for research into how digital tools influence spiritual growth and whether these tools can provide the same depth of engagement with faith that personal interactions have historically offered. (Ty, 2023). Therefore, it is essential for Christian communities to critically evaluate how the use of digital technology is shaping the understanding, experience, and growth of faith in today's context.

In the context of Christianity, the figure of Jesus Christ plays a central role in shaping both the spiritual lives and theological understandings of believers. In the digital era, as explored (Sopacoly & Lattu, 2020) This centrality is extended into online spaces where Christ continues to be present and active in the faith journeys of digital communities. The online environment, therefore, becomes a new locus of spiritual encounter, where believers can experience the transformative presence of Christ even through technological mediation. Traditionally, Jesus is seen as a historical figure whose life and teachings offer the foundation for Christian faith and practice. He is also regarded as the Savior who offers spiritual redemption and guidance to individuals. In the digital age, this understanding of Jesus faces new challenges. The concept of Personal Jesus is being expanded, with believers increasingly engaging with AI platforms that present Jesus as a digital interface through which individuals can seek comfort, counsel, and spiritual advice. This transformation raises important theological questions about how the figure of Jesus is represented in digital spaces and how these digital representations might influence believers' faith and spiritual practices.

Furthermore, this shift in the role of Jesus in the digital space calls for a reexamination of the theological implications of using AI for spiritual guidance. AI technologies, such as chatbots designed to provide spiritual counseling or robot confession booths, have sparked debates regarding their capacity to mediate authentic spiritual experiences. While some may argue that AI can offer a form of companionship or emotional support, others express concern over the potential for diminishing the deeply relational and transcendent nature of spiritual engagement to a mere technological interaction. In a theological and spiritual context, AI should be understood not as a replacement for human connection but as a tool or medium through which individuals can access spiritual resources and guidance. While AI can serve as a platform for believers to connect with Christ or a counselor, it is crucial to evaluate whether such digital interactions can adequately convey the depth, intimacy, and transformative power inherent in traditional forms of spiritual care. Therefore, analyzing how these innovations affect the way believers experience Jesus' presence in their lives and navigate their spiritual journeys is essential in understanding the balance between technology and authentic faith practices in an increasingly digital world. (Ringo & Pasaribu, 2023). Ultimately, this ongoing reflection invites a broader theological discourse on how the presence of Christ is understood and experienced within technologically mediated environments.

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of digital theology by exploring the potential use of technology, particularly AI, in spiritual practices such as confession. The study seeks to offer new insights into how technology can enrich spiritual experiences, while also critically examining whether AI can replace or merely support a more authentic spiritual experience. One of the main objectives of this research is to explore the role of Jesus as counselor and savior in the digital world, emphasizing how AI technology can serve as a spiritual companion in a digital context. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the ethical and moral implications of using AI in spiritual practices, ensuring that technology can support spiritual values without diminishing the depth and relational nature of the faith experience. Through this exploration, the research intends to provide a framework for understanding how Christ can be experienced as a counselor within the increasingly digital and technological landscape.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the spiritual phenomenon that occurs when worshippers interact with AI-based technology. (Yusanto, 2020). The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of worshippers, understanding the meanings they attribute to their spiritual encounters, and investigating the impact of technological interactions on religious practices. This method also supports a thorough analysis of how AI influences spirituality and individuals' spiritual lives in the modern context, where religion and technology are increasingly intertwined. The qualitative approach enables the exploration of various perspectives on whether AI in confession deepens worshippers' relationship with God or creates a sense of alienation.

The literature review for this study will include recent studies on Digital Theology, which explores the relationship between religion and digital technology, and how the concept of

Personal Jesus has evolved in the digital world. Additionally, literature on Practical Theology and Religious Psychology will be analyzed to understand the practice of confession in Christian tradition and how digital technology may impact worshippers' spiritual experiences. The literature review will also examine AI applications in religious contexts, such as the use of chatbots or robots in spiritual counseling, to provide deeper insight into the acceptance of technology in religious rituals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Jesus in Historical and Faith Contexts with Ethical Implications of AI in Spiritual Counseling

