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ЦИФРОВИЗАЦИЯ ОБЩЕСТВА И БУДУЩЕЕ ХРИСТИАНСТВА

К ВОПРОСУ О ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ ЦЕННОСТНО-НОРМАТИВНОЙ СИСТЕМЫ ОБЩЕСТВА

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В данном сборнике представлены доклады участников VII Международной конференции «Цифровизация общества и будущее христианства. К вопросу о трансформации ценностно-нормативной системы общества». В них ученые из восьми стран дают экспертную оценку тех процессов, которые происходят в современном обществе в свете его стремительной и неизбежной цифровизации. Важным является то, что авторы смотрят на этот процесс сквозь призму христианства, пытаясь ответить на вопрос о том, какое будущее ждет человека и человечество. Книга, безусловно, будет интересна тем, кто пытается осмыслить происходящие в наше время глобализационные события.

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Diffused religion and digital society

Распространенная религия и цифровое общество

Diffused religion theory concerns the capacity of a dominant religion in a country to remain solid for centuries. The most successful interventions are based on virtual networks, which involve many people. Certainly, the audience has been greatly enlarged, no longer limited to the local circle of influence. The use of the Internet, social networks and the mutual request and provision of help via e-mail has been the winning solution for rather marginalised organisations, peripheral cults, isolated and dying liturgies.

Теория распространенной религии описывает способность доминирующей религии в стране оставаться устойчивой на протяжении веков. Наиболее успешные её вмешательства основаны на виртуальных сетях, в которых задействовано большое количество людей. Конечно, сейчас аудитория значительно расширилась, больше не ограничиваясь местным кругом влияния. Использование Интернета социальных сетей, а также запросы о предоставлении помощи по электронной почте стали выигрышным решением для довольно маргинализированных организаций, периферийных культов, изолированных и умирающих религий.

Introduction

Diffused religion theory concerns the capacity of a dominant religion in a country to remain solid for centuries.

The primary particular terms of diffused religion are identifiable as religious socialization and enculturation of values. The secondary particular terms are belief, membership/belonging or religious adherence. If there is initial religiosity regarding sensitivity towards the sacred, then, there is most probably some form of participation in rites. However, the main trend is towards a reduced relevance of religious structures. Diffused religion may occupy the space left vacant because of disappointments and disenchantment due to loss of the credibility of previous influences. Thus, diffused religion assumes the role of a functional substitute for other attitudinal and behavioural references, like in the Grace Davie [7, pp. 261–267] theory of "vicarious religion". The most diffused and developed practice is prayer, of course.

Socialization and diffused religion

The value of the inheritance is stressed, culture, socialization and education are emphasized, the variables of socialization are widely considered, the features of religions are strategic and the resilience of religious belief is evident. Every person who comes into the world already finds waiting for him myriad religious options, established over time within different territorial and cultural contexts. This pre-existence is, to a large extent, also their strength, consisting as it does in a heritage that is transmitted from one generation to another almost without any break. People and organisations, beliefs and rites, values and symbols, traditions and acquisitions can resist the most drastic changes and adapt to the less important ones. Let me think of Orthodox Christianity in Russian history, from the first half of the 10th century till today, through the Mongolian empire and the Tsarist period.

The cognitive, affective, and selective dimension of values is relevant, the constitution of interests is fundamental, values are both independent and/or dependent variables, ethic and values are seen as linked, the universality of values is well known, religious ideologies are comparable and secular impact is evident. A wide part of contemporary values has ancient origins belonging to religious inspiration. But it is not always so easy to

discern secular values from religious values. However, there are some typically secular values which are accepted by people inspired by religious principles. The main issue regards those who hold religious and secular values. If religious values are presumably conserved by Churches, denominations, confessional organizations, for secular values the state is usually considered to be the main holder.

Diffused secular religiosity

There is an *ante litteram* diffused religion which is the Hegel's [9] *Volksreligion*. Afterwards, a peculiar question is now afforded: a return to the Jaspersian Axial Age (like in the period from about the 8th to the 3rd century BCE, when in Persia, India, China and the Greco-Roman world religion and philosophy were a common thought) [11]. In any case, religion as a personal-God experience remains a key point of the sociological analysis. At the same time, beyond the so-called invisible religion *à la Luckmann* [12], there are many religious and meaningful experiences. So-called religiosity of atheism can be a consequence of secularization. The diffused religion of today is not so different from that of the past. Indeed its very persistence is its real peculiarity. If something has changed, it has occurred at the secondary level, affecting details, not the substance. So diffused religion persists as the result of the extensive action of religious socialization.

