The Philosophy of Early Christianity in the Era of Digitalisation

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Edited by

Yip Mei Loh

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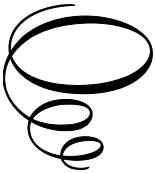

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Yip Mei Loh

PREFACE

MARIA JOHN P. SELVAMANI

One of the major impacts of the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic is the rapid digitalization of many aspects of human society. As the cities were locked down to control the spread of the pandemic, digital platforms replaced the offices, schools, restaurants and even the places of worship. As the Churches were closed, the pastors turned to digital platforms to reach out to their faithful. Virtual worship, which was unthinkable a year ago, has become the norm as the pandemic continues to ravage many countries. This pandemic has forced upon us an era of digitalization which even religions could not resist. This conference, held just before the pandemic, focused on the impact of the digitalization on Christianity.

Early Christian philosophy, which was greatly influenced by the ancient Greek philosophers, plays an important role in understanding the theological development and the history of the nascent Church, and becomes the yardstick in maintaining the orthodoxy and tradition of Christian faith. The study of early Christianity is a much-neglected field in Taiwanese academia. To revive interest in the philosophy of early Christianity and to encourage Christian scholars to engage in the digitalization of modern society, this conference, titled "The Philosophy of Early Christianity in the Era of Digitalization", was held on December 6-7, 2019 at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan and was organized by the Department of Philosophy and Academia Catholica, a research institute on Catholic Studies.

This book is the collection of the papers presented at the conference. The topics range from the philosophical basis of early Christian theology, especially the influence of ancient Greek philosophy, to the influence of digitalization on the society at large and on Christianity in particular. This collection of papers draws from the wisdom of early Christian theology and addresses the impact of digitalization on Christianity in modern times. Apart from providing an overview on this topic, this book, in a special way, focuses on the perspectives from Russia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

This book first focuses on digitalization as a social process that influences all the spheres of modern human society and the way it affects Christians in understanding and interpreting their faith. Igor Pavlovich Ryazantsev describes the social digitalization process in Russia. He points out that there is a conflicting attitude towards various aspects of digitalization. Though most of the respondents are supportive of the process, there is also deep concern on the risks of digital technology to the economical, socio-political and educational institutions of the society.

The rest of the book deals with the philosophy and theology of early Christianity and the impact of digitalization. Ya-Tang Chuang attempts to contextualize the theological reflection for the digital age by proposing a theology of digital story telling. He contends that story telling is a way of theologizing and the digital technology makes this process more accessible and powerful. James Batcho re-evaluates the Greek concepts *Mimesis*, *Diegesis* and *Logos* as applied to audible cinema. The paper by Andrew Tsz Wan Hung explores Augustine's ethics in the light of internet addiction. From Augustine's theory of will, desire and concupiscence, he argues that these concepts and the Augustinian model of lust-habit-addictive necessity, are relevant in understanding the damage that internet addiction causes.

Le-Chih Hsieh argues that a better comprehension of Aristotle's concepts of *Dunamis* and *Energia* can help in understanding St. Paul's theology of justification by faith in his letter to the Galatians (2:16). The next paper by Bernard Li and Yip Mei Loh discusses the relationship between digitalization, the Bible and Philosophy. They affirm that the philosophy of ancient Greece, early Christianity and the modern technology are all intertwined. They conclude that human innovation in digitalization proceeds from the effluence of God's wisdom and assert that technical advances are meant to glorify God's wisdom.

Mark Edwards reviews the twentieth century translation of Greek and Latin Philosophy. His excellent survey of the translated works reveals that no translation can capture the original ingenuity and will always be a hedge between the reader and the original. The final chapter by Christoph Horn discusses the Neoplatonists' debate on the concept of evil. He provides insight into Plotinus' conception of matter as evil and how Proclus, after rejecting Plotinus' understanding, develops his own theory of evil. This paper concludes with an observation on the innovative employment of the Plotinian concept of evil by Augustine in ascribing the cause of evil to human free will.

As we continue to grapple with the impact of modern technology on the philosophical and theological foundations of Christianity, it is necessary to understand the way early Christianity responded to its socio-political environment. This collection of conference papers is a valuable resource for those who are interested in the theological and philosophical development of early Christianity and those who are concerned about the impact of digitalization on human society.

Author's Biography:

Maria John P. Selvamani is an associate professor in the Department of Medicine and the dean of Academia Catholica at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan. He holds a doctorate in molecular biology and bachelor degrees in philosophy and theology. His research interests are science and religion and bioethics.

INTRODUCTION

YIP MEI LOH

Cicero gave up his political business after the death of his daughter, subsequently devoting himself to philosophical studies. While thus occupied he engaged in five philosophical conferences in a Tusculan villa, and in Bk 1 of his *Tusculan Disputations*, observed that 'living well depends on the study of wisdom, which is called philosophy'. It is clear that philosophy is a subject in which to search for wisdom by means of endeavouring to comprehend the truth of the cosmos and man. In other words, wonder is the beginning of philosophy, Plato says in the *Theaetetus* 155d; and philosophy, the *paideia* of mind, is the beginning of human speculation; and the Bible is the seed of the wisdom planted in our mind, 'of which office is to use its reason well'[1] as Cicero says. Reason (ratio) is number, and number is made clear to us by means of '*lux mentis*[2]', leading to the creation of the artificial mind, in imitation of our own mind, with the numbers 0 and 1.

