Christology in Digital Era:
A Socio-systematic Theology Contribution to the Sustainable Smart Society

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Article Info	Abstract
	Theology, specifically speaking, Christology, owns exclusive position and tends react sentimentally toward secular disciplines out of its circle. Therefore, linking Christology and digital era falls to practical matter on how modern devices could be emplyed for religion advantages. This essay tries to evaluate reconciliation between them and see possibilities on how Christology could contribute to the sustainable smart society. However, divinity and technology are contrast square that offers less of space for dialogue, furthermore, it receives pessimistic tone concerning their health relationship. The expectation is, a socio-systematic sensitive approach of Christology may ground new perspective and results unexpected knowledge for the sustainable of smart society

INTRODUCTION

The shift of the traditional age to smart society, namely, the digital age leads to unlimited access to information and communication. A new era of digitalization drives all dimensions of activity into openness, boarder scope of dialogue. Digital interaction is increasingly having direct impacts on human social, anthropologically, its mental and spiritual form. Religion never absents during the shifting ages of the world due it is a reality to human context and determines the social environment.[1] Even more, religion is facilitated by theology to be engaged with cultural matrix.[2] As a consequence, religion and the whole context of the world are inseparable, including theology, as part of religion structure, always potentially relates to every age.

Christology has been derived since the fallen of the first human being and maintained well throughout the decades. The footprints of its legacy exist both in the Old and New Testament. Afterward, its notion continuously kept, even more, developed in its local culture and period. The diversity of Christology is the evidence of this time traveling of dogma. For instance; the discussion concerning the deity of Christ, the office and degree, his relationship to the other divine person, its correlation with soteriology, and contribution to the age after the redemption event. Therefore, the provoking question nowadays is, what is the contribution of Christology to the digital society concerning to maintain a sustainable environment?

Christ is considered as a historical person who has no significance to the sustainability of the digital era. His duty and responsible had done in the past, the existing age nowadays lay to modern people where theological square has no urgency.[3] With this in mind, Christology could be regarded contain the nature of contextualization as it is articulated well since the Hebrew, Jews, church fathers, and afterward era where the link to digital period is possible to be served.[4] In response to the inadequacy of traditional theology, origins of Christian dogmatic concerning local context and situation, various theologians and concepts such as Martin Luther with his reformation to Catholic church, Abraham Kuyper with his education and political movement in the Netherlands, and other famous figures have been arising to highlight its connection. Therefore, the research question that leads this essay is, what can be learned from Christology that could be contributed to the sustainability of digital society? A sensitive socio-systematic theology approach will be employed to see any possibilities that may be offered.

METHODS

A socio-systematic theology approach leads this research in order to uncover the tension here. However, this is a qualitative research where the secondary data, international journals and books are employed, criticized and re-structured. Critics lays on the data and communication are constructed between theology and technology in order to see any possibilities. Gradually, ideas that support the research will be formulated in a very sensitive way to ground contributions and perspectives.

DISCUSSION

Theological Contextualization of Digital Society

Theology encompasses public squares such as sociology, politics, anthropology, morality, ethics, culture, education and digital society. But theology is an object of attacking, technology able to damage the

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[1] Carlos Mondragon, *Like Leaven in the Dough: Protestant Social Thought in Latin America, 1920-1950* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing House, 2011), 28.

[2] Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli, Ed., *The Lonergan Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 443.

[3] Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2009).

[4] Steven Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012).

system of moral degeneration. Loss of Christ mind, moral standard, destruction of humanity and separation of divine sense caused by the absence of man's physical presence and the present of exaggerate information of Christology scopes. However, it may contribute positive inputs as well, due it is a good place of reconciliation between theology and digital society.[5] Therefore, theology of Christ need to be contextualized into digital society, a contextualization approach is needed in order to bridge Christology and smart society. Expectation of certain contribution of Christology should be paid expensively.

The expectation of effectiveness and accessible encourages the development of digital society. Information has move to from traditional approach to new age where affected on how resources or knowledge is produced, disseminated and consumed.[678] Digital equipment gradually launched online and leads the mobilization jump from offline era to computerize basis. The uniqueness of internet bears various of branch for human society such as, education, commerce, politics, journalism, and culture, in which does not limited to the reformation of communication but rather to acknowledge and realize their existence.[9] Even more, digital interaction is not limited to the term of transforming information, but represents new form of creating and maintaining connection that transcend proximity the limitation in which performed by religion, culture and social status. However, as theology never absent, always present in every age, required to articulated its knowledge according to the existing age. The fact is, internet in all its forms and applications has permeated all square of human life, means not only reflected to certain ramifications but extend to social, spiritual and theological environment.[10]

A provoking question arise concerning the place of theology in digital society. The urgency is questioned in order to see its significance in the modern world. For it could be assumed that theology has no more role due it could be considered as an ancient culture that cannot supply any contribution for the sustainability of digital society.[11] Digital society is a new exercise for theological notion where several theologians still deal with how to be familiar with internet, presentation software, computer typing, and paperless activity. Reflecting theology in the digital society demands sensitive exploration to gain the core linked that may profit both sides. Digitalization as a mediator of real physical world where each person share their emotional and spiritual connection must be supplemented, concretized, and realized with full expression as it is manifested in reality. Theology is required to be a digital native, even more, share positive contribution to digital society. With this in mind, theology branch becomes a digital immigrant who need to adapt with moving era. Theology need to maintain its original intention, offering spiritual convenience which is the fundamental need of human being in the whole period.

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[5] John Efiong, "Theology and Information Technology," *Methodist Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (2015): 160–179.

[6] Shu-Fang Lu, Luo and Kao, "Traditional and Modern Characteristics Across the Generations: Similarities and Discrepancies," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 142, no. 1 (2002): 45–59.

[7] Dominikus Riki Yonda, "Social Transformation on Traditional Society," in *International COnference on Ethics of Business, Economics, and Social Science*, 2016, 452–460.

[8] Philip Ende, Jan Van Den, Mulder, Karel, Knot, Marjolijn, Moors, Ellen and Vergragt, "Traditional and Modern Technology Assessment: Toward a Toolkit," *Technology Forecasting and Social Change* 58 (1998): 5–21.

[9] Pontifical Council for Social Communications, "The Church and the Internet," accessed March 24, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_ councils /pccs/ documents %09/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church- internet_en.html. .

[10] Anthony Le Duc, "Cybertheology: Theologizing in the Digital Age," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2016): 3,4,8.

[11] S. C. Humphreys, "Ancient Theologies and Modern Times," *Centre International d'etude de la religion grecque antique* 25 (2012): 149–161; Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli & Lara Weiss Albrecht, Janico, Christopher Degelmann, Valentino Gasparini, Richard Gordon, Maik Patzelt, Georgia Petridou, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke, Benjamin Sippel, "Religion in the Making: The Lived Ancient Religion Approach," *Religion, Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group* (2018).

However, both theology and digitalization share similar nature in the context of cyberspace, a national environment in which communication over computer network occurs.[12]

Computer network relates to unreal word, connected by technology, brings the real world link each other by technology in the cyberspace. In the other side, the nature of theology could be assumed bear the attribute of digital context due its doctrines, most of them, lack of reality. For instance, speaking about Christology, always relate to his divinity and humanity. Physically, probably the human Christ existed in the past as witnessed by historians and proved archeologically. But discussing his deity is part of cyberspace, known as faith in religious context. Deity against the reality due it contains of imagination, fiction, dream, and revelation, where science against that knowledge and calls them as abstraction of spiritual life. Therefore, digitalization and theology are considered as cyber knowledge, in which not physical, and not necessarily virtual.

Furthermore, they are part of daily daily experience of human being.[13] Indeed, theology duties are fulfilled by cyberspace, extend to politic, business and social life.[14] Digitalization and theology integrally connected and increasingly more artificial, guides the link becomes life. However, digital world has evolved into human environment, it determines the structure of thinking, contributing to education system, stimulating intelligence and opening new thinking of theology.[15] Therefore, mutual influence takes place to theology and digital era, forces theology to be contextualized and digitalization accommodates the intention of theology. Anthropological space is cut off, led to shaping the feelings of spirituality and theology sensibility being appropriate to current age.

