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CYBERTECHNOLOGY AND THEOLOGY

An Uneasy Relationship

Delfo Cortina Canceran, O.P.

Etymology of Theology

Theology is Greek. As we know, Greek was widely spoken as the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world and would eventually become the official parlance of the Byzantine Empire. The Greek language holds an important place in the history of Europe, the more loosely defined Western world, and Christianity, in particular the Catholic religion. In fact, Greece was the birthplace of Western culture, with the latter being its seminal culture. Greek was also the language of many of the foundational texts of Western philosophy, such as those authored by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Moreover, the Christian Bible was written in Koiné Greek. The Greek language thus constitutes the discipline of classical study. The ancient Greeks pioneered in many fields that rely on systematic thought, such as philosophy and theology, in pursuit of order and proportion. Greek culture thus had a powerful influence which focused on the role of reason which in turn provided the foundation of modern Western culture.

The word theology comes from Greek, and combines two words: "theos" and "logos." Its etymology is ambiguous. The etymological combination of two Greek words (*theos* and *logos*) has created an ambiguity in the discipline of theology because it can mean "word of

God" or "word about God." The prepositions "of" and "about" are not insignificant because they provide the origin of the word—literally from God the Father or from theologian the man. The determination of origin is crucial. The origin gives the person authority to speak on behalf of God or a discipline. This authority justifies the division of the Church into a teaching Church and a listening Church. We know that the teaching Church resembles the magisterium of the Church which defines dogma. However, we know that language is a human creation and it follows that theology is the word about God. Theologians construct a body of knowledge about God, known as theology, as they reflect on God in the Bible and in the world. Thus, theology is a word about God expressed in human language.

These two observations are important in theology and in theologizing because they show the power of Eurocentrism in theology and the ventriloquism of Europe.

Discourse of Theology

Theology is dominantly theocentric and anthropocentric in content, made within the context of ecclesiastical authority. In scholastic theology, beings are hierarchically arranged according to their perfection and excellence. In this order, God occupies the apex followed by Jesus Christ the Son of God as the mediator and then humanity (to read: *man*). In this theology, the focus is on the relationship between God and man and the salvation brought about by the redemption of Jesus Christ in his Paschal Mystery.

In the curriculum, theology as a discipline in the university is placed within the Liberal Arts or Humanities. This section emphasizes the study of classical antiquity and the human condition in forming a citizen to be functional in society using speculative methods in inquiry. The aim of these studies was to produce a virtuous, knowledgeable and articulate person. In this curriculum, the humanism in theology is reinforced and ennobled. As we know, humanism emphasizes the value of human beings and capitalizes on rational thought. During the Renaissance period in Western Europe, humanist movements attempted

to demonstrate the benefit of gaining learning from classical sources as *ad fontes*, or of going back to the sources as the basis of knowledge.

Theology, due to its being dominantly theocentric and anthropocentric, thus becomes ambivalent to emerging technology. This ambivalence ranges from indifference to enjoyment. The dyad of the God and man relationship, as a natural scheme of being, precludes technology, invented by man, as it is far removed from that dyad and is an artificial artifact. The separation between natural and artificial plays a crucial role in the exclusion of technology in theological discourse. From a humanist viewpoint, technology is merely instrumental, therefore inessential and peripheral. Although technology is ubiquitous, theology generally remains indifferent in its standpoint and treatment of technology.

Exclusion of Technology

In the hierarchy of being, technology is conspicuously absent. Technology is an offshoot of practical knowledge produced directly by man and indirectly by God because the raw materials in making technology come from nature as the creation of God. The finished products come from the invention of man; these are created by man as a rational being. Since technology is apart or far removed from God in creation, I conjecture that theology undermines, if not dismisses, technology in the discourse about God. Theologians socialized in the theocentric and anthropocentric frameworks are also ignorant and unprepared to tackle the relationship and intertwinement of theology and technology.

Moreover, technology, being artificial (invented by the hands of man) and not natural (created by God as the author of nature), is excluded in theological discourse. Nature, in the broadest sense, is equivalent to the *natural world, physical world or material world*. The word *nature* is derived from the Latin word *natura* which refers to the essential qualities, innate disposition and intrinsic characteristics of the created world. The transformation of nature effected by man in this conceptualization of nature is already an artificial invention that falls outside the God-nature relationship since man mediates in the

transformation of nature into culture. In this scheme, the relationship between theology and technology is oblique to, if not incompatible with, theological discourse. The binary logic that operates in our worldview is responsible for the separation between nature and technology.