Digitalisation is changing the methods of our learning, work and lifestyle, and more importantly, it is transforming our patterns of thinking. Being guided by the digital world in all aspects of our life is our inescapable fate. The controversial issue of Big Data becomes the most necessary lesson that we have to investigate and understand in order not to be manipulated and enslaved by it - to avoid censorship, to maintain our independence of thought and to publish freely, since the better we apprehend it, the more transparency we demand about it, to prevent us not only from being monitored unconsciously, but also from abusing it. As St. Augustine says, the knowledge of life (*vitae scientia*) is better and higher than life itself, since once we are living in a stage of understanding, our mind is more perfectly enlightened; [3] and our knowledge is deepened for us to

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[1] Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Tusculan Disputations*, BK III, vii (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1877), 63.
[2] Augustinus. *De libero arbitrio*, Liber II, 21, 82 (Paderborn/Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006), 158.
[3] Augustinus. *De libero arbitrio*, Liber I, 17, 59, 96-97.

distinguish truth from falsity, and information from misinformation, by means of 'rational reflection and thought[4] ' (*animadversione et cogitatione*). And the President of Harvard University, Drew Gipin Faust, quoted Jeremy Knowles, saying 'the most important goal of higher education is to ensure that graduates can recognize when "someone is talking rot"'.[5] It is thus clear that from the ancient days to these, we are challenged by the same issue - misinformation and falsehood. We all are immersed in a world of specious information. In these information-filled generations, training students to distinguish truth from falsehood is the key to a good education, along with independent thinking.

In Plato's *Protagoras* 314a-c Plato warns us that the risk of purchasing knowledge to be absorbed by learning is serious, since we have no way of knowing whether our soul may be either injured or benefited by it. We have to be very careful what kind of knowledge we have learned, since our soul can suffer drastic pain if we have bought false knowledge and fake information. He reminds Hippocrates not to be a parrot, but to be capable of distinguishing truth from falsity. Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave in his *Republic* VII described Socrates as a true philosopher telling his compatriots to think independently and not to be imprisoned by specious nonsense. For this his destiny is to forfeit his life.[6] His heroic sacrifice was witnessed by the Greeks, and served as an essential guide to justice and courage, demonstrating that universal values – truth and virtues - cannot be compromised. Thus Greek philosophy prepares the way for the Christian faith, as evinced by Titus Flavius Clement (c. 150-216). In his *Stromateis* he holds that 'philosophy is a preparatory science for Christianity, since it was a direct gift of God to the Greeks before the Lord extended his appeal to the Greeks'.[7] And Mark Edwards underscores the fact that Origen quoted Plato more often than any other philosopher for the purpose of 'availing himself of philosophy in the service of exegesis and

[4] Augustinus. *De libero arbitrio*, Liber II, 9, 29, 138.
[5] https://www.harvard.edu/president/speech/2017/freshman-convocation-address-to-class-2021 (accessed 11th December 2020).
[6] See Yip Mei Loh. 'The Allegory of Pistis and Eikasia in Plato's Divided Line and Social Media Bespoke Groups as Virtual "Ekklesia" in Taiwan' in *Цифровизация общества и будущее христианства*, (Материалы V Международной научной конференции 24.01.2019 / Отв. ред. И. П. Рязанцев, ред.-сост. Р. М. Плюснин. – М.: Изд-во ПСТГУ, 2019), 33-47.
[7] Clement of Alexandria. *Stromateis*, translated by John Ferguson, Bk I, 5, 28(1) (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 41-42.

the defence of ecclesiastical tradition'[8]. Hence, philosophy is the means by which early apologists could rebuke the pagans for the vindication of the Christian faith. For example, St. Augustine, in his first philosophical encounters, reads Cicero's work, *Hortensius*, which leads him to turn to the Bible, and which he discovers can provide him with guidance in seeking for truth, happiness and salvation; thus replacing the role of Manichaeism in his life. [9] Furthermore, after he read the work of the Neoplatonists, he not only thinks that their philosophy is compatible with the Bible, but also depicts Plotinus as the 'resurrected Plato'.[10]Under the mentoring of Ambrose, whom he met in Milan, he converts to Christianity and deploys Greek philosophy to rebuke the quarrels of Donatism and of Pelagianism to defend the Bible.[11] Hence the important role of philosophy is to train us in independent thought, to sift through popular opinion, and to not be manipulated by fake information.

Nowadays we are bombarded with information overload and are facing a challenge in having our lives overseen by the digital world. Digitalisation is the invention of man, and a gift from God for us to possess a better life and a better view to comprehend Him. Transparency and truth are becoming more and more urgent. Therefore, individual independent thinking and judgment becomes necessary to avoid confusion and puzzlement, and philosophy is the best way to help people to achieve this. The very earliest apologists utilized Greek philosophy to defend the truth of the Bible, and in our own time we can likewise employ the core principles of the Bible and the same philosophy of early Christianity to protect our values from false information in the event that we are unknowingly drawn into a vortex of evil. As Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) says, in his *Grundlegung zur*

[8] Mark Julian Edwards. *Origen against Plato*, Introduction (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 1. Cf. 馬克・愛德華斯。《歐利根駁斥柏拉圖》，羅月美譯，(台北：五南出版社，2020 年 5 月)，2 頁。

[9] Christoph Horn. *Augustinus* (München/Germany: Verlag C.H. Beck oHG, 1995), 14. Cf. 克里斯多夫・ 霍恩著。《奧古斯丁—哲學思想導論》，羅月美譯，(台北：五南出版社，2021 年 03 月)， 26 頁。

[10] Christoph Horn. *Augustinus*, 29. Cf. 克里斯多夫・ 霍恩著。《奧古斯丁—哲學思想導論》，羅月美譯，40 頁

[11] Christoph Horn. *Augustinus*, 18-19. Cf. 克里斯多夫・ 霍恩著。《奧古斯丁—哲學思想導論》，羅月美譯，30-31 頁。

Metaphysik der Sitten, when we encounter difficulties with morality in practice, we need the help of philosophy to surmount these hurdles. [12]

Today digital technology has been managing our lives in various fields, and affecting our thoughts and behaviours, so we should appreciate Socrates in being the first philosopher to bring down philosophy from the heavens, to proclaim it in cities, to introduce it into families, and to oblige it to examine life and morals, and good and evil, as Cicero observed of him.[13] With the help of philosophy, I think that we are able to resist the bad temptations of digitalisation in our lives by rational thinking. The free choice of our will is faced with the two kingdoms of good and evil, also called the kingdom of Christ and of Satan, as determined by Augustine in his *De civitate dei*. In dealing with the conflict between these two kingdoms, correct and hard philosophical training, and the values of Christianity, can assist us to make correct decisions about values.

[12] Immanuel Kant. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Herausgegeben von Karl Vorländer, 3 Auflage, Erster Abschnitt, 405 (Hamburg/Germany: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1957), 24.
[13] Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Tusculan Disputations*, BK V, iv. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1877), 107.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL DIGITALISATION IN RUSSIA: EXPERT OPINIONS AND DEVELOPMENTAL FEATURES

IGOR PAVLOVICH RYAZANTSEV,
MARIA PODLESNAYA,
AND VASILIY PISAREVSKIY

This article discusses research approaches to digitalisation as a modern social process. One point of view is associated with the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt (1923-2010) and his theory of "multiple modernities", while another lies with his critics and academic opponents: Volker Schmidt and Thomas Schwinn. According to Eisenstadt, the European path to modernization is not the only possible one and the project of modernity itself is ontologically rooted in the religious and spiritual sphere. Schmidt and Schwinn, on the contrary, point to the universal nature of modernity, noting that it is primarily a European project and its multivariant nature is nothing more than the result of the adaptation of individual elements of the value-institutional matrix of modernity by different civilizations. Describing the key features of the social process of digitalisation, the authors focus on the relationship between social action in the social space, both online and offline. The main characteristics of digitalisation are considered, including widespread robotization, labor market decentralization, and the desire for a "technological singularity" where machine intelligence surpasses human intelligence by several orders of magnitude. Special emphasis is placed on consideration of the spiritual risks of digitalisation, including "dehumanization", and the corresponding statements of Orthodox clergy on this issue are given.

The article shows the developmental features of the social process of digitalisation in Russia using examples of relevant sociological research, including research by the Information and Analytical Center of St. Tikhon's Orthodox University. This study assessed the local population's attitudes to digitalisation in the Kirillovsky District of Vologda Region, as well as in Belgorod Region. The article emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary study of the social processes of digitalisation and the productive international exchange of results.

Introduction

We will start with a story about Russian realities; a story that has led us look at this topic from a particular angle. Russia, like many other European countries, has recently been actively developing industries in the fields of robotics, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence. This was the subject of an international conference held at the highest level (with the participation of heads of government of the Russian Federation, major IT leaders, and 5,000 participants from 20 countries) in Moscow in early November 2019.

This conference was reported on in the final broadcast of "Weekly News" on the TV channel "Russia 1" and at the most accessible time for the majority of the Russian audience (Prime time). This event was presented as an undoubtedly high achievement of Russian business and government, with appropriate rhetoric and pathos.

The report that followed dealt with a flood in Irkutsk Region (Siberia) and the widespread flooding of residential areas there. Here, we can see two completely different realities: the so-called world of the elite, with its constant dreams of a digital future, the approach to which is so hurried that you might think that such a future already exists in the present; and the world of ordinary citizens living their usual lives and facing everyday problems, far from the world of big technology, artificial intelligence, and other things. In addition, as it turns out, this world will largely depend on both territorial and climatic factors, which, in turn, will determine that not every technology is suitable for Russia's geography.

This leads us to the problem addressed by this article and we ask the following question: what are we really dealing with when we talk about digitalisation? Is it the phantom of power and business? Is it a media construct? Is this future inevitable? Or are we dealing with necessity, as a continuation of everything preceding it (digitalisation)?