The term cybertheology is offered as a way to combine and link contradiction attributes of theology and digitalization, it is a critical reflection of faith and intelligence evaluation of beliefs in the cyber age which is influence theological exercise.[16] Theological contextualization in digital society bears the sense of spiritual and faith in the essence by covered and formed with modernism appearance. Theology adapts to the digital environment, where the public square and communication connected by internet, modern devices. The highlight of cybertheology is the tremendous social change, systematic reflection of faith to the transformation of digital age.[17]

The nexus between theology and digital society exist in theological contextualization where theology itself required to adapt and make adjustment as the digital age moving forward without consideration, therefore, both these knowledge are dynamic, but digitalization walk in the front while theology follows the changing world. Here the adaptation relates to the digital society where technology plays significant role; the practical purpose on how using digital devices in order to grasp the knowledge of theology and in contrast, on how theology able to impacts its divine order toward digital society. However, the flexibility of theology does not degrade its core intention, but the main message of theology is articulated in line with the current context, requirement, needs and urgency. Here the theological contribution to digital society is needed to be discovered.

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[12] Le Duc, "Cybertheology: Theologizing in the Digital Age."

[13] Pope Benedict XVI, "Message for World Communication Day 2013," last modified 2013, accessed March 24, 2020, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/ %09documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20130124_47th-world-communications-day.pdf.

[14] Pope John Paul II, "Message for World Communication Day 2002," last modified 2002, accessed March 24, 2020, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications %09/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20020122_world- communications-day.html. .

[15] Antonio Spadaro, *Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

[16] M. Peter Singh Singh, *An Overview of Cybertheology*, *Seminar on Ekklesionlogy in Cyber Age*, 2014.

[17] Le Duc, "Cybertheology: Theologizing in the Digital Age."

Christology and Digital Society

Speaking about central dogma of Christianity relates to the doctrine of God,[18] where the whole system of universe give wide attention to its knowledge. For monotheistic religion, God has no numerical problem due it is clear that God is a person, despite human knowledge of God is not exhaustive, but his presence is acknowledged and confirmed by human society. But Christianity has struggle with the scholarship of God as considered the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in nature but divided in person. Therefore, the office of Christ, the predominant message of scripture, receives rich attention. Regarding digital society, the tension here is, what contribution could be offered by Christology to smart society, digital environment?

Christ is not only for certain context, but bears a comprehensive nature, a desire to all nation, applicable every single context, and valid to the whole human knowledge. It implies the attribute of catholicity.[19] Christ cannot placed simply as a historical person with no significant role for modern society, rather his present exist since the beginning, known comes from the eternity, and supplies influence for each period of the universe.[20] This knowledge enables Christology owns rich contribution for modern age. Previously, before the redemption event in the cross, he held the office with the Father and Spirit as the creator, afterwards, he becomes the central attention as he crucified as the offering to redeem sins of human being. Therefore, his endowment is able to be contextualized in the digital, online environment. It is not a mistake to search Christ in all things including in digital world, even more, cyberspace becomes the mirror of human desire for the infinite, the divine, and increasingly develop the attributes of God, omnipresent and omniscient.[21] With this in mind, digital equipment and device prepare, as tools, help to seek the knowledge of Christ in modern way, the knowledge of Christ and its revelation are performed by digital devices. But the contribution of Christology for sustainable of the smart society need further clarification.

