

“A Voice from the Cloud”

In the passage from Kings that we just heard, God asks Solomon what he needs. Solomon could have asked for fortunes, armies, or fame. Instead, he asks for wisdom. As he puts it, “your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?” Not only is it an appropriate prayer request, but it is also a wise one.¹

Solomon’s desire also pleases God. The Lord says in response to Solomon’s prayer, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed, I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.”

While Solomon’s prayer is heard and answered, there is something new afoot that is challenging the traditional life of prayer. Viviane Warren brought to my attention an article in *The Washington Post* about how people of faith are turning to AI chatbots to answer their questions of ethics and spirituality.² People we would expect to turn to God as Solomon did are entrusting their concerns to AI. If this article were a post on the satirical website of *The Onion*, it would give us a good laugh. But this was in *The Washington Post*’s Sunday edition for July 19th. It is serious and alarming.

I can understand people asking AI for information on an historical event, a recommendation on a household appliance, or a recipe. I can even understand asking AI about a health condition, although I personally would not trust AI on this one. I just cannot fathom going to AI instead of your pastor, therapist, or the ethics column in *The New York Times* with questions of such magnitude. AI aggregates data, but its sources are suspect. It seems to take all information at face value. Reliable and unreliable sources are treated as equal. AI is untrustworthy in my opinion. I want to know if the advice I am given comes from Desmond Tutu, Immanuel Kant, or Joe the Plumber. Joe may have an interesting take on things, but I doubt that he has studied for years to come up with his response unless it has to do with bathtub drains.

David DeSteno, one of the collaborators on this study and author of the article, writes, “It’s actually people of faith who more regularly turn to AI for guidance and spiritual advice. With its appearance of omniscience and objectivity, AI poses a threat to the authority of traditional religious bodies.” He

¹ This request also foretells the scene where he must discern the wise thing to do when two women come to him arguing over their claim for a child.

² David DeSteno, “People of faith are finding a new moral guide in AI,” *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2026.

goes on to write that “people who reported higher levels of religious engagement or belief were more likely to view chatbots as possessing moral authority and, as a result, to seek moral guidance from them.” They are also more likely to perceive “AI chatbots as conscious and intentional.” Frighteningly, the participants in the study view AI as “a source of divinely sanctioned knowledge.”

Could it be that people of faith, especially evangelical Christians, seek advice from AI due to their frustration with God? They pray as their pastors tell them to. They are faithful givers to their church. They participate in Bible Study and prayer groups. They do all the right things, but God is not giving them the riches that their pastor promised. God is not answering their prayers as they expected. God is failing them, but the AI chatbot comes through every time with an answer and quickly.

Which makes me think of another reason for Americans to rely on a chatbot instead of prayer. Americans have come to expect their wishes and desires to be fulfilled quickly. We like fast food. We like our TV shows on demand. We want our online orders delivered the same day we ordered them. One comedian jokes that we will soon want our packages delivered before we order them. That is how impatient we have become. Now AI can give us the answers to our questions about life, the universe, and everything³ in the blink of an eye. None of this silly waiting on God’s Time. *Kyros* “smyros,” we want our answers now. And if we believe that AI possesses some kind of moral authority or divine spirit, all the better.

Beware of falling into the trap that others have by thinking AI is something more than it is. There is already the doomsday scenario that AI will outstrip human intelligence and take over the world. There are books and sermons written by AI, and the transparency of it is an ethical question for some. (I have not used AI to write a sermon and have no intention to.) Pray to God for wisdom, discernment, needs, worries, cares, healing, praise, and thanksgiving. God is alive. God is real. God is more than the sum of all human intelligence because God is God. As the psalmist wrote, “When [God’s] word goes forth it gives light;/it gives understanding to the simple.”

Let us all trust AI to answer our questions about paint colors and hedge trimmers, but in matters of faith and the spirit, I adjure us to trust the word that goes forth from the mouth of God and gives light, God’s light, to the world.

³ Thanks to Douglas Adams for the title from his third book “a trilogy in five parts,” *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*.