Once we had formulated these questions, it suddenly became quite clear that we were talking about digitalisation, on different planes and at different levels: 1. at the level of science fiction; 2. at the level of expert evaluation; and 3. at the level of direct practice.

Therefore, we must talk about digitalisation with an understanding of these epistemological differences, but not be limited to them. It turns out that, as a kind of new social phenomenon, digitalisation has the capacity to change society in one way or another. It affects not just different social spheres to variable extents, but also, moving from changes in the social structure of society to the consciousness of the individual, as a result, digitalisation is realized in different ways, with different effects and consequences that the ideologists of digitalisation and its practices cannot predict. However, let us proceed in an orderly fashion. Firstly, let us address the origins of digitalisation.

Section 1. The origins of digitalisation and the signs of a new society

1957 can be considered to mark the beginning of movement in this direction as the US Department of Defense first began to think about how to achieve the reliable transmission of digital information. In 1969, a group of talented scientists created a computer network called ARPANET, which united four universities (UCLA, UCSB, Stanford, and the University of Utah). In 1973, ARPANET became international, connecting to the NPL network in London. In 1991, after the standardization of World Wide Web (WWW) pages, the Internet became a public invention for the United States and then across the world. What important conclusions can we draw from this brief history of the emergence of the Internet and, as we now understand it, a new and globally encompassing reality?

Our first conclusion: the history of the development of the Internet and the digitalisation process seems to have been developing now for the past few years, or even over the past decade, but it has seen at least 63 years of active development and research, attracting some of the greatest minds of our time.

The second conclusion: the initiator of this research and development was the US government (Department of Defense), under the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower, indicating not only the main subject and customer of such technologies, but also the corresponding institution of interest.

The third conclusion: digital reality, which we may say concerns our everyday lives, has changed many aspects of our attitudes to work, rest, leisure, relationships, communications, and our way of life in general.

These changes have taken place over no more than 30 years—in comparison to other historical forms of social life, this is quite a short period—but the resulting consequences have been quite tangible. This thirty-year period not only marks the life and maturation of a whole generation of people, but also a change in consciousness and the very structure of society, which is worth talking about in more detail.

Section 2. The IT class and its friends

In this regard, we may ask ourselves the following questions: what is digitalisation as a social process today? Is this process global? And how much does it coincide with globalization in general? When you first attempt to generate answers, it is not difficult to notice both some similarities and significant differences between the processes of digitalisation and globalization, which lie primarily in the source and causes of these two processes.

Globalization is a phenomenon on a global scale. Its processes have emerged as a reaction to the growth and development of multinational companies and the relevant forms of economy, production, and capital (by analogy with the capitalism of the late 19th century resulting from the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of appropriate sites and classes, particularly the bourgeoisie).

Digitalisation was a process initiated, as noted above, by the military government elites of the USA and with the support (development) of leaders of the IT industry. They represented, on the one hand, the scientific-technical elite and, on the other, a new business segment of the economy, though only partially developed at the time and only beginning to gain momentum, as lobbying interest groups.

In connection to this, even today we can talk about the emergence of a new class, if not referring to the bourgeoisie (in the usual sense), then to modern intellectuals who were not only able to create technologies, but also to update and (continuously) manage them. This latter point is a serious factor in the emergence of a new form of power and new forms of its formation. Hence, we can ask the inevitable question about the relationship between democracy and technology in modern neoliberal

societies, the answer to which will probably put us in the very near future in need of reviewing currently available ways of implementing democracy and its basic principles. Thus, we can draw a first conclusion: digitalisation is not just a sequential process of development from the two preceding stages of capitalism and globalization, associated with the emergence of new technologies and relevant classes or social groups, but also new forms of governance and power.

At the same time, we are witnessing the birth of a new class of IT workers, which, already today, has a visible structure with at least four elements: 1. developers (scientific and technical elite); 2. IT business personnel; 3. IT communications personnel; and 4. IT service personnel (the grassroots mass element of this class structure).

A closer examination of the origins of digitalisation indicates a very interesting feature, namely, that this process was originally formed from a set of social practices and not with individual actors (as was the case with the growth and development of transnational corporations), but multiple groups and networks of actors. As a result, although the process was initiated by the scientific and technical intellectual elite, there were a number of interested groups involved and the process itself was very fast in terms of the speed of its coverage and dissemination.

Concurrently, major players involved in the process of forming a new digital reality have managed to create their own business strategies (for example, Yandex-taxi, which has displaced the usual city taxi services that use centralized dispatchers from the market in recent years). As such, digitalisation itself can be considered a business strategy. In the case of the possibilities of digital technologies being taken advantage of by special services and other shadow structures of power, digitalisation can be considered as a mechanism of control. This is also true of the field of management. In the case of the geopolitical alignment of forces, it can be seen as a project of the future also. Thus, unlike globalization, the process of digitalisation, if I may say so, is more practice-oriented and structures life not “from above”, but “from below”; not just changing our economy or culture, but all of everyday experience itself. Such a far reaching process could be compared to conversion, with a transition from one group to another and with a qualitatively new approach to each group.