The mediatorship office of Christ is one of expensive intention of the Father who bears the initiative to reach human being. Christ came to bridge the gap between the divine father and the humanity of sinful man because no available space of meeting for these two contrast nature, but through Christ, who own the nature of divinity and humanity, allows the Father to save the universe from sins.[22] The common purpose of digital devices, however, to connect society that may cut the distance and time. The significant difference between Christ and digital instrument is, Christ serves the mediatorship of divinity and humanity while internet connects the interaction between smart society, mutual relationship of human being. But functionally, they work as a mediator to cut obstacle and barriers concerning communication among communicators. The role of Christ's mediatorship, however, available for the whole sinful universe, in this sense, modern society receives the same present, the mediatorship of Christ, that enable them to earn dialogue with the Father, and collects redemption. Speaking the cross event does not limit to soteriology alone, but it impacts to the sustainable of knowledge and technology. Proverbs 1:7 highlights the link between the divine and human scholarship where fear of God in the first stage leads to the development of human knowledge. Furthermore, the term fellowship expresses the mediatorship of Christ which is offers a sustainable connection with God that may lead to the development of human scholarship of digitalization.[23]

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[18] Bavinck Herman, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Publishing Group, 2004).

[19] Barend Kamphuis, "Herman Bavinck on Catholicity," *MAJT* 24 (2013): 97–104.

[20] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 3: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Publishing Group, 2006).

[21] Spadaro, *Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*.

[22] John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father , Son and Holy Ghost by Publisher : Description :* (Grand Rapids: MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1657), http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/communion.html.

[23] Ibid.

Moreover, the mediatorship bears the nature of love, a communicative love and extend to all people, in which it is eternal.[24] The eternity characteristic of Christ's love enables to be employed into the whole segmentation and dimension of human life, including modern society. It implies a sustainable work that producing love to be shared and transformed in which similar with the intention to maintain the continuation of digitalization. However, the mediatorship of Christ and its offering, love, do not bear direct dialogue and contribution to the sustainable of modern society. Theology has no credible access to reach technology, due the link is pessimistically doubted to be constructed, but technology in the sense of its society and environment, probably have opportunity where religion could be employed to connect them as it has the capacity. Max Webber, a sociologist, highlights the influence of religion to capitalism in which could be applied to technology by saying that theology has direct cause of cyberspace condition but certain extent appears to be a result of them.[25] As the consequence, a connection topic need to be explored in order to build proper discussion between Christology and technology. Religion, sociology, and anthropology are the optional topic that could offers interesting notions that may open possibility to the pessimist assumption concerning the tension.

Acknowledging God as the origin of all thing is the foundation to see its relationship with technology, furthermore, recognizing that a responsible of man, the creature, in which commissioned by God to unfold God's creation, including technology and science. Modern society, cyber era, digitalization must subservient to the divine meaning and intention.[26] Here is clear, Christology contribution possible through a man, anthropological approach may serve effect to the modern society. The dogmatic of Christ elaborates human being where extended contextually to cyberspace. The potentiality of maintaining or facing 5.0 era depends on anthropological where the divine matter employs it to reach the original aims of universe. The worldview of each man lead critical thinking on how to response the smart society and preparing the future challenges. Clearly, Schuurman against anthropocentrism, man as the mediator of divinity to gain proper dialogue with digital era does not mean man being viewed as an object of cyberspace manipulation, but must instead receive love as a prior given and divine love.[27] With this in mind, the love that shared by Christ in redemption is received by human society, where they are the user and hold control over technology. Inputs from Christology will have wide impact to technology because the sinful man who had receive love through the mediatorship of Christ is required to extend it for the sustainable of modern society. The pessimistic tone appears here due Christology depends on anthropology in order to gain proper contribution for digital era. A join work is needed; single effort of Christology plays no direct significant role toward technology.

Moreover, divine anthropological contribution cannot be separated with its divine purpose, a pure intention to interact with smart society is difficult to be reached due it is always followed by heavenly aims. Appreciation toward technology should be lays on dogmatic purpose such as respecting the Owner of all things, kingdom of God and other related topic.[28] Therefore, significant contribution seems impossible to be reached with Christology-anthropological approach. Furthermore, religious faith doubts the existence of technology will be replaced by atheistic set of beliefs, and eventually becomes irrelevant to all context of society.[29] This pessimistic tone appears because cyberspace potentially could

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[24] John Owen, *Meditation and Discourse on the Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Publishing Group, 1965).