The European religious galaxy moves twixt Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism. The diffused religions of Eastern Europe are mainly Orthodox, Islamic and post-secular, therefore multi-religious Europe is the novelty of this new century [4, pp. 439–463]. For instance, Europe and India religions can be compared and contrasted, but it is the Latin-American socio-religious context that is attracting more attention. Finally, urban space is the nursery of religions diffusion. We see that from diffused religion people can go towards world diffused religions. To conclude, it is quite evident that theory of diffused religion is not devoid of empirical support but, on the contrary, it proves to be of greater validity and applicability, in Europe but also in other non-European areas, by presenting conclusive, recurring features. Undoubtedly, there remains the methodological problem of comparing dissimilar situations.

Religion and politics

The starting point of diffused religion is the socialization, but political events are good indicators of diffused religion because ethic and politics are strongly connected, religious and political pluralism are combined: these are the main points. Besides, an emblematic case is that the existence of diffused religion would accentuate pluralism, a tendency towards ideological tolerance, as an overall articulation of both basic and contingent political choices. Far from slowing the union between religion and politics, this "pervasive diffusiveness" seems to render it more manifest. However, the "religious field" remains as a fighting place: it forms part of a formulation which is explicitly defined as "political sociology of religion" or "of religions".

The relationship between religion and politics is emblematic: Church and state are continuously fighting about values. To give an example, in the Catholic world the influence of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council is relevant and people pass from civil religion to diffused religion. The topics suggested by Robert Bellah [1] of religious ground bass and five types of religions (primitive loyalties, Catholicism, liberalism, socialism, and activism) are controversial. But, there is the novelty of new values conquering the world thanks to secularization and urbanization phenomena. It is precisely the hypothesis of diffused religion which helps to explain the world situation, as proven by my book *Diffused Religion. Beyond Secularization* [5]. The religions are crisscrossed horizontally and vertically by quite heterogeneous strands, which reflect regional and territorial backgrounds, social stratification, and contingent historical events.

Function of religion

The function of religion in the world is increasing: from diffused religion, there is a transition to "religion of values", and religious values and social change are linked. Certainly, the presence of values is a constant both in the historic religions, deeply rooted at the cultural level, and in the new religious movements, still in a phase of growth and re-composition. These values represent idealistic motives, key concepts, basic ideas, parameters of reference and ideological inclinations, which watch over the personal and interpersonal actions of individuals and make them reasonable, socially relevant and sociologically classifiable. Every religious experience

involves dedication to a cause, and ideal, with a socio-individual engagement, which is more or less marked according to individuals' intentions.

The levels of this diffused religion are differentiated, religious and moral pluralism are new features of contemporary society, moral attitudes and religious characteristics are not in conflict even though contents of religious and moral pluralism are different. Diffused religion also represents a kind of functional substitute for divergence from the ecclesiastical structure. There is a limited tendency toward religious pluralism, whereas moral themes would appear to be much more fragmentary. The cultural setting seems to have a more decisive role than religious affiliation since attitudes do not change substantially in the groups of those claiming to be religious and those who do not (so-called "nones", and so-called "dones" that have left their religion).

The theory of diffused religion provides various explanations for the resilience of religions, especially where single forms have managed to establish themselves and progress over time. Historical events follow one another leading to changes affecting political regimes, entire economies, organizations and movements, but barely scathe those structures and modalities of religion that have become ingrained over centuries and millennia. There is a persistence of different religions diffused all over the world, with prospects that appear different from those raised at the end of the last century.

From televangelism to social networks

The forerunner of digital religion is undoubtedly televangelism, a term coined by American sociologists Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann for their book *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* [8]. At that time, the terms "electric church" and "electronic church" were also used. The latter definition, however, concerned preachers who used radio and television mainly to raise money: there were some scandals (accompanied by others involving extramarital affairs). The initial aim had been to save souls, but then the enterprise grew to such an extent that it required significant financial investment and amount of funding in the form of donations from followers.

Famous preachers were Oral Roberts, an inspirational character who was hardly attentive to theology, and Pat Robertson who was quite sensitive to political aspects. In the 1980s there were well over a thousand radio

stations and over two hundred television stations with a religious character in the United States. Some broadcast continuously for 24 hours. Organisations and even universities linked to individual speakers sprang up. Religion, after all, was compared to a kind of commodity that could be consumed on a par with other mass products. The major exponents of televangelism had the style of barkers, salesmen and merchants.