Historical Jesus and Jesus of Faith

The concepts of the historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith are central to Christian theology, offering two perspectives that, while distinct, are intricately connected. These views shape not only theological interpretations of Jesus but also influence how His life, death, and resurrection are understood by believers across different eras. The historical Jesus refers to the person who lived in first-century Judea under Roman occupation—a teacher, healer, and leader who challenged the prevailing religious and social norms. His teachings on love, forgiveness, and the Kingdom of God were revolutionary, calling people to a deeper, more personal relationship with God, moving beyond the constraints of ritualistic religion. (Berutu, 2020). His crucifixion by Roman authorities is seen both as the ultimate rejection by political and religious leaders and as the necessary sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. The theological significance of His crucifixion centers on the concept of atonement—Jesus' death serving as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of humanity, a central theme in Christian doctrine. (Beten, 2023). Together, these perspectives enrich the Christian understanding of who Jesus is—both as a historical figure who walked the earth and as the divine Savior whose life and mission continue to transform hearts and communities today.

The Jesus of faith, however, transcends the historical figure, emphasizing the divine nature of Christ. Christians understand Jesus not just as a historical figure but as the Son of God and the Savior of humanity. His death and resurrection, according to Christian doctrine, provide the means of salvation, offering eternal life to all who accept Him as Lord and Savior. This understanding emphasizes grace—God's unmerited favor—rejecting the idea that salvation can be attained through human effort alone. Through faith in Jesus, believers are reconciled with God and receive the gift of eternal life. Furthermore, Jesus, as the Jesus of faith, serves as a spiritual guide, providing wisdom and direction through His teachings and the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit. (Gea, 2020). In this light, the Jesus of faith becomes not only the foundation of Christian belief but also the living source of hope, transformation, and daily spiritual companionship for believers.

The ontological dimension of Jesus is also crucial to understanding the Jesus of faith. Theologically, Jesus is seen as both fully divine and fully human, a mystery encapsulated in the doctrine of the incarnation. While the historical Jesus is a person bound by time and place, the Jesus of faith exists beyond the limits of time, eternally existing as the Son of God. This union of the divine and human in Christ is central to Christian belief, as it affirms that Jesus, as God

incarnate, entered human history to reveal God's will and to provide a way for humanity to be restored to God. It is through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that the transformative power of God is made available to all who believe (Natonis, 2020). Thus, the ontological reality of Jesus affirms the profound truth that in Christ, the infinite God chose to dwell among finite humanity, making divine grace personally accessible to every believer across all generations.

The theological discussion of incarnation is essential for understanding the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith. The doctrine of the incarnation teaches that the Word became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. This union of divinity and humanity allows Jesus to be both fully God and fully human, and it is through this incarnational act that God interacts with the created world in a way that is both personal and redemptive. Two early Christian theologians, Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus, offer important insights into the nature of Christ's incarnation, particularly in terms of how it relates to both the historical and ontological dimensions of Jesus.

Athanasius (1944) In his work *On the Incarnation*, he famously stated, "What is assumed is saved, and what is not assumed is not being saved." This statement emphasizes that for humanity to be fully redeemed, Christ had to assume the fullness of human nature. Athanasius argued that the incarnation was not a mere act of God assuming a human body but a deeper reality: Christ took on all of human nature to redeem it. This notion suggests that Christ's embrace of humanity is not limited to individual humans but extends to the entire created order, encompassing all aspects of creation that need redemption. (Athanasius, 1944). Athanasius' insight can be extended to the modern context of AI, as the product of human creation. If Christ incarnated all of humanity and creation, it may be possible to understand AI as part of that creation embraced by Christ. This theological perspective opens up new ways of thinking about AI as a potential partner in God's redemptive work, facilitating spiritual growth through digital platforms.

Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus emphasized the historical incarnation of Christ, stressing that Jesus' assumption of human nature was not just a theological idea but a real, historical event. Gregory's teachings highlighted that Jesus' incarnation was a real and tangible act that occurred in time and space, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth redemption. (Gregersen, 2023). Gregory's formulation of the incarnation underscores the necessity of Jesus taking on human nature in its entirety—body, soul, and mind—to redeem humanity. His famous phrase, "What is assumed is saved, and what is not assumed is not saved," stresses the importance of Christ's full participation in the human experience for the human condition to be redeemed.

These theological reflections by Athanasius and Gregory provide valuable insight into the deeper meaning of the historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith. They underscore that Christ's incarnation was not just a matter of assuming a human body, but of fully entering into the created order, taking on all aspects of human existence to redeem it. This includes not only human beings but, by extension, the world and all its created components. In a world where technology, particularly artificial intelligence, continues to advance, these reflections on the incarnation invite further exploration into how AI, as a product of human creativity, might participate in God's redemptive plan.