[25] Max Webber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1992).

[26] Swearengen J.C, *Beyond Paradise: Technology and the Kingdom of God* (Eugene: WIPF & STOCK, 2007).

[27] Schuurman, "Technology and Religion: Islam, Christianity and Materialism," *Koers* 76, no. 2 (2011): 373–386.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Pauline Hope Kluver, Randolph and Cheong, "Technological Moderization the Internet and Religion in Singapore," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007): 1122–1142.

lead to the comprehensive understanding of science and technology in which would make religious faith becomes unnecessary, furthermore, higher stage of technology results skeptical attitude because natural phenomenon gains empirical explanations from science.[30] Therefore, religion, as a mediator, offers less opportunity to Christology in order to contribute toward smart society. Cyberspace is considered as a threat to religion, bears potency to degrade the core of Christology.

Furthermore, sociology offers different critique to the smart society. The more religious civilization the less they employ digital devices.[31] Here appear the contradiction of Christology and modern age, smart digital society, they go contrast and do not share support to each other. The society stands in the middle and forced to move in certain side, mutual profits are absent in their communication. Smart society embodies secular worldview, decreases spiritual interest of the society.[32] The ethos of digital era discourages the religious orientations.[33] Barriers and obstacles follow the domination of cyberspace that could presents information in which undermine plausibility structure of religious system by allowing uncontrolled critics to Christology. Moreover, certain ritual that affiliated to Christology cannot accommodate by digitalization where the limit of physical contact exist.[34] Technology, cyberspace, and smart society are considered as a potential harmful product.[35] Therefore, instead of sharing contribution, Christology has sentiment toward modern society, because even by mediators; anthropological, sociological, and religion, significant impact is difficult to be discovered. The discussion between them bears contradiction, controversy and less of opportunity. Forcing Christology to transform benefits for the sustainable of smart society will lead the dogma loses something supposed to be and creating chaos to digital era.

The ethical and moral issues surrounding cyberspace bothers Christology to be engaged.[36] Because the absence of physical interaction produces threats. But it is, the root of technology development, Christ mind is the foundation of all existence and owns the authority over cyberspace (Col 1:16-17).[37] Therefore, the smart society runs under the authority of Christ without give intervention. This means, even though the technology owned by religious dogma but Christ has no significant role. In contrast, it seems that digital era itself donates advantages or disadvantages to Christology.

CONCLUSSION

A proper place of discussion for Christology and smart society does not share sufficient knowledge. Exclusivism and divine intention lead Christology to maintain its original purpose and limit itself around the theological circle. In the other side, digitalization is considered as a threat for the existence of Christology, therefore, receiving large number of theology sentiments. Instead of contribute positive input to the development of digitalization, in contrast, the users of Christology gain profits from technology. Anthropology, sociology, and religion are potential mediators that may link the two contrast notions. Christology need to employs them in order to enable himself contribute positive donation for the sustainable of smart society. Nevertheless, they only share poor contribution and have no significant effects to digitalization.

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[30] R Norris, P., & Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Camridge: Camridge University Press, 2004).

[31] R Armfield, G., & Holbert, "The Relationship between Religiosity and Internet Use," *Journal of Media and Religion* 2, no. 3 (2003): 129–144.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Kluver, Randolph and Cheong, "Technological Moderization the Internet and Religion in Singapore."

[34] Ibid.

[35] M Bockover, "Confucian Values and the Internet: A Potential Conflict," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30, no. 2 (2003): 159–175.

[36] Efiong, "Theology and Information Technology."

[37] Ibid.

The superiority of Christology in which assuming as the authority holder over all public square and knowledge adds extend difficulty for positive dialogues. Cyberspace receives large number sentimental of Christology reflection. Consequently, instead of sharing constructive inputs, Christology transforms critique, suspicion, sentiment, and pessimist to the development of digital smart society. Contextualization, and the modification of cyberspace becomes cybertheology is simply a response to the current environment that will help Christology suitable with the digital era, but nothing to do with certain donation to technology because those discipline own contrast order.

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