A captivating and convincing oratory was combined with a revivalist spirit, aimed at awakening the attention of souls to be saved. Reference to the Bible and the words of the sacred texts was basic. In fact, for some, it was preferable to use a drier, more direct style of speaking based on the word of the Old and New Testament rather than on theological discussions, interpretative disquisitions or doctrinal logic. At the same time, recourse was made to managerial techniques to run the moment of preaching through the mass media as well as all the preliminary and subsequent activities. In some cases, Bible schools were established to support the work of each telepreacher. Others mixed spectacle (with music, singing and dancing), commercial methods (with products of various kinds) and religious references (with biblical quotations and/or liturgies of various kinds). To increase the presence of religious content in radio and television broadcasts, the National Religious Broadcasters' organisation worked and special radio and television slots were purchased to reach as many viewers as possible. The results were remarkable, with a maximum of almost 60 million viewers and a minimum of 7.3 million. Finally, it seems to have been established that televangelism had political connotations of a neo-conservative type, close to the Christian right.

Nowadays, televangelism has moved towards the Internet and all digital production, so that videos, testimonies, stories, episodes, Bible readings, sermons, debates, talk shows, interviews, questions and answers find ample space in social networks. In this respect, the contribution of satellites and servers is considerable, as they have enormous storage capacities to satisfy almost any kind of demand for archiving and for the possibility to download programmes and files. At this point, it is difficult to properly distinguish televangelism, so it is better to speak of digital religion [2]. It is through the new media that the wave of the cult of personalities, influencers, behavioural patterns, religious novelties, alternative religions, new rituals, and religious forms invented from scratch [6], as in the case of the Pastafarians [13] (which would have remained practically unknown had it not been for the impulse of digital technologies), passes.

The media system easily supports the dissemination and practice of religion, shortening distances, making it possible to attend rituals without leaving home, facilitating the reading of texts and documents, prayers and entire volumes, even conspicuous ones such as the Bible and the Koran, the Pāli canon and Lún Yǔ, the Torah and the Vedas, the Taoist canon and Sam-bu-han-sho. Usually, the dominant pattern of mass media communication is also reflected in religious messaging and especially in spiritual audiovisual offerings. The difference between the sacred and the secular is thus less noticeable, and religious reflections reach their recipients more easily. It is not by chance that they prefer to be included in the usual programming, also following a market logic, with a not always explicitly religious slant. Community prayer is practised at a distance as a means of comfort and help in difficult situations and contexts of uncertainty. Personal participation is not always active, but more often subordinate.

The digital presence of Christians and Muslims is particularly accentuated, and they frequently resort both to more or less classic forms of televangelism and more sophisticated ways of personalised communication, attentive to the specific needs of the subject, also relying on the fame of some famous person. The dissemination of news about facts and protagonists of the religious worlds typical of each context appears more effective than ever. Less use is made of leaflets and choral songs, home visits and study seminars.

The most successful interventions are based on virtual networks, which involve many people simply by word of mouth. Some of the strategies of the past have changed, particularly those aimed at fundraising. Certain programmes based on charismatic and neo-Pentecostalism have had some success, but they go beyond the usual musical parades introducing the preacher's speech. As for the style and objectives of the sermon, the aim is now to enhance self-esteem, self-confidence, personal skills, and hope as a virtue of promoting winning projects. Certainly, the audience has been greatly enlarged, no longer limited to the local circle of influence, but in practice with no boundaries whatsoever, except a linguistic kind.

Digital society

There are three central variables of the digital society: body, memory and technology, which are part of the perspective that Roland Robertson [14] has long duly defined as globalisation. The aim is to understand the fu-

ture development of human communities, which are now caught between modernisation [16] and virtual worlds, between continuity and innovation, between old and new frontiers. The question in the background once again concerns the role of the social actor, who has to deal with everyday problems but also with meta-generational dynamics that will affect our descendants.

What will happen, in the planetary markets, to the adolescents of today who invest in their future protagonism? What will happen to the social and cultural structures of the century that has just begun, to the attitudinal and behavioural models now in force, to individual and collective memories, to the physical envelopes already overburdened with prostheses of various kinds (from the pacemaker to the iPod, from the tablet to the Personal Digital Assistant, from the smartphone to all the personal electronic equipment, made up of so many tiny supports, wearable technologies, now a new garment to be worn as soon as we wake up and wash our hands)?

The challenge is not insignificant. Do we remain subservient to the structures given to us by others (before us) who have designed our scenario, i.e. the situation of life in which to place ourselves, and thus the conditions of our existence and survival? Or is there still room for individual freedom, which tries to establish its environment? Or is there only a middle way between upstream conditioning and downstream potential?