At the same time, the process of digitalisation, from the point of view of its own development, needs certain conditions. In connection to this, the

question arises in the present as to its geopolitical and ideological boundaries (benchmarks).

Section 3. Modernity as a world of "multiple realities": Departing from European unification

In this regard, it is worth remembering a few theoretical ideas about modernity as it exists at the moment. An important viewpoint was expressed by the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt (1923-2010) through his theory of "multiple modernities".[1] Another perspective, one critical of his position, is found in the work of his opponents: Volker Schmidt[2] and Thomas Schwinn.[3] According to Eisenstadt, the European path to modernization is not unique. The project of modernity is ontologically rooted in the religious-spiritual sphere of civilizations, in "axial time", and, therefore, every civilization's "axial age" sees the generation of its own project of "modernity" embedded in its spiritual potential and embodying that civilization's respective achievements in the fields of culture, social organization, and technology, etc.

According to Eisenstadt, there is no single and universal Art Nouveau; rather, we can only talk about the possibility of the existence of various projects of Western and Eastern types that have formed naturally or have arisen in the course of confrontation, copying, and partial reproduction of the achievements of Western civilization in conditions different to those of the context of its origin. In this latter case, the determining role is played by the civilizational and cultural specificity of a particular society. However, this does not prevent modern companies having a set of common features.

Schmidt and Schwinn, opponents of Eisenstadt and proponents of a globalist modernization paradigm, point to the universal character of modernity. They note that, in this primarily European project and its multivariance (*mnogovariantnost*), there is no difference in the outcomes

[1] Eisenstadt Sh. N. (2007) Multiple Modernities: der Streit um die Gegenwart, Berlin: Kulturverl. Kadmos (in German).
[2] Schmidt V. H. (2010) Die ostasiatische Moderne: eine Moderne, eigener Art? Berliner Journal für Soziologie, vol. 20, iss. 2, pp. 123-152 (in German).
[3] Schwinn T. (2018) From the Comparative Sociology of Religion to the Comparative Political Sociology. Max Weber and Multiple Modernities. Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya = Sociological Studies, no 1, pp. 121-131 (in Russian).

of adaptation of individual elements of the value-institutional matrix of modernism in various civilizations, which are beginning to interpret modernization as a challenge to their own existence and create the axiological groundwork for its assimilation and traditionalist legitimation. Therefore, pluralism can only be discussed within the framework of the existence of a single substantive core in all of these "multiple modernities". This plurality itself is nothing but the selectivity of reactions of modernizing societies and the adaptation of individual components of the modernization project to the national context. That is, the various forms of modernity are forms of a single, dominant content. Speaking about the plurality of ideological constellations of the institutional configurations of modernity, it is necessary to take into account the presence of a common core or common features of the "cultural program of modernity". This core includes: "a new concept of human action—the Autonomous Self"; "intense reflexivity"; multiple roles beyond narrow, stable, cohesive communities (translocal communities); the blurring of differences between the center and the periphery; the inclusion in the cultural core of the themes and symbols of protest—"equality and freedom, justice and autonomy, solidarity and identity"; and finally, the idea of progress and understanding of history as a "project" (domination over nature).

By the way, the presence of common features of the "cultural program of modernity" was not denied by Eisenstadt himself, who emphasized pluralism as diverse configurations arising from differences in national, regional, and global patterns of modernity.

Today, we are witnessing the "blossoming complexity" of the global world, the coexistence of different types of democracy and political institutions, the diversity of models of capitalism and civil society, the emergence, for example, of a unique Eastern path of modernization (we recall the successes of the "East Asian tigers" of China, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, for example).

One of the properties of modernity, according to Wolfgang Knobl, a proponent of the ideas of Eisenstadt,[4] in addition to its plurality, is its contingent nature. It can be understood in terms of a set of random events acting as a catalyst for processes and phenomena and the multiplicity of

[4] Knobl W. (2007) Die Kontingenz der Moderne. Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika. Frankfurt a.M. (u.a.): Campus. [Contingent of modernity. Ways in Europe, Asia and America].

random conditions necessary to change any situation, as well as equifinality (a plurality of ways to achieve a single goal) and multifinality (a multiplicity of evolutionary paths leading to qualitatively different states). Hence, as Knobl argues, the immanent process of self-development of Western civilization, assumed by all, is nothing more than the interaction of many socio-historical factors initiated in reality, some of which are natural, while others are random (contingent) in nature.

This is typical not only for European civilizations, but also for others around the world. Continuing the ideas of Knobl, supporters of the evolutionary approach find a combination of contingent processes in the conditions of systemic instability. There is a new "critical assemblage point" of the system (critical juncture), formed according to the configuration of random factors and guiding the development of society in a new direction, and institutions that further enhance the effect according to movement along the selected trajectory.

Based on the concept of contingency, Knobl emphasizes that, in the course of "a large-scale reconstruction of the history of world civilizations, Eisenstadt hardly touches on the problem of real empirical mechanisms of reproduction and self-preservation of cultural programs of our time". At the same time, the author identifies three main mechanisms of institutional stabilization in conditions of dependence on the previous path of development. This ensures the stability of the system through the maintenance of cultural traditions, the institutionalization of the religious sphere, reproduction through forced political mobilization, strengthening of the institutions of power and control, and examining in detail, first of all, the relevant political mechanisms.

As a result, Knobl rejects the extreme version of the theory of predetermined development, admitting to the development of social systems both following and abandoning a given trajectory. In his opinion, contingency arises not only at the moment of structuring the system at the point of bifurcation, but is immanently present at any point in the trajectory of evolutionary dynamics. In addition, the stability of the system is possible only in the period of development of the system from one critical phase of development to another. The critical points in the development of institutions and socio-historical systems can be spoken of only from the standpoint of retrospective analysis.

In the context of the globalization of modernity, a different situation arises. The environment of modern society is a fundamentally open (contingent)

space of possibilities in which the results of past decisions, although they limit the options for behavior in the present and in the future, do not completely determine the choice. As a result, we can talk about another property of modernity—reflexive temporalization—through which modern society becomes a society of constantly increasing permanent transformation.

Modernity is a historical category that does not presuppose the possibility of definitively determining the diversity of its constitutive features; their variation can be updated, changed, and replaced by others in the course of subsequent stages of development, leaving and fixing the achievements of previous phases of modernization as traditions and values. Considering the process of digitalisation in the context of the theory of "multiple modernities", we can see that the conditions for the development of this process in different countries will be different.

The process itself involves some unification, at least this is how its ideologists position it, and here we are faced with a certain contradiction. The contradiction lies in how this process occurs in reality and what is assumed in theory. This is theoretically still the same scheme given by Wallerstein, which sees the world divided into core and peripheral countries: core countries are successful, developed, and in a state of modernity; the periphery is backward, underdeveloped, and difficult to integrate into modernization processes. As a rule, the latter belong to so-called traditional societies and are seen to have strongly archaic ways of life. It is believed that, because of their traditionalism and the restrictive weight of tradition, in such societies modernization and development are both extremely difficult.

As such, we see not only an expansion of the European ideals of how this should be, but also an attempt to unify these countries in terms of European ideas about development. In this sense, Eisenstadt's theory, to put it mildly, changes the global strategy of the so-called "core", pointing to a number of features around which a unified modernity is impossible. Reality turns out to be wider than the narrow framework of a convenient, but somewhat biased theoretical approach.

Section 4. The "Ideal" model of digitalisation: Utopia or the future?

We can only talk about the process of digitalisation and its development (speed, intensity) within the framework of "multiple modernities", although we note, once again, that attempts to unify this process exist today and

their features are easily recognizable. First of all, it relies on: the maximum openness of all citizens to possible control; a departure from tradition; and the reformatting and erasure of historical memory. As a result, a constant orientation towards the future, with the eradication of archaism (as a certain communal, close, and interpersonal way of life) and the creation of the myth that archaism is bad, is something close to social infantilism.

The question of whether the "ideal" model of digitalisation is a utopia or that the future can be left open, relies on an understanding that any theory can become a plan of action and the ideology of the ruling elites has an interest in all of this. From the point of view of our understanding, reality still takes a toll and we agree with Knobl in his discussion of the importance of contingent processes in the context of development. In this sense, it is very timely to recall an example from everyday life, when two opposing examples of modernity were voiced in the same media space with only the difference of a few minutes—the popularization of the development of artificial intelligence in Russia and the flood in Irkutsk Region (broadcast on 10/11/2019).[5]

We may conclude that there is a significant gap between digitalisation as a kind of dream of power of business elites and the daily lives of ordinary citizens; it lies not so much in their antagonistic relations, but in the discrepancy between their realities in different scenarios of modernity. Therefore, modernity is plural, not only from the point of view of country and macro-sociological analysis, but also from the point of view of intra-country structures, groups, and classes. In this sense, digitalisation is a project that is being updated by the ruling groups of society.

At the same time, in order for the "ideal" model of digitalisation to work, serious efforts must be made on the part of these groups, since, in fact, changes must affect more than a single social structure and consciousness. Let us now think about the fact that society is not only a "sticky" reality, as Sigmund Bauman said, but also a multi-layered reality consisting of different structural levels. It can be imagined in terms of: the structural level of society, with its classes, groups, and networks (this is the very first outer layer of society); as a level of the structure of action, with its relations, connections, and iterations (the second layer); as a level of social

[5] Vesti nedeli (Weekly News on Russia 1) https://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/5206/episode_id/2218835/video_id/2240352/viewtype/picture/

consciousness (the third layer), filled with stereotypes and historical memory; and finally, as a structure of individual consciousness, with its complex matrix of the conscious and unconscious experiences of life. In other words, in order for the standardization of a certain pattern of life to be accepted, it is necessary that it cover all the represented layers.

In this sense, standardization "works" both at the level of the social structure of society and at the level of individual consciousness. However, the "multiple realities" that Eisenstadt writes about, and which we can still observe today, tells us that, if the first two layers of these standardization processes can occur painlessly, then at the 3rd and 4th layers, variations begin and standardization takes form depending on cultural differences (recall that Eisenstadt also spoke about this, agreeing that there is a "cultural program of modernity", the pluralism of which is born from diverse configurations arising from differences in national cultures, and regional and global patterns of modernity).

Section 5. Digitalisation and religion in the context of a globalized modernist scenario

It is important to note that digitalisation as a process initiated by the elites of society, already has visible and articulated features today that have been shaped by developers of the digital environment. Let us try to understand this in order to determine how the process of digitalisation in Russia is taking place and whether it has its own national characteristics, based on our assumption of the "plurality" of modernity. In this regard, we will use the statements of the most influential experts in this field and statistics from various research companies to make our analysis.

Currently, the process of digitalisation is most actively developing in the economic sphere of society—a trend that is typical mainly for developed countries. Today, even traditionally "offline" sectors of the national economy are increasingly using cloud computing, big data, and the Internet of things.[6] At the same time, the process of digitalisation cannot be reduced exclusively to the development of the "digital economy", since it affects all significant areas of society—the social, political, and cultural.

[6] Weill P., Woerner S. (2018) Digital business transformation. Harvard Business Review Press (USA).

One of the first sociologists to study the information society in the context of the impact of the Internet on social processes was Manuel Castells.[7] He highlighted the key characteristics of such a society. Let us look at them in more detail.

First, social reality on the Internet (online) is not opposed to the usual forms of social reality (offline), but rather closely related to it. Castells characterizes this as the phenomenon of "real virtuality". Second, simultaneously with the advent of computer technology and online reality, social and economic structures have changed: relatively rigid and vertically oriented institutions are being replaced by flexible horizontally oriented networks through which resources are exchanged. In this regard, Castells defines the information society as a network society. Third, the ability to change and reconfiguration Castells notes as "a crucial feature in society". At the same time, the generation, processing, and transmission of information all become fundamental sources of power and influence.

An intermediate place between the scientific theory of Manuel Castels, considering the network society, and the concepts of digitalisation is occupied by the theory of the "digital revolution" by Chris Skinner.[8] On the one hand, he, like D. Bell and E. Toffler—researchers of the information society—and others, introduces a historical periodization of significant "revolutions" in the history of mankind. The first revolution, as Skinner notes, is the emergence of shared beliefs that help different groups negotiate; the second is the invention of money; the third is the industrial revolution; and finally, the fourth is the network revolution, which chronologically belongs to our time. The essence of the network revolution is that time and space are beginning to shrink, radically reshaping social institutions and processes. For example, the social institution of the banking system is rapidly being pushed to the sidelines by P2P lending technologies ("person-to-person", when individuals lend to each other through specialized digital platforms), and the money itself is taking on a digital form based on blockchain technologies.

On the other hand, Skinner talks about the evolution of the Internet as a network of networks within the historical stage of the network revolution. He identifies the stages of WEB 1.0 (the birth of the Internet); WEB 2.0

[7] Castells M. (2000) The Information age: economy, society and culture. Moscow: Higher school of Economics. 458 p.
[8] Skinner C. (2018) Digital human. The fourth revolution of humanity includes everyone. Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Pte Ltd.

(the birth and development of social networks); and WEB 3.0 (the "Internet of values" in which individuals provide each other with a certain value through digital platforms and exchange these values. Note that the concept of "value" is used here in an economic, not a sociological sense). WEB 4.0, Skinner presents as the "Internet of things", when the maximum share in the information exchange will be occupied by machines and robots, rather than people. Finally, the fifth version of the Internet, according to Skinner, will develop through artificial intelligence, with which it will be extremely difficult for people to compete.

One of the most famous researchers of digitalisation, Ray Kurzweil,[9] should not be overlooked either. He is both an inventor (creating the first reading machine for the blind and being the first to teach computers to recognize human speech), and a futurist who studies the process of digitalisation. In his book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, he formulated the "law of accelerating returns", according to which the development of technology occurs exponentially. In other words, the more powerful a particular technology becomes, the greater the acceleration of its development.

The law of accelerating returns, Ray Kurzweil suggests, has three sequential phases. The first is slow growth—the early phase of exponential growth; the second is rapid growth—the explosive phase, when the curve rapidly rises; and the third is the stabilization phase, when a fundamentally new technological paradigm is formed. At present, we are in the first of these phases. In the next stages, the digitalisation process, according to Kurzweil, will have the following characteristics:

- Ubiquitous robotics, focusing on the use of artificial intelligence and deep machine learning. This will lead to revolutionary changes in a number of industries, ranging from medicine to urban management (such as the emergence of driverless cars).
- The development of decentralisation of the labour market (the emergence of "remote professions"), the replacement of a number of existing professions with artificial intelligence, and the emergence of fundamentally new ones.
- Striving for a "technological singularity", when machine intelligence surpasses human intelligence by orders of magnitude, leading to unpredictable consequences in all spheres of human society.

[9] Kurzweil R. (2008) How to Create a Mind: The Secret of Human Thought Revealed. Viking.

- The development of a number of complementary technologies that will influence the reformatting of existing social processes and institutions.

First of all, this concerns big data, which can include huge samples of hundreds of millions of Internet users, while taking into account hundreds of criteria—not just socio-demographic, but also behavioral and economic values. Such volumes of data can be processed exclusively by machine and there is a risk of using personal data without the consent of their owners, consequently giving total control over the activities of people.