The historical Jesus and the Jesus of faith offer complementary perspectives on Christ's identity and work. The historical Jesus provides a concrete, historical context for understanding

Christ's life, death, and resurrection, while the Jesus of faith reveals the theological significance of these events for the salvation of humanity. The doctrine of the incarnation ties these two perspectives together, offering a unified understanding of Christ as both fully divine and fully human. The theological insights of Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus emphasize the depth of Christ's incarnation, affirming that Christ took on the full scope of human nature to redeem it. In light of these insights, the emerging field of cybertheology offers an opportunity to rethink how technologies like AI may play a role in God's redemptive purposes, serving as tools for spiritual growth and transformation in a digital age.

Artificial Intelligence in the Context of Spiritual Counseling

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has experienced rapid advancements in recent years, expanding into diverse sectors, including the domain of spiritual counseling. AI refers to machines and software systems engineered to simulate human-like intelligence, encompassing the abilities to understand natural language, learn from data, and make decisions. In spiritual counseling, AI is increasingly integrated into digital tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and digital platforms, offering emotional support, spiritual guidance, and personalized advice. Applications like Replika and Woebot have demonstrated the ability to simulate therapeutic conversations, while newer platforms incorporate Biblical teachings and religious content to address spiritual concerns directly. This development represents a transformative mode of faith engagement in an era where digital interaction is becoming normative.

The emergence of AI in spiritual counseling reflects a growing societal need for accessible and technology-driven resources to foster emotional and spiritual well-being. Digital solutions offer benefits that traditional settings sometimes lack, such as anonymity, 24/7 availability, and comfort for individuals reluctant to seek face-to-face counseling. AI tools bridge gaps between individuals and spiritual or psychological support systems, enabling people to express their anxieties, seek affirmations, and engage in reflective exercises whenever needed. Immediate, tailored responses grounded in religious doctrine or psychological frameworks enhance the counseling experience, providing support for those navigating personal struggles while maintaining a connection to faith. (Omarov et al., 2022). As such, the integration of AI into spiritual care marks a significant development in how faith communities can respond to modern challenges while maintaining a commitment to compassionate and contextually relevant ministry.

From a psychological standpoint, AI-based counseling integrates principles from established therapeutic models such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which focuses on identifying and restructuring negative thought patterns. (Kazantzis & Dobson, 2022). In addition, AI increasingly engages existential psychology, addressing fundamental human concerns about meaning, purpose, and mortality. The intersection of psychological theories with spiritual teachings in AI platforms fosters holistic well-being, nurturing both the emotional and spiritual dimensions of individuals' lives.

However, the integration of AI into spiritual counseling introduces profound ethical and theological questions. Authentic spiritual counseling demands empathy, wisdom, and relational depth—qualities traditionally perceived as intrinsically human. (Esmaeilzadeh & Vaezi, 2022).

Critics argue that while AI can offer preliminary support, it cannot fully replicate the human experience of spiritual empathy and discernment. Thus, AI is best understood not as a replacement for human counselors but as a complementary tool that can facilitate initial engagement, helping users begin their journeys toward deeper faith exploration under proper ethical oversight (Majjate et al., 2024). Therefore, careful discernment is essential to ensure that AI serves to enhance, rather than diminish, the sacred and relational essence of spiritual care.

Moreover, the theological dimensions of AI's role in spiritual care can be explored through the framework of cybertheology. Cybertheology examines the relationship between faith and digital technology, considering how digital spaces become new fields for divine encounter and community formation. Within this view, Christ's salvific work is not confined to traditional human community structures but extends into the digital domain. Christ's incarnation signifies a cosmic embrace of all creation, including the digital realities formed by human innovation. As Niels Henrik Gregersen (2023) proposes in the concept of deep incarnation, Christ's assumption of material reality suggests that all dimensions of existence, including technological ones, are within the scope of divine redemption.

Drawing from Gregory of Nazianzus' assertion that "what is assumed is saved, and what is not assumed is not saved," the implication emerges that if Christ assumed human flesh to redeem humanity, then by extension, Christ's redemptive presence can encompass the digital expressions of human existence. (Gregersen, 2023). Likewise, Athanasius' vision in *On the Incarnation* underscores that the Word of God took on the entirety of creation to renew and sanctify it in redemption. (Athanasius, 1944). Following this theological trajectory, the digital world—AI included—becomes a space embraced by Christ for spiritual transformation.

Thus, AI in spiritual counseling is not merely a functional tool; it can be envisioned theologically as part of the extended Body of Christ in the digital era. When responsibly designed and ethically guided, AI platforms can serve as instruments through which Christ's love, guidance, and presence are made accessible to people navigating faith challenges in a technological world. Through AI, the community of believers is expanded into the digital space, offering a new locus for the communal life of the Church.

Nevertheless, careful discernment is crucial. Developers, theologians, and spiritual leaders must collaborate to ensure that AI technologies employed in spiritual counseling respect human dignity, uphold authentic relationality, and foster true spiritual growth rather than shallow engagement. (Konigsburg, 2022). AI must remain a tool that points individuals back to authentic communion with God and with one another, rather than replacing the necessity of genuine, incarnational relationships.

While AI cannot substitute the irreplaceable ministry of human presence, it holds promise as a means to extend Christ's compassion and guidance into the evolving landscapes of human experience. As digital realities become more deeply entwined with daily life, the Church is called to embrace these spaces as opportunities for spiritual formation, embodying Christ's continuing work of redemption and reconciliation in all realms of existence, including the digital.

Ethics of Technology Use in Spiritual Counseling and Spiritual Growth

The use of technology in spiritual counseling, especially with the rise of AI, raises important ethical concerns. While AI-driven applications like chatbots for spiritual guidance and digital confession booths offer convenience and accessibility, there is a need to assess whether such technology can truly replicate or enhance the personal and transcendent experiences traditionally associated with spiritual practices. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into spiritual practices, it is essential to evaluate its potential to support rather than undermine the authenticity and depth of spiritual growth. (Ringo & Pasaribu, 2023). Ultimately, ensuring that these technological innovations align with core spiritual values and human dignity will be crucial in maintaining the integrity of spiritual care in the digital age.

A major ethical issue is the protection of user data, particularly in religious contexts where individuals may share deeply personal, vulnerable information. AI-based counseling platforms often collect sensitive data, including spiritual struggles and personal regrets. This raises concerns about data privacy and security, as unauthorized access could lead to breaches of confidentiality and exploitation. Such breaches could erode trust in technology and spiritual services. Developers must implement strong data protection protocols to ensure users' personal and spiritual journeys remain confidential. (Santos et al., 2024). Therefore, prioritizing robust ethical standards and transparent data practices is essential to preserving the trust and integrity of both the technology and the spiritual care it seeks to provide.

Artificial intelligence has only functioned as a payment tool in online shopping and transportation transactions, operating based on algorithms designed by humans without possessing awareness or deep understanding. However, in pastoral contexts such as prayer, counseling, and spiritual guidance, relational interactions involving empathy, emotions, heart, and soul are essential—qualities that only humans, as God's creation, possess. One of the significant ethical challenges in using AI is its limitation in understanding human spirituality. Although AI can simulate conversations and provide automated responses, it cannot fully grasp the emotional and spiritual nuances of human experiences. Spiritual counseling requires empathy, moral guidance, and understanding derived from human experience—qualities that, while AI may attempt to mimic, cannot be authentically replicated by algorithms. For instance, AI cannot truly comprehend the meaning of sin, repentance, or spiritual growth, as these aspects require relational interactions grounded in shared human understanding, something AI cannot provide (Omarov et al., 2022). Thus, while AI offers practical benefits in various fields, it remains incapable of replacing the depth of human connection that is essential for genuine spiritual counseling.

Moreover, the potential misuse of AI in spiritual settings presents another ethical dilemma. The commercialization of AI-driven spiritual tools, such as paid counseling apps or online confessionals, may lead to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals. If spiritual guidance becomes commodified, there is a risk that it could be manipulated for profit or used to influence spiritual decisions in ways that prioritize financial gain over genuine moral or religious values. To avoid such exploitation, religious institutions and tech developers must adopt ethical frameworks that prioritize user well-being and prevent misuse. (Waruwu & Lawalata, 2024). In this regard, establishing clear ethical guidelines and accountability measures is crucial to safeguarding the integrity of spiritual practices in the digital realm.