Within such a scenario — in which capitalism itself is unrecognisable, elusive, polymorphous, invisible, anonymous, a seamless flow chart with no defined profiles, with which the individual will have to deal — what should our human community expect? And what use can be made of the memory that belongs to us?

The "passage" from biological to cultural, today suggested by the cybersociality, obliges us to 'recodify', in the body, the orientation system in computer society. Information technology (ICTs) is transforming the way people interact between themselves and with objects around them. The emergence of the complex, compound contemporary technologies that involve *virtuality*, *simulation* and *computer modelling (including tomography)* has special implications for embodiment and perception. Technologies, inventions of the human brain, obviously have a great impact on the functioning of the brain, on the working of the mind and on memory. Moreover the technology focus is gradually shifting away from the computer as such, to the user. Electronic communication — personal computer linked together by the Internet — creates a world wide web of memory banks.

However, the key to understanding the different approaches is perhaps in the category of time which can devour everything; it can go beyond what has already been; time can take itself away from the past for good, without turning back. It grinds event after event sending them back to the bowels of the earth from which they have been born, condemning them to oblivion, to the river Lethe, that is, to forgetfulness. But, above all, time is, by its nature, un-stoppable. At the very moment in which one may try to trace its outline, time escapes and seems to elude our clumsy efforts to block it. To be even more precise, the real attitude of time seems to be that of total indifference towards what it leaves behind.

But, the memory comes to the rescue and recovers that time risks cancelling out. Thus, the physical dimension is not nullified, but rather revalued thanks to memory and, increasingly, thanks to new technologies (although there are doubts about their resilience: technical supports are still unreliable, their durability has not been scientifically tested, and there is a danger of sudden *défaillances*).

On the other hand, it should also be noted that the body is increasingly repairable, modifiable and adaptable. Prostheses replace what is missing or does not work. The soma is therefore reprogrammable. Even death can be postponed, at least in part, thanks to the intervention of intubations, breathing machines and oxygen supplies. These "dilated deaths" have illustrious examples in the extreme days of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco and the Brazilian politician Tancredi Neves.

On a moral level, moreover, questions arise ranging from eugenics to euthanasia, in short from life to death, without any solution of continuity along the existential path. But, the horizon also widens to include less dramatic issues concerning cosmetics, dietetics, plastic surgery, ultraviolet radiation for off-season tanning, tattoos, piercings and mutilation, all this made possible and easier thanks to new digital tools.

It should also be noted that contemporary society seems to mark the height of the glorification dedicated to the body. By now, neo-surgical repair and aesthetics, neo-genetics, neo-dietetics and neo-aesthetics have built an imposing, majestic monument to the ideology of well-being. In the meantime, other alternative solutions are being studied, giving unprecedented impetus and development to the body industry: the issues of abortion and contraception are now considered to be outdated, the new problems concern cloning, same-sex marriage, gene banking, artificial insemination, and embryo modification.

Medicalisation is being pushed beyond all limits. The body is thus regarded as a *sui generis* economic asset, sold in parts for transplants, lent out for the transfer of spinal marrow (even unplanned procreation for medical purposes is used for this purpose). In practice, the body is increasingly becoming just another product, marketable like so many others. But it is still our product, a reserved property, which nevertheless seems to be giving rise to new capitalism, that of the exercise of private ownership of one's physical being (with valuations in terms of prices for each organ, almost like a new human butcher's shop window, displaying and cataloguing parts and costs, as in an insurance compensation handbook). The current trend seems to be to preserve more and more individuals, who are unable to reproduce, for reasons of age. Today the quest for well-being at any cost continues unabated.

Diffused digital religion

One of the characteristics of religion, of every religion, whatever its cultural context of reference, is its extraordinary capacity to adapt even in the most difficult situations. One thinks of the thousands of years of Jewish history in the diaspora, of Christians' recourse to celebrations in the catacombs, of the hardships faced by Tibetan Buddhism, of the sufferings of the untouchables in the Hindu world, just to give a few examples. Despite everything, these religious expressions have managed to survive and operate. Not even the advent of digital technologies seems to impede the development of different religious denominations. On the contrary, it can be said that in many cases the use of the Internet, social networks and the mutual request and provision of help via e-mail has been the winning solution for rather marginalised organisations, peripheral cults, isolated and dying liturgies and numerically negligible beliefs.