This is also about the technology of the "Internet of things", in which a variety of devices (ranging from smartphones to fridges at the scale of the individual and from the "smart factory" to "smart cities" across the whole of society) exchange information via the Internet. This technology will allow the rebuilding of economic and social processes in such a way as to eliminate the need for human intervention in standard actions and operations.

Among complementary technologies, we can also describe the technology that constructs virtual objects, which people perceive and give meaning to. As an example of augmented reality, we can cite the game Pokémon Go, which gained massive popularity some years ago. Much has been written about the deplorable results of such a "game" in the Orthodox Christian media, but it is interesting that representatives of other faiths, such as Roman Catholics, also gave a sharply negative assessment of this game and the technology of augmented reality in general.

We should also mention the technology of 3D printing and, as some researchers note, in the near future we may be talking about printing not only complex objects, but also human organs, which would present many contradictions with the Orthodox view of man. In the same field, we find artificial intelligence and autonomous robots. The advantages of these technologies are obvious, but the danger of them escaping human control certainly exists.

We can identify the main features of the process of digitalisation, which conditionally sees development within the framework of the globalization-modernist scenario. They are as follows:

1. The process of digitalisation covers all spheres of society, starting primarily with the economic;

2. Changes to the structure of society from vertically oriented institutions to horizontal networks;
3. The main source of power and influence becomes the generation, processing, and transmission of information;
4. Social reality itself becomes identical to the social reality of the Internet;
5. We also see changing notions of time and space, which can be compressed;
6. The process of digitalisation covers not just stages of a revolution, but the stage of its own evolution, one which sees the development of artificial intelligence and active robotics;
7. Significant changes to the set of technologies promoting digitalisation. For example, the technology for building virtual human objects and the introduction of axiological traits and meanings.

Thus, we are dealing with a process that is radically changing the social reality we are familiar with, including the transformation of traditional social institutions. The latter is particularly significant from the point of view of the topic of this report and requires consideration of the role of religion and religious social institutions, particularly in today's digital society. Let us look at this issue in more detail.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the role and significance of such a process as the rationalization of the development of a European-centered modernity. It was rationalization that contributed not only to the development of a certain way of thinking, but also to the idea of progress that is being implemented today, including through the digital age/society we are considering.

Rationalization and digitalisation, obviously inseparable, are closely related to each other in this process. At present, we are seeing a serious rationalization of religion, which is clearly demonstrated by the growth of new religious movements. There is a change in the number and basic functions of religion, including the worldview presented. Instead of forming a certain picture of the world for the individual, new religious movements are engaged in the scientific adaptation of ideas. This is due to the weakening of the transmission of religious identity between generations. A result of this is that the formation of an individual's worldview begins to depend on other elements.

> One of the most common elements is pseudo-scientific ideas, which are most often associated with Eastern religious ideas, as well as various health

> practices and near-scientific ideas. In itself, this borrowing is not due to the individual building a new "world picture", but the inclusion of these elements in the already established "world" of man ... the function of pseudo-scientific adaptation of religious ideas allows a person to remain in the framework of his scientific picture of the world, through its rationality, not demanding a faith in the transcendent to achieve salvation. It only suggests adding to the individual's "picture of the world" those elements of spirituality that are convenient, understandable, and acceptable to him.[10]

In other words, we see a kind of hybridity of beliefs and ideas that include elements of all possible traditional religions, supposedly scientific in nature, but at the same time not drawing on pure science. In Orthodox theology, the mixing of non-ordained worldview religious foundations has been called ecumenism. Even S. Huntington, speaking about the uniqueness of Western civilization and its culture, noted that Western universalism is an ideology adopted by the West to resist non-Western cultures.[11] The ecumenism or holism of new religious movements has been considered by some authors as

> ...the desire to overcome the "non-Western", the inclusion of "foreign" cultural code in Western society ... the Holistic function, expressed through new religious movements, acts as a mechanism for overcoming the negative consequences of the loss of an individual's identity, restoring them, but on the basis of religious universalism. Through the holistic function, the "foreign" cultural code changes, creating a variety of elements for the construction of personal spirituality. The individual becomes a bearer not only of, for example, Orthodox or Protestant identities that may no longer meet certain expectations, but also of a new identity—a universal one that may contain, for example, the combined ideas of Christianity, paganism, Eastern teachings, and scientific worldview.[12]

Why is it important for the elite to offer a project of digitalisation in the framework of a globalized modernist scenario to reduce the influence of traditional religions in society and the emergence of new ecumenical religious movements (such as New Age movements)? The answer lies in the very essence of digitalisation, which implies a single space and a world without national and state borders. In turn, this should affect the

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[10] Zudov E. V. (2018) Functions of new religious movements // Ideas and ideals, no. 2 (36), vol. 2, p. 147.
[11] Huntington S. (2003) Clash of civilizations. Moscow: AST. P.35
[12] Zudov E. V. (2018) Functions of new religious movements // Ideas and ideals, no. 2 (36), vol. 2, p. 148.