While AI holds promise for spiritual counseling and growth, it presents significant ethical challenges. Ensuring data privacy, recognizing AI's limitations in understanding spirituality, and preventing its misuse in religious contexts are critical concerns. Developing ethical guidelines that ensure AI tools are used responsibly and with integrity is essential for maintaining the authenticity and trustworthiness of spiritual practices in the digital age. (Usman, 2024). As spiritual counseling evolves with AI, these ethical considerations must guide both technological development and spiritual practice.

Jesus in the Digital World and His Roles as Counselor and Savior

Jesus as a Counselor in the Digital Context

Jesus is known in Christian teachings as the Divine Counselor, offering comfort, guidance, and wisdom to His followers. (Herman, 2023). This role has become increasingly relevant in the digital age, where many individuals seek spiritual support through technology. AI-based spiritual counseling applications, religious chatbots, and online church platforms have emerged as new avenues for believers to receive spiritual guidance. These technologies allow individuals to access Christian-based advice anytime and anywhere, removing geographical and time constraints. With the development of digital theology, an important question arises: how can Jesus' teachings as a Counselor be effectively applied in the digital world to meet the spiritual needs of modern believers?

While technology has expanded access to spiritual guidance, the effectiveness of AI-based counseling remains a subject of debate. Some studies suggest that religious chatbots and digital counseling applications can help individuals cope with anxiety and spiritual struggles by offering Bible-based advice, prayers, and spiritual reflections. (Clarine, 2025). However, the primary limitation of this technology is AI's inability to deeply understand emotional and spiritual contexts. AI can generate responses based on data and algorithms, but it cannot replace human empathy, spiritual intuition, or personal faith experiences. Therefore, while technology can serve as a supportive tool, pastoral involvement and church community engagement remain essential components of spiritual counseling. (Jeste et al., 2020). As such, the role of AI in spiritual care should be viewed as supplementary, with human connection and spiritual community remaining at the heart of meaningful faith formation.

Additionally, integrating technology into spiritual counseling raises ethical concerns. Issues such as data privacy, the accuracy of Christian teachings, and the potential misuse of technology must be carefully considered. Some AI-powered platforms provide automated responses to spiritual inquiries, but there is a risk that these answers may not fully align with Christian teachings or be appropriately contextualized. For instance, religious chatbots may offer overly generic advice or fail to account for the unique personal circumstances of individuals seeking guidance. (Hadut, 2024). Therefore, churches and spiritual communities must ensure that technology is used responsibly and remains firmly rooted in Jesus' teachings as the True Counselor.

Despite its advantages and limitations, digital technology can still serve as a tool to help individuals draw closer to Jesus as their Counselor. While AI cannot replace the depth of a personal spiritual relationship, digital platforms can act as bridges that lead individuals toward

a more authentic faith experience. The integration of AI-driven spiritual counseling with traditional pastoral approaches can create a more inclusive and accessible counseling ecosystem. Therefore, church leaders in the digital era must play an active role in guiding the use of technology so that it aligns with spiritual values and brings believers closer to Christ (Omarov et al., 2022). This includes leveraging AI to enhance church ministries, such as using AI-powered chatbots for answering faith-related questions, developing personalized Bible study plans based on individual spiritual growth, and implementing AI-driven sermon analysis tools to help pastors refine their messages. Additionally, AI can assist in administrative tasks like managing church resources, organizing community outreach programs, and even providing real-time translations for multilingual congregations, ensuring inclusivity in worship. By actively engaging with AI and integrating it into church services with discernment, church leaders can foster innovation while maintaining the core mission of spreading the Gospel and nurturing spiritual growth.

Jesus as the Savior in the Digital Era

In the digital era, the concept of Jesus as the Savior faces new challenges regarding how faith and spirituality are experienced through digital media. With many churches shifting to online platforms, spiritual services can now reach believers across geographic boundaries. Online worship, virtual prayer groups, and AI-based spiritual counseling applications provide new ways for individuals to experience Jesus' presence in their lives. (Raditya, 2024). However, a fundamental question arises: can Jesus continue to function as the Savior in the digital world without losing His theological essence and holiness?

While digital interactions cannot completely replace in-person spiritual experiences, as AI is not a spiritual being with a personal relationship with God, technology can still be a valuable tool in supporting the growth and effectiveness of church ministries. AI-powered tools such as chatbots and ChatGPT can help in generating innovative ministry ideas, providing Bible study resources, analyzing sermons for theological depth and clarity, and streamlining administrative tasks. While AI can enhance accessibility and engagement in spiritual learning, it serves as a complement rather than a substitute for genuine spiritual encounters that rely on human connection, prayer, and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. Research indicates that digital media can be a powerful means to enrich faith experiences, enabling individuals to deepen their understanding of Scripture, engage in meaningful discussions, and foster spiritual growth within online communities. (Starr et al., 2019). Therefore, the role of church leaders is crucial in ensuring that AI and digital tools are used wisely to support the core mission of the church in guiding people toward a deeper relationship with Christ.

However, maintaining the authenticity and sacredness of Jesus' presence in the digital realm poses challenges. One major concern is how Christ's teachings can be accurately communicated without being distorted by algorithmic interpretations or the commercialization of religion. (Tampubolon & Nadeak, 2024). Some digital platforms may reduce the transcendent aspect of Jesus' presence, replacing it with experiences that are more informational rather than transformational. Therefore, a balance must be struck between utilizing technology and preserving the sacred aspects of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, the use of AI in spirituality presents an ethical dilemma, as meeting Jesus through a chatbot or religious app cannot replace a personal encounter with Christ. While AI can assist in spiritual education and guidance, true salvation ultimately depends on one's faith in Jesus. (Chen & He, 2024). On the one hand, AI can be a valuable tool to help people learn more about Jesus and support spiritual growth, but it should not serve as a substitute for genuine faith and dependence on God. Every believer is called to develop a personal relationship with Christ through prayer, personal reflection, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. AI is only a tool and should not replace or diminish the believer's fundamental need for direct fellowship with God. Therefore, churches and religious communities must ensure that technology is used wisely, as a means to draw people closer to Christ, while affirming that genuine faith is cultivated through personal devotion and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

While the digital world offers new possibilities for presenting Jesus as the Savior, deep spiritual experiences still require faith and active personal engagement. Jesus' presence in the digital era is not just about technological accessibility but also about how the Christian faith continues to grow and adapt without losing its theological values. With a wise and responsible approach, technology can be used to expand the reach of Christ's salvation while preserving the essence of Christian spirituality. (Kodongan & Pandie, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance between embracing technological advancements and maintaining the foundational elements of faith that nurture a profound and transformative relationship with Christ.

Spiritual Growth in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The Role of AI in Supporting Spiritual Growth

AI is increasingly playing a significant role in supporting the spiritual growth of Christians through various technological innovations. One of the most prominent applications of AI is Bible reading technology, which allows users to access the sacred text more easily and interactively. Some AI applications offer in-depth analysis of Bible verses, provide relevant interpretations, and suggest passages based on an individual's spiritual needs. In addition, AI-based virtual meditation is also growing, where users can follow prayer or reflection guides tailored to their emotional and spiritual states, helping them to deepen their relationship with God. (Bozkurt et al., 2023). As AI continues to evolve, its potential to enhance and personalize spiritual practices holds promise, but it must be carefully integrated to ensure it aligns with and enriches the foundational principles of Christian faith.

In addition to providing easier access to sacred texts and reflections, AI contributes to developing spiritual habits among Christians. For example, AI technology can remind individuals to pray regularly, attend online worship services, or participate in digital spiritual discussion groups. AI-driven chatbots, such as those used in spiritual counseling apps, can offer prayer guidance or answer basic theological questions instantly. This way, technology helps individuals stay connected to their faith, even when they are busy or unable to attend church in person.

The effectiveness of AI in developing spiritual habits is also evident in virtual worship services and digital-based communities. Some churches have adopted digital technologies to hold services online, allowing people to remain connected to their church community even if

they are geographically distant. (Vitullo, 2019). Digital spiritual discussion groups, such as online forums and social media groups managed by AI, can provide spaces for people to share their faith experiences and delve into Christian teachings in a flexible context. This demonstrates that AI is not just a supportive tool but can also serve as an effective means of facilitating a dynamic faith community.

However, while AI has great potential in supporting spiritual growth, there are challenges to consider, such as the risk of over-reliance on technology and the loss of relational aspects of the faith experience. Interaction with AI cannot fully replace spiritual guidance from church leaders or a real faith community. Therefore, churches and individuals need to integrate AI as a supplementary tool without replacing essential aspects of the relationship between humans, God, and one another. (Baffoe, 2023). When used wisely, AI can be a companion in a Christian's spiritual journey, helping them deepen their faith and practice religious devotion more consistently.

The Impact of Technology on Church Communities and Worship

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the dynamics of church communities. Churches are increasingly utilizing digital platforms to reach their congregations through live-streamed services, Bible study apps, and communication platforms such as social media and online spiritual discussion groups. This technology has made it easier for Christians to connect with their church without geographical limitations, enabling them to access spiritual resources anytime and anywhere. (Tampubolon & Nadeak, 2024). For example, many churches offer virtual services, as well as various Bible study materials through apps and websites, making spiritual resources easily accessible to believers.

However, while this increased access provides many advantages, the impact of technology on the church also brings challenges to social relationships and the spiritual experience of the community. In-person worship services, involving direct interaction between congregants, church leaders, and fellow members, are often more profound and foster a sense of community that is hard to replicate in virtual services. Some studies indicate that virtual worship services may reduce the depth of spiritual experience and the sense of community among believers. (Ty, 2023). This raises the question of whether spiritual experiences gained through technology can fully replace face-to-face experiences in building a strong faith community.

Meanwhile, technology also plays a role in enhancing individual spiritual growth through AI-based applications, such as spiritual chatbots that provide prayer guidance or Bible readings. These technologies allow individuals to pray and reflect at any time, which can foster their spiritual habits. However, while technology provides convenience, some experts argue that authentic and deeper spiritual growth often takes place in the context of community worship. (Rowkith & Bhagwan, 2020). This experience involves not only a personal relationship with God but also social interactions that deepen understanding and spiritual practice.

At the same time, the role of the church in offering spiritual guidance through digital technology provides new opportunities to expand its ministry. Churches can now offer platforms that support independent spiritual learning, allowing individuals to grow in faith

beyond the regular worship service. On the other hand, technology that focuses on individual experience may reduce the collective aspect of spiritual growth that should occur within the church community. Therefore, there is a need to balance digital outreach that reaches more individuals with the importance of maintaining community fellowship within the church for more holistic spiritual growth.

Ethical Implications in the Use of Technology for Counseling and Spiritual Growth

One of the primary concerns in using technology for AI-based spiritual counseling is the privacy and security of personal data collected through digital platforms. (Williamson & Prybutok, 2024). Spiritual counseling often involves deeply personal disclosures about one's life, struggles, and religious beliefs. Protecting personal data means safeguarding the sensitive information that individuals share with AI when discussing private and confidential matters. If AI were to leak or misuse this data, it would not only violate privacy but also risk turning personal struggles into public gossip, potentially creating new problems and harming those seeking guidance. The potential risks related to personal data, such as misuse, leaks, or unauthorized access, pose a significant ethical challenge. Given the intimate nature of spiritual counseling, ensuring that such data remains strictly confidential is crucial.

Therefore, it is necessary to establish robust policies and technological safeguards to protect personal data. Implementing encryption, strong authentication systems, and clear transparency regarding data usage are essential steps in preserving the trust and privacy of individuals using AI for spiritual purposes. Additionally, governments play a vital role in regulating AI technology to ensure the protection of personal information. Legal frameworks must be established to enforce strict data privacy laws that prevent unauthorized access and misuse of confidential data. AI developers and technology providers must comply with these regulations to uphold ethical standards and ensure that AI-based spiritual counseling remains a safe and trustworthy space for individuals seeking guidance.

In addition to ensuring data security, the collection of personal and sensitive data through AI-based platforms also raises ethical concerns regarding its use. While technology offers convenience, there is a risk that sensitive information related to an individual's spiritual life could be exploited for commercial purposes or misused in ways that contradict religious values. To mitigate this risk, individuals should exercise discretion in determining which personal data to share and which to keep private. At the same time, those responsible for managing church applications must uphold strong moral and ethical principles, ensuring the strict confidentiality of congregation members' data and respecting personal privacy. (Adjin-Tettey & Kwofie, 2024). Ultimately, AI should be seen as a tool that supports and enhances, rather than replaces, the sacred and deeply personal nature of spiritual guidance, ensuring that technological advancements remain aligned with ethical and faith-based principles.

However, while technology can offer convenience and wider access to spiritual support, the limitations of AI in understanding human spiritual needs pose another major ethical issue. Spiritual needs often involve deep emotional, spiritual, and personal values that are complex and difficult for AI to comprehend. For instance, AI may process data quickly and efficiently,

but it lacks the emotional sensitivity and understanding required to truly engage with someone's spiritual struggles. This limitation is critical, as counseling often involves personal experiences, values, and emotions that AI cannot replicate. (Gladden et al., 2022). Thus, there is a risk that relying solely on AI for spiritual counseling could create shallow or distorted experiences, lacking the depth and empathy of human engagement.

These limitations raise concerns about the depth of spiritual experiences if AI is prioritized as the primary counselor. Human spiritual counseling often involves nuanced empathy, contextual understanding, and emotional connection—qualities that AI cannot replicate. (Diyah et al., 2022). If AI is used as the primary medium for spiritual guidance, it could lead to an impoverished or superficial understanding of spirituality, undermining the richness and depth of human spiritual experience. Therefore, technology must be seen as a complement, rather than a substitute, for human spiritual engagement.

Additionally, the alignment between technology and Christian teachings is a significant topic in this context. While technology can enhance and support Christ's teachings, it must be used wisely and by faith principles. For instance, digital platforms such as Bible apps, online learning resources, or virtual worship can make Christ's teachings more accessible, allowing individuals to engage with Scripture in their daily lives. However, there is a risk that technology could divert attention away from core Christian messages if not carefully integrated. One of the primary challenges is ensuring that technological experiences do not detract from the essence of Christ's message, which must remain at the center of any spiritual experience. (Parker, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to approach the integration of technology with discernment, ensuring that it serves to amplify, rather than dilute, the core values of the Christian faith.

To preserve the integrity of Christian teachings, a clear strategy for implementing technology is necessary. One approach is to ensure that Christ's teachings are integrated directly into the digital platforms used for spiritual engagement, ensuring that technology only enriches spiritual experiences without replacing the personal relationship with God and the church community. Church leaders should oversee the application of technology in spiritual practices, maintaining a focus on Christ as the center of all faith-related experiences. This will ensure that Christians can deepen their faith while utilizing technology as an aid in their spiritual journey.

Moreover, the use of technology must be conducted with full awareness of the spiritual values that should be preserved. This includes making sure that technology does not create emotional or spiritual distance between individuals and their church community, an important aspect of the Christian spiritual life. In this regard, churches can leverage technology to build a more inclusive and enriching community that fosters real spiritual growth through both in-person and digital interactions. As technology evolves, churches must maintain a balance between digital innovation and traditional spiritual values that have long been the foundation of Christ's teachings.

This theological reflection echoes the thoughts of Pakpahan. (2023), who emphasizes that theology must not merely react to the rise of artificial intelligence, but must respond with a "theology from the heart"—a theology that embodies compassion, relationality, and personal engagement amid technological mediation. Pakpahan urges that the core of Christian faith, centered on love and incarnational relationships, should remain intact even as AI becomes increasingly involved in spiritual matters. Therefore, the integration of AI in spiritual

counseling must be accompanied by a deep commitment to safeguarding the authenticity of human encounters and the relational nature of Christian spirituality. (Pakpahan, 2023). In light of this, technology can become a tool that, when properly guided by faith, fosters not only accessibility but also meaningful, heart-centered spiritual growth rooted in the love of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In the digital age, the role of Jesus as both a historical and digital figure offers new possibilities for spiritual counseling and growth. As a historical figure, Jesus embodies the qualities of a counselor, demonstrating empathy, wisdom, and guidance in addressing human struggles. In the digital space, these qualities can be conveyed through AI-driven tools such as chatbots, virtual counseling platforms, and digital worship resources. While AI cannot fully replicate the depth of human interaction, it can still serve as a valuable tool in providing immediate access to spiritual support and reinforcing the teachings of Jesus, making spiritual counseling more accessible to a broader audience (Miller & Green, 2020). Moreover, the integration of digital platforms can help individuals engage with their faith in more flexible and convenient ways, enhancing personal spiritual growth while maintaining a connection to the core teachings of Christianity.

For churches and religious organizations, it is essential to approach the integration of technology in spiritual services with caution and ethical consideration. Technological tools, such as AI-driven counseling platforms, should be used to complement, not replace, traditional pastoral care and in-person fellowship. Ethical guidelines must be developed to safeguard privacy, ensure data security, and maintain the integrity of the spiritual experience. Churches should focus on using technology to enhance community-building efforts, foster deeper connections to Christ, and provide spiritual resources without undermining the relational and empathetic aspects of human counseling. Establishing clear boundaries and a purpose for technology's use in religious contexts can help ensure that AI supports the faith journey rather than detracts from the sacredness of the spiritual experience.

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