2024—YEAR OF CHALLENGES:
THE ELUSIVE QUEST FOR TRUTH
IN AN AGE OF DEEPFAKES

"Pilate said to him [Jesus], 'What is truth?'"

John 18:38

"One leading AI [artificial intelligence] architect told us that in private tests, they can no longer distinguish fake from real—which they never thought would be possible so soon… This technology will be available to everyone, including bad international actors, as soon as early 2024."

Joe Allen[1]

"America, Britain, India and more than 60 other countries will hold national elections in the coming year. More people will vote—an estimated two billion—than at any other time in history. And as they head to the polls, they're set to be targeted with an equally unprecedented barrage of AI-generated fake news … if urgent action isn't taken, democracy could be derailed by deepfakery."

Rhys Blakely[2]

Welcome to 2024!

In the year ahead, *Truth* will become a perishing commodity at home and around the globe. Just like in the days of Stalin's U.S.S.R. or Mao's China, we are increasingly forced to read between the lines of official statements, statistics, or media headlines to sift out reliable information. The age of fabricated truth to serve personal, political, economic, and institutional agendas is upon us. Take for example, a seemingly innocuous recent article on megacorporation *Google's* newly

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[1] Joe Allen, "2024: A New Year of Deepfakes and Old-School Phonies," *Singularity Weekly,* Jan. 2, 2024. For readers interested in this topic, see chapter 8 of Allen's book, *DARK AEON: Transhumanism and the War Against Humanity,*

[2] Rhys Blakely, "How political deepflakes could decide who wins the general election," *The Sunday Times (London),* Feb. 10, 2024.

released *Gemini* chatbox (designed to one-up *Open-AI* and *Microsoft's ChatGPT),* quoting CEO Sundar Pichai. Pay attention to this statement by the author: "the web and its critical search layer are changing. We can see it happening: Social media apps, short-form video, and generative AI are challenging our outdated ideas of what it means to find information online. ***Quality* information online."[3]** (Emphasis mine).

In other words, in today's informational world there is no place to find *reliable* (quality) information. In my words, no place to find the truth. Why? Because virtually all of today's information flows run through shaded prisms of truth which lie in turn, at least in the world's way of thinking, in the eye of the beholder.

Look at today's pre-election political realm. Almost half the country (and perhaps more) no longer can rely on the validity of the electoral system, the information provided by the government or the various platforms conveying that information, or the statements or statistics provided by the economic elites on Wall Street. Simply put, we no longer know who to trust.

Part of the problem is the mushrooming use of *deepfakes.[4]* What are they? To create a *deepfake,* an AI system is trained on an individual's facial expressions and unusual vocal inflections. An abundant number of whiz kids and technicians-for-hire—in both political parties and, this year, perhaps a third-party candidate as well—feed an AI program with as many images of the targeted individual as he or she can gather, or as many voice recordings. With enough data, the system can emulate that person on demand. *DeepFaceLab* is among the most advanced software for creating audio/visual clones, but there are many others.

Two days before the New Hampshire primary, for example, a robocall likely using AI voice cloning technology—impersonating President Biden—widely broadcast a message to discourage Democrats from heading to the polls. It was merely one of the most recent examples of *deepfakes* in U.S. politics; similar efforts to disrupt elections in

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[3] Lauren Goode, "Google Prepares for a Future Where Search Isn't King," *WIRED,* Feb. 08, 2024.
[4] I have been polite in the text. One of my favorite definitions of *deepfakes* comes from the pen of Joe Allen who aptly describes it as "just a high-tech turd on top of a mountain of stale bullshit."

Slovakia and Taiwan have also occurred.[5] Last summer, the Ron DeSantis campaign famously used a *deepfake* of Donald Trump embracing Anthony Fauci. A few months later, the Trump campaign created a "goofball ad" where digitized GOP candidates introduced themselves as "Ron DeSanctus" from "High Heels University" and Nikki "Bird Brain" Haley from the "Bush War Crime Institute."[6] The subtlety of the parody was lost on many observers.

It goes on and on.

And, unfortunately, will continue to do so until the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election, still over ten months away.[7]

It is becoming harder to tell the real from the manipulated. Reportedly, 7.6 million *Facebook* users were recently exposed to a disinformation campaign (believed to be run previously by a Kremlin-linked group), that paired images of celebrities like Taylor Swift and Cristiano Ronaldo with fake anti-Ukraine quotes.[8]

Of course, we all know the news that really matters is if Taylor Swift returns from her concert tour in time to watch Travis Kelsey in the Super Bowl. (She did. The Chiefs won. *Yahoo!)* But even in the world of celebrities, the failure to ascertain truth has ramifications: the recent flood of unapproved AI-enhanced nude images of Taylor Swift incurred the ire of millions of young "swifties."