Relationship to Technology

In the relationship between theologian and technology, a relationship of distance is created. This distance is effected by the indirect relationship of God with technology and the direct relationship of humanity with technology. Since theology relates both to God and humanity, technology is only treated obliquely.

This distance is characterized by a consideration of technology as merely instrumental. As instrumental, technology is only a means to an end. Thus, the theologian uses technology as a means to his or her work as an academician in the university, scholar in the community, or researcher in an institution. Thus, the theologian uses the computer to encode his or her theological reflections for publication or lecture and to entertain him or herself when he/she is bored or tired from his or her work. Thus the computer is a means to finish a research paper or article. After finishing the paper or article, the theologian can leave the computer and proceed to the classroom or conference. Sometimes, he or she brings his or her computer into the classroom or conference to use, in his or her lecture or talk, or to aid his or her memory in the lecture or talk. In instrumental technology, the place of technology is diminished, while the position of theologian is elevated, because the performance of the theologian is highlighted in the process or activity. Thus, not only are work and leisure separated but also means and ends, as though they can be easily divorced or readily detached at any time.[1]

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[1]Technophobia is not limited to anxiety towards technology but is linked with the consideration that technology is irrational and therefore merely instrumental. Technophobia is prevalent among the older adult population which missed out on technology in their education and socialization. Thus the Church, being a traditional institution, and the theologian, being immersed in humanism, can be

Aside from the instrumental view, we have another way of conceiving technology—the constructionist view. In the constructionist view, people construct the meaning of technology. In our example, the theologian constructs the meaning of technology for him or herself. Thus, he or she considers the computer as a means to his or her successful career or profession. The difference between the instrumental and constructionist views is that the intention of the inventor, of the technology, may not coincide with the intention of the user since in constructionism, it is the user, not the inventor, which determines the meaning of technology in the way he or she uses it. Technology is thus not only an instrument for an end, but also a companion in the room, a facility for work, and leisure during boredom. If the person is lonely or bored, he or she can just switch on the computer, log into the internet and surf websites. It is the user who determines the value or significance of technology.[2]

In contemporary discourse on technology, there is not just instrument or construction; technology is also a discursive practice. In discursive practice, technology constitutes the user. Technology is not something external to the user which he or she can detach or separate himself or herself from, as though the user remains the same. Nor does

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susceptible to technophobia. The avoidance of theologizing on technology and the treatment of technology as instrumental are symptomatic of technophobia.

[2]Considering the price of a computer unit and an internet connection, cybertechnology caters to the needs and leisure of the elite in society. Since they can afford to acquire this technology, the rich have an edge in this information age, adding to their symbolic capital. Thus, the poor are deprived in this information age, and are dependent on the rich for information. The poor can afford the internet cafe but not own their own computer and internet technology.

In this case, a split is inevitable between those who are included in technology and those who are excluded from it. The rich class (the information-rich) takes advantage of this cybertechnology that further exacerbates the dismal condition of the poor class (the information-poor). In effect, the rich class outsmarts the poor class with this information technology which makes the poor more materially and informationally deprived.

the user determine the meaning of technology as though technology is a passive recipient of human construction. Technology constitutes the user. By constitution, we mean that technology not only affects the user but transforms him or her in the process or in the activity.

In the discursivist view, the interaction between theologian and technology is characterized by power relations. These power relations are not one-sided but dispersed. In this way, the relationship can be subjection where the subject (user) is subjected to another—technology. This is shown in the way the user is addicted to the internet whereby he or she submits to the power of technology, or in subjectivation where the subject recognizes himself or herself in technology. The subject and technology resemble each other whereby the user recognizes himself or herself in technology. This is shown in the way users become a media creation of technology, where social networking constitutes their identity as twitters, bloggers, etc. Discursivism thus focuses on practices as a domain of analysis that approaches the study of technology from the angle of what "is done" to the users. As institution, technology governs the behavior of the society in which people are placed and in which they are made. These practices, understood as a way of acting and thinking, constitute the users.