In the past, the example had come from the United States, where the decline in religious practice had convinced several pastors, especially of Protestant Churches, to make use of radio, but especially television, to increase the number of their faithful, to reach even the most distant villages, to strengthen the bonds of faith, to offer messages with religious content, and to renew bonds that were on the verge of dissolution. As we know, televangelism has been and still is a widespread phenomenon. All the more so today with the streaming, listening and viewing through computers and mobile phones.

Some empirical evidence

A case in point is Tim Keller, pastor and founder of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church. At first, he had only 50 people in his church in Manhattan, but this soon grew to 5,000 every Sunday. He uses Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Author of 22 successful books, he has a very popular website. Keller is "the most successful Christian Evangelist in the city". His Church is "one of Manhattan's most vital congregations": it is a special kind of United States megachurch, with a good Asian-American presence. Redeemer Presbyterian Church has created "Hope for New York", a non-profit organization for serving social needs. During the pandemic (9th April 2020) a meditation by Tim Keller on "Trusting God in Difficult Times — Psalm 46" has reached 102,114 viewers. But some months before another sermon on "How to deal with dark times", a kind of prophecy, had the top of 890,329 Youtube viewers.

Something similar is happening with a young Italian Catholic priest, Father Alberto Ravagnani, who uses Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok. His catchment area is mainly made up of teenagers and young people. He has 40,000 followers. His 18 videos on Youtube have been seen by more than a million people. Invited to a programme called "Wild Moss" (in Italian: Muschio Selvaggio), he was watched by 1,451,587 people on 19 October 2020. The content of his speeches can be either purely religious or of another kind, for example, videogames or sexuality.

Not even the pandemic could stop the action of the various religions. In a recent interview, Monsignor Siluan Şpan, bishop of the Romanian Orthodox diocese in Italy, with almost three hundred parishes spread throughout the Italian peninsula, explained to me that the link made possible by digital platforms have been a "salvation", because they have made it possible to maintain a strong relationship with the faithful and to provide some economic support to the clergy, who, being completely dedicated to pastoral work, have no economic resources at their disposal other than the offerings collected during the weekly celebrations. Despite the limitations imposed by the disease and government regulations, however, the Orthodox liturgies dedicated to the Romanian people living in Italy took place telematically (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Pinterest), and a solution was found to provide the clergy with enough money to support themselves and their families. The most-read article on their website has been "Canon of

the prayer that is made in times of contagious diseases or pestilence to the Holy Trinity and all the saints" (62,427 visits).

The pandemic also prevented the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) from celebrating its centenary with a pilgrimage to Sremski Karlovci in Vojvodina, where its headquarters were originally located. However, a long-distance celebration has been scheduled to bring together nearly 400 parishes and some 500,000 faithful.

The famous annual initiative of the international youth meeting organised by the Taizé ecumenical community for the New Year 2021 has been broadcast in streaming from 27 December to 1 January with the significant title "Hoping in Season and out of Season. A message for 2021".

Social networks have also been considerable support for the actions of pope Francis, whose singular celebration in St. Peter's Square without the faithful, in the pouring rain, will certainly be remembered, with the pontiff crossing the parvis alone and limping, to reach the main entrance of St. Peter's Basilica on 27th March 2020, the fourth Friday of Lent, on the occasion of the special celebration to invoke divine intervention to ward off the contagion of Covid19, which was raging in many parts of the world and particularly in Italy (8.6 million viewers). The Holy Mass presided over by pope Francis, in Santa Marta church, Vatican, was broadcast live on Facebook, the same day in the morning (141,339 viewers). According to pope Francis, "The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people" (Message of pope Francis for the 48th world communications day. Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter. Sunday, 1 June 2014).

Digital theology

One of the "perverse", i.e. unforeseen, effects of the spread of the coronavirus is the sharp increase in the familiarity of a large part of the population with digital technology. How many and which campaigns would it have taken to get millions of people to use Information Technology tools? How much investment would be needed to achieve such significant results in just a few months? By now, the use of digital platforms has reached wide strata of people on every continent. Even conservative religious structures have adapted to the new wave of widespread digitalisation. It was realised that in the absence of a live presence, even an online celebration could be

useful in keeping devotees united and guaranteeing the continuity of community spiritual action. In the end, all religions agreed on the idea that digital technology is now a fundamental tool.

Even the theologians, that is, the most strenuous defenders of the *status quo*, of the proclaimed doctrine, of the dictates of faith to be observed, have been convinced of this. So Facebook and Youtube have made inroads into churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, mandirs (Hindus), jinjas (Shintoