



Contemporary Theology in the Internet of Things

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Abstract. In the context of the Internet of Things (IoT), contemporary theology embraces new forms and formats. While there have undeniably been negative ramifications, the IoT has made it easier for humans to carry out cultural mandates efficiently and effectively. Within this new era contemporary theology seeks to reinterpret matters pertaining to divinity, humans, and churches as a means of self-regulation and improvement. This paper explores a variety of contemporary theologies that aim to adopt technology in a comprehensive way without eliminating Christian orthodoxy and thereby forge a new theology rooted in the emerging paradigm of the internet of things.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), contemporary theology, internet of things, technology, theology

1 Introduction

Along with the rapid development of the digital world and the internet, Christianity faces challenges in theology, teaching, and the application of Bible principles in the modern world. Through their digital awareness, for example, Indonesian Christian internet users, search for content for online worship and church to meet their spiritual needs [1]. It is no longer possible for someone to remain entirely isolated from the digital world and the internet. It is claimed that the IoT has led to its own “intelligence.” Its very existence has given birth to a new generation of necessary systems, such as “smart cities” and “smart homes.” However, according to D. Cardoso and L. Ferreira, without system sensors and tangible monitoring, data transmission in the IoT cannot work properly [2].

Vibrant theology is able to put forward a faith that does not have to be perpetually in conflict with science. There are areas where science and matters of faith prove compatible, and science may stand in accordance with orthodoxy as defined by God’s general revelation through His created order. Human inventions throughout history, including the invention of the internet, are the result of the innovative thinking, ingenuity, and the natural creative abilities that humans possess as autonomous creatures made in God’s image. Humans are thereby given a cultural mandate and a social mandate from God since Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:26). God first gave the responsibility to Adam and all His creation the power to rule the earth with the intellect be

stowed to humans by God. Yet man's fall into sin led to the pursuit of intellectual faculties that are destructive, standing in contrast to God's perfect will [3].

A foundational goal of Christian Theology is to understand how God has revealed Himself in both specific and general ways through His Word and the created world. God's revelation in nature can be seen in various aspects, including in the development of technology and human ingenuity. Healthy theology does not neglect the consideration of humans apart from their existence in the community or from their pursuit of scientific developments.

Thus, there is a need for a healthy, intellectual and spiritual dialogue between religion and science [4]. Undeniably, Christian theologians must periodically assess whether their theological understanding sufficiently addresses and responds the relevant questions of the age. There are periods that call for reconstruction and renewal. Sonny Zaluchu argues that the principle of *koinonia*, when placed within the framework of the age of the internet, demands a change of perception on how "fellowship" may be realized in everyday experience. He claims that there is a paradigmatic shift in the logic being used within the unique media of the internet, and it calls for theological reconstruction, that is, for an epistemology that embraces a digital *koinonia* [5]. Likewise, the IoT beckons churches to redefine the theological meaning underlying their identity as "church" and reconsider how they will function in today's world.

2 Method

This paper uses qualitative research method with the primary emphasis on literature study and descriptive lists of contemporary theological methods in the IoT era. The theological approach and system patterns are analyzed and then interpreted to find out whether the method is worthy of being called contemporary theology in the context of the IoT. This research seeks to find the logical characteristics of contemporary theology related to the IoT. New theological formats and methodologies will be analyzed to identify existing patterns and formations in relevant contemporary theology.

3 Findings and Discussion

Several challenges and ideas, as well as, models in contemporary theology have emerged in the midst of the development of the Internet of Things (IoT).

3.1 Network/digital Theology

The internet brings unlimited and rapid access to information. The IoT makes it easier for people to be productive through networks and a work management approach that is more efficient as it reduces human labor. Humans no longer work alone because as social beings their dependence on one another is crucial to survival and success [6].

Modern theologians have explored the theological concept of human interdependence. This exploration emphasizes that human being's network with one another. The nature of how humans network virtually in today's world calls for a paradigm shift as it is fundamentally different from conventional, direct social interactions. This emerging integrated network of human relations that is common in the IoT has captured the attention of classical theologians. New forms of fellowship, worship, and digital social interaction cannot replace normative interactions observable in the testimony of Scripture. However, it remains unclear if the emergence of digital theological exchanges—whether propagated through e-books or virtual seminars—will alter these foundational concepts and their application in a way that demonstrates fidelity to biblical patterns and principles. In other words, the central question remains: Can healthy theological exchange and ecclesiological interactions be implemented purely in a digital manner?

In response to the contemporary development of Internet technology and the misunderstandings that frequently arise from irrelevant understandings of the Internet era, the authors of the essays in this book offer Internet Theology as a form of contemporary praxis and Christian ethical principles that can be applied in the Internet world. Collaboratively they claim that the Cross, which is the center of the Christian life, stands as a symbolic foundation for the digital fellowship of believers. This idea manifests most clearly through the concept of a Cross-centered “HTML” [7]. Digital technology has fundamentally changed contemporary culture, and Christianity is not immune to these realities. For good or for ill, internet technology had “programmed” or influenced the lives of believers in such a way that it has produced an entire generation internet-minded Christian.

Le Duc investigated digital theology and found that cyber theology was still in its initial formulation. However, it deserves attention because it may represent a new way of understanding God and His relationship with created human-beings [8]. Carlos Arboleda maintains that without a strong and solid epistemology, cyber-theology cannot be built. The theological basis must first be laid. This includes, for example, the presence of the Body in the digital world, recognizing the internet community as a legitimate ecclesiological expression. Further, future cyber-theological phenomena pertaining to divine experiences in the digital world need to be scripturally assessed [9]. The reconstruction of orthodox theology towards digital theology does not only include implications for Christian theology, but also deals with dogmas and philosophical foundations and new theological formats after postmodern theology. The cyber-theology controversy has not yet touched on broader theoretical and philosophical values. The phenomenon of the IoT in the world of Christian theology and ministry is therefore an attempt to answer the latest technological developments and provide new perspectives for Christian service in the context of contemporary technological developments.

3.2 The New Digital Moral Theology

With the presence of the internet and the current technology connected to the IoT, a wide range of information and knowledge can be obtained quickly. While there is a

certain convenience obtained by users contributing to the effectiveness of collaboration and personal development, the IoT has also given birth to various problems associated with moral and ethical practices that contradict those of the Christian worldview and therefore intersect with the matter of Christian theology. Green B mentions that AI has given rise to ethical issues such as moral automation, robot rights, and other issues [10]. Unfortunately, Christian scholars have yet to write much on these topics, and there's only a relatively small number of research articles and studies that exist on related ethics and theology.

As a theologian builds a relationship with God, he presses into the questions of, "What has God done for me?" and "What does God want me to do in response." With the availability of the IoT, today's central human question has turned into, "What can the internet can do for me?" This presents an opportunity for Christians to "theologize" and to renew and reinforce the concepts of theology in the IoT era. One of ethical challenges, for example, involves the authority of the Bible which has been replaced by the authority of the internet. The human search for God has been supplanted by the tendency to seek lesser things or anything that brings fleeting comfort through the internet.

There is a peculiar paradox presented between the real and virtual world. With the presence of a "robot saint" or servants of the church who provides pastoral assistance to believers, the moral agency of humans has been commandeered by machines. The challenge for Christianity is therefore rendered urgent with regard to the ethical issues put forth by the presence of robots and the development of AI [11]. This is especially true in the case of the 'theomorphic robot', which is considered a representation of God [12]. God created humans to have a close relationship with Him (Genesis 1:27). Robots cannot replace God. AI and robots, if used as a substitute for the divine, actually distance humans from God and His divinely ordained purposes for them.

3.3 Toward The "Metaverse" Theology

A second life in the virtual world characterizes the deception and concealment of one's true identity. The concept of sin or guilt has been built in the avatar world. Theological questions that arise for the online administration of the sacraments or ordinances leave controversy unfinished. Baptism and the implementation of the Lord's Supper, when carried out online or virtually, raises many questions regarding the principles of propriety and biblical truth [13]. Churches are responding both positively and negatively to the presence of a metaverse world that presents avatars as graphical representations of people using the Internet of Things (IoT). Although there is a pretext for carrying out a new mission in the digital age, the metaverse church is causing controversy theologically both now and, in the future, [14]. Religious practice cannot be authentic if it is only done in cyberspace. After all, there exists only a limited extent to which the state of the heart can be verified if social interaction occurs only in a filtered, alternative reality.

Avatar churches have sprung up on various platforms trying to reach people from different ethnic groups and present a new church model in cyberspace. The important

issue is that humans are able to create accurate representations of themselves so as to redefine the concept of Christian anthropology. In the virtual world a person can identify himself or play the role of a god. In fact, in the contemporary world of video games game creators are already using Christian profiles and the designations of God and His divine acts [15]. It would be even more dangerous if today's theologians adopted these concepts and ethics of the world of technology into the world of theology. In contrast, Christianity should present a theology of technology that gives meaning, leads in the right direction and provides healthy boundaries for today's technological culture [16]. In the future, contemporary theologians if not careful can redefine the meaning of worship, the human relationship with God, and other theological concepts based on virtual reality in the Second Life metaverse.

3.4 Toward Disrupted Theology

Ethical principles based on the Bible as a significant guide for believers are no longer the guidelines that determine activities for human life. Humans today are filled with a tsunami of information, whether factual or hoax. With the growth of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) that is believed to have exceeding abilities beyond what humans are capable of, this leads to the disruption for theologians to have influence to the public in comparison to scientists of this day and age. Responding ethically to the development AGI, Ross Graham found that epistemologically theologians have undergone a rationalistic change from substantive to formal. Thus, in this era scientists have a greater influence in ethical decision-making than theologians [17]. Because the tools used in this intelligent technology can improve themselves, evaluate, and offer various alternatives, it is not only a shift from anthropocentric to technology centric but also the primacy of God is no longer regarded.

Researching the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the mission and theology of the church, Jerry Pillay stated that the world and the church have been permanently changed by it and churches must adapt and adopt new ways of carrying out their role [18]. Contemporary theology today can also be influenced by deconstructive Post-modernism which asserts the invalidity of traditional worldviews, including Christian theology [19]. Seeing the religious praxis that exists in the church and the Christian world today, there is a transformation of theological concepts that were previously considered normal theology. Christians should be wary of the reductive approach of liberal theology which seeks to understand the Christian tradition (theology) within the framework of modern secularity [20]. In other words, Christians are bombarded with secular teachings encased with Christian theology in the digital era and must be vigilant of the inaccuracy within it. The construction of reality and ideology is disrupted and moves towards the formation of new theologies. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in ecclesiastical activities and ecclesiastical tasks being carried out online, has contributed to the efforts of Christian theologians and practitioners to question the definition of church, fellowship, and other theological fields. Disruption of technology can result in the spiritual disruption of believers in the praxis of life.

4 Conclusion

The presence of the IoT makes churches more innovative and creative in utilizing internet technology. The IoT is a crucial tool for the effectiveness of the church in carrying out its functions. Not only in church practice, the IoT causes churches to redefine the theological meaning of the church and its function in today's world. There is a strong indication that contemporary IoT theology must adopt a terminological conception of the world of social media as a contextual way of theology. This IoT is considered to have "its own logic" that can control human-made systems, and ultimately control humans themselves.

Theologians cannot be neutral on today's cultural and technological issues. The theological spectrum cannot be separated from the world where Christians are present. However, a theology that is not founded upon the Bible can be a theology of excess and disruption.

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