Identity of Theologian

As technology impinges on the theologian, it inevitably transforms his or her identity in the process. In the past, the theologian merely read books and journals alone in the library or in his or her room. Now, he or she can do research on the available websites of the internet and read these materials, especially when he or she is hurrying to finish his or her lessons or talks to beat a deadline. The theologian becomes dependent on the computer not only because it is convenient but also because it facilitates his or her work. For example, compare the use of the typewriter and computer. We know by experience that computer use is better for serving our needs as scholars and researchers in our fields.

However, the theologian does not only use the computer for research as a scholar, but for other activities as well. The use of

internet connected computers is not only for research in writing papers or articles but, after writing or during writing, the theologian can also chat with his or her friends using Skype, or upload his or her pictures and activities to Facebook. In addition, while writing he or she can also listen to music for inspiration or even view Youtube videos once in a while. In front of the computer connected to the internet, the theologian can perform various activities simultaneously: he or she can write a paper, listen to music, and view videos. Thus, the theologian experiences what are called "multiple identities" simultaneously—as scholar, chatter, music lover, and Youtube viewer. In multiple identities, the self is fragmented by various activities. In our example, the identity of the scholar as a writer dominates these other activities but sometimes these other activities intrude and disturb the main activity. "Multiple identities" is not a psychic disorder but a fact of life in a technological world. The subject is no longer defined in terms of centered consciousness, characterized and unified by one self-defining identity or identity-grounding center. In multiple identities, the subject is not centered, but instead is decentered and fractured. Such a decentered subject can encompass many different, perhaps even contradictory, identities brought about by various forms of socialization or interaction that forge the subject over time, as well as by the activities in which he or she participates. Since subjects engage different and multiple identities in response to the social contexts in which they find themselves at a given moment, no one identity is *a priori* or necessarily more central, self-defining, or true than any other.[3]

Aside from multiple identities, technology also brings an anonymous identity. For example, there are websites that do not require the user to reveal her or his identity. Thus, the user can assume different identities: the user can be male or female, a *Manileño* or *probinsiyano*, Filipino or American, handsome or ugly. Users can thus hide physical identities such as gender, appearance, ethnicity, race, etc. because the

[3]"Multiple Identity—The Critique Of The Subject, The Linguistic Turn And The Social Construction Of The Subject, New Philosophical Challenges," *JRank* (http://science.jrank.org/pages/7777/Multiple-Identity.html#ixzz27uvPQK4i).

body is invisible.[4] Many activities on the internet are essentially done anonymously through the use of unidentifiable pseudonyms, fake pictures in profiles, or by preferring a hidden body during chats. While these names can take on an identity of their own, they are frequently separated from the actual user for freedom of expression. The net has increased the ease for a person to distribute anonymous and pseudonymous messages. For example, a person can send a message or join a website using a falsified name or faked picture. Most website softwares allow users to specify whichever name they prefer and perform no check for correct identities. Anonymity is often used to protect the privacy of people, and is related to issues like identity theft, closet identity, sensitive information, etc.[5]

Emergence of Cyberculture

Cybertechnology has become a culture based on the use of computer networks for communication or the study of various social phenomena associated with the internet. Since the boundaries of cyberculture—in terms of location and people—are difficult to define, the term is used flexibly to refer to the culture that emerges from virtual communities in cyberspace. The cyberculture does not only describe the present but also anticipates the future that is linked to advanced

[4]The invisibility of the body has been a point of contention between the humanist intellectuals, who assert the value of embodiment, and the post-humanist intellectuals, who celebrate the power of invisibility. Humanist intellectuals want to defend embodiment because the body, together with its context, is significant in any relationship and interaction. The post-humanists support the disappearance of the body in favor of virtual reality in an information age.

[5]Full anonymity on the Internet, however, is not guaranteed since IP addresses, in principle, can be tracked, allowing identification of the computer from which a certain post was made, albeit not the actual user. Anonymizing services such as I2P—The Anonymous Network or Tor address the issue of IP tracking. Their distributed technology approach may grant a higher degree of security than centralized anonymizing services where a central point exists that could disclose one's identity. See people.dsv.su.se/~jpalme/.../anonymity.html.

information systems and information technology. We are now in an age of information where we are inundated with information and knowledge from the internet. Cyberculture combines the traditional notion of culture and the informational notion of cybertechnology. Culture implies the idea of a group having an identifiable symbolic world. Cyberculture, however, implies the idea of heterogeneous groups, both known and unknown, forming a virtual community. Cyberculture thus includes numerous new technologies and capabilities used by diverse people in various locations.

In cyberculture, anybody who has access to the internet can communicate and join the discussion. Thus, it decenters the space since there are no longer experts that monopolize it. The space is already democratized so that anyone can participate in the discourse. Freedom is the appeal of cyberspace. Users are free to surf and visit websites anytime of the day. They have the control of the technology in the sense that they can simultaneously do multiple activities or they can choose websites according to their tastes. Theologians are not exempt from this information age offered by the internet. They are one group among many participants in communication. They are no longer the experts that can control the production of knowledge and the ventriloquists that can speak on behalf of people. People speak their minds and communicate their thoughts. Expertise in a cyberculture is diminished while participation is increased. Cyberspace thus encourages cacophonous voices in the network or internet.

Toward Cybertheology

Cybertheology is a combination of cyberspace and theology. Its coinage can be uneasy since a new technology is broached in the humanistic discipline of theology. Cyberspace is not only an instrument of theology but a partner in a network of relationships. The theologian is immersed and embedded in technology and is affected and transformed by technology. In this sense, theology should recast its medium and its message, its vocabularies and its images, in cyberspace. The theologian can become technophobic in the sense that he or she

fails to enter into technology as its partner, and not just as user of an instrument. In fact, a theologian can be a cyborg, in cybertheology, which embodies human and technological qualities. Cyberspace is a challenge to theology and the theologian that needs to embark into technology if he or she wants to be relevant and contemporary.

Theologians in a cyberculture have to read and discern the words and voices of many people in the network or internet. They cannot just listen among themselves because they cannot claim their privacy as a group in this network. They cannot assume superiority of knowledge in the marketplace of ideas and opinions, in the network or internet. Users can express their thoughts freely and disagree with opinions candidly. In fact, the theologian can learn from the words and voices in the network and internet. Sometimes one finds the ideas and opinions in the network or internet more intelligent and wise. The theologian can join many virtual communities and communicate their knowledge to these communities. Cyberspace technology is not the monopoly of experts such as theologians, but calls for the active participation of people from all walks of life. People can exercise their agency by joining forces in social movements for democratization. Democratization is the active participation of users and the use of technology for the benefits of the users.[6]

There are two pressing challenges that theologians situated in poor countries should confront. In the absence of a democratized space in information technology accessible to the poor, theologians should bring their issues and protests into cyberspace. In this case, the poor's words and voices are heard as cyberspace provides them a space in discourse. Theologians should remain in contact, or in solidarity, with the poor who are deprived of access to, and use of, the internet and other information networks. Theologians become the representatives of the poor who push their struggles without having

[6]The problem is that the effects of technology on users are known only after some time, and therefore users are generally ignorant. Thus, there is a need for on-going discussion and debate on technology to protect users. They need to transform technology and improve their welfare, instead of being subservient to technocrats, since they are the direct users and consumers.

the sole right to arrogate their voices and words. They cannot hold the center of discourse in the network or internet because they are only one group among many groups of users who are free and empowered to express their ideas and opinions in cyberspace. They have to accept that cybertechnology has transformed or altered their identity such that they can no longer assume or insist on a unified self—they have been fragmented by their exposure to different websites and their engagement with different features of the network or internet.

Conclusion

In the cybertechnological world, theology cannot remain within the discourse of God and humanity; it must include the discourse on technology as a human invention from the creation of God. The binary logic operative in the epistemological framework dividing the natural and the artificial should be rethought and deconstructed in order to free our thought from constraints and to include technology in the common world of human and nonhuman interaction.

Theologians should view the cyberspace world as a network of relationships without boundaries. Community thus expands not only in an actual encounter but also in a virtual relationship where people can interact with one another. Cybertechnology is not merely a novel instrument of communication which enables theologians to upload theological discourses to websites, but a partner in conversation that constitutes their identity.