But back to my point that the failure to determine truth is going to have a huge political impact. In pre-election Great Britain, for example, a recent BBC audience watched a clip featuring a female network commentator reporting how Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was ensnared in a financial scandal after earning "colossal sums" pilfered from a fund to benefit ordinary Britons. The problem: none of it was true.[9]

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[5] Christine Mui, "A Mysterious phone call cloned Biden's voice. Can the next one be stopped?" *POLITICO,* Jan. 29, 2024.

[6] Allen, "2024: A New Year."

[7] An interesting article to read in this regard is Kenneth R. Rosen, "Can AI manipulate a presidential election?" *Popular Science,* Feb. 12, 2024.

[8] *WIRED* (Readout: The world, quantified), Feb. 09, 2024.

[9] Blakley, "How Political Deepfakes."

In Pakistan, where the recent election was a disaster for the military-backed party in power, the opposing presidential candidate used AI to make speeches—from jail![10]

Or take the case of Indonesia—the 18,000-island-archipelago that is home to the world's largest Muslim population—where a presidential election takes place in mid-February, with over 200 million expected to vote. All 18 major candidates, in a country with one of world's highest internet usage rates, are using *TikTok* (which became the second most popular source of information for the Indonesian populace during the campaign) to run ads supporting the candidates, sometimes with surprising results. Most recently, for example, a three-minute video featuring the voice and picture of long dead General Suharto (who died in 2008 at age 86 and ruled the country with an iron fist for three decades) racked up almost 5 million views on *X* and spread to *Tiktok, Facebook* and *YouTube.* The video was an AI-generated *deepfake,* created using tools that cloned Suharto's face and voice, ostensibly to bolster support for the frontrunner, former army general Prabowo Subianto (also a former son-in-law). As one Indonesian remarked on-line: "that is the state of our country today—bringing dead dictators back to life to fool and scare us into votes."[11]

We are not that far behind.

Such developments raised a red flag at the recently concluded World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, where the global elites tell the rest of us how we should live and think. Participants were told that the number one global threat was *not* the Middle East, the Ukraine, or climate change, but rather **disinformation**,[12] particularly as the 2024 U.S. presidential elections approach. (These are the same educated elites, by the way, who held their deliberations in a room displaying the Walthamstow Tapestry, known in some circles as the

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[10] Gerrit De Vynck, "AI companies agree to limit election 'deepfakes' but far short of ban," *The Washington Post,* Feb. 13, 2024.

[11] See, among others: Heather Chen, "AI 'resurrects' long dead dictator in murky new era of deepfake electioneering," *CNN,* Feb. 11, 2024; and Stanley Widianto, "Dance moves and deepfakes: Indonesian presidential candidates duke it out on Tiktok," *Reuters,* Feb. 12, 2024.

[12] In this missive I differentiate *disinformation* (targeted malicious and objectively false claims designed to deceive) from *misinformation* (inaccurate or misleading claims).

"satanic tapestry," a large mural created in 2009 by a cross-dressing contemporary artist, where a person's life is shown from infancy to its bloody end in the mouth of the devil.)[13] As my wife Imogene is fond of saying, "you can't make this stuff up!"

Like Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem, we are surrounded by untruth everywhere around us and cannot recognize the *real* truth—the Lord Jesus Christ himself—should He be standing in front of us.

Who is dictating the new pseudo-truth? One author identifies these companies, among others, as the driving force of today's "authoritarian technocracy": *YouTube (*owned by *Google), Instagram* (owned by *Meta),* and *X* (formerly Elon Musk's *Twitter).* What are their common beliefs: "That technological progress of any kind is unreservedly and inherently good; that you should always build it, simply because you can; that frictionless information flow is the highest value regardless of the information's quality (*i.e. truth);* that privacy is an archaic concept; that we should welcome the day when machine intelligence passes our own. And, above all, that their power should be unconstrained."[14]

Alas! Be not dismayed. This week, the leading artificial intelligence companies (*Google, Microsoft, OpenAI, Meta, TikTok* and *Adobe)* announced a plan to "sign" an accord committing to developing tech to identify, label and control AI-generated images, videos, and audio recordings that aim to deceive voters ahead of crucial elections in multiple countries this year.[15] I know that makes me feel much better and totally confident that there will be no political partisanship shown in any such decisions.

Not!

Deepfakes are just one symptom of an environment that has a diminishing value for truth. Such AI-generated images have been around for several years, but in the past year they have rapidly improved in quality. So much so, in fact, that today's fake videos, images and audio recordings are difficult to distinguish from real ones.

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[13] Bob Unruh, "'So oddly blatant': Satanic tapestry featured at World Economic Forum," *WND,* Feb. 5, 2024.

[14] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Rise of Techno-Authoritarianism," *The Atlantic,* Jan. 30, 2024.

[15] De Vynck, "AI companies agree to limit election 'deepfakes.'"

As a result, we are now standing at the doorstep of pervasive digital delusion—or what Patrick Wood calls the "collapse of reality" and Shane Cashman calls "post-reality"—with people wallowing in fake worlds populated with fake people. In this increasingly chaotic meme storm, corporations (such as the future megacorporation *SINCOM* which I depict in *Prawnocuos Rising)* and governments will seize more and more control over public narratives.[16]

 Don't take my word for it. Ask a machine. In the words of a "chatbox" asked to speculate on political developments in 2024: "Bots and fake accounts can be used to spread propaganda, amplify certain narratives, and silence opposing voices. *Deepfakes,* manipulated videos or audio recordings, can further blur the lines between truth and fiction."[17]

Outside the political realm, this reliance on algorithms and AI math-based simulations as a modern substitute for truth, can have real-world consequences. For example, a new study funded by the U.S. military[18] examining how AI can be used in foreign policy decision-making, found how quickly the tech would call for war instead of finding peaceful resolutions. Some AI in the study even launched nuclear warfare—all models show "signs of sudden and hard-to-predict escalations"—with little to no warning, giving strange explanations for doing so.[19] And if you don't think AI-enhanced machines are dramatically changing today's battlefield and diplomatic calculations, you haven't paid much

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[16] Allen, "2024: A New Year"

[17] Rob Vaughn, "We asked top AI chatbots for their predictions for 2024 … and it produced some VERY alarming results," *Daily Mail,* Jan. 2, 2024. When two chatbots (*Google's Bard* and *Amazon-backed Claude)* were asked to predict their fate, the answers yielded surprising results. These two language models were selected because they use live information from the internet unlike *ChatGPT* and *Microsoft's Bing* which rely on older data.

[18] Juan-Pablo Rivera, *et.al.,* "Escalation Risks from Language Models in Military and Diplomatic Decision-Making," *arxiv.org,* n.d. The 67-page study is crammed full of charts, algorithms and simulated models and, according to the forward, was initiated in response to the new reliance by strategic decisionmakers on generative AI models like GPT-4. The study was assembled by six experts at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Stanford University Northeastern University and the Hoover Wargaming and Crisis Simulation Institute.

[19] Maxwell Zeff, "AI fired nukes in a war simulation because it wanted 'peace in the world,'" *QUARTZ,* Feb. 08, 2024.

attention to what is happening in the Ukraine, Middle East, or South China Sea.

So, what is to be done? Simply, in these difficult times, turn to Jesus Christ, the embodiment of truth. As I remind the listeners at the end of each of my podcast appearances: God is still in control and not shaking nervously on His throne.

In an extraordinary passage by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans, Paul writes about how Gentiles—even without the law—have a *conscience* bearing witness to the truth of God's reality.[20] Many of today's leading scientists, however, eager to counterfeit everything God has created, assert that conscience and consciousness are actually a quantum wave process that passes through microtubules (a complex lattice of proteins in the brain) with properties like *superposition* (the ability to be many places at the same time) and *entanglement* (the potential for two particles that are very far away to be connected).[21]

But I still believe God created mankind with a conscience "filter" to see, hear, and know truth as needed.

All this reminds me of a futuristic prediction by Yuval Noah Harari that I read many years ago: "In the twenty-first century we will create more powerful fictions and more totalitarian religions than in any previous era. With the help of biotechnology and computer algorithms these religions will not only control our minute-by-minute existence, but will be able to shape our bodies, brains, and minds, and to create entire virtual worlds complete with hells and heavens. **Being able to distinguish fiction from reality and religion from science will therefore become more difficult but more vital than ever before.**"[22]

It will indeed …

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[20] Romans 2:15.

[21] For information about the Orch OR theory, see—among others—Susan Lahey, "Scientists Believe They've Unlocked Consciousness—and It Connects to the Entire Universe," *Popular Mechanics,* Feb-Mar 2024.

[22] Quote from Hariri's *Homo Deus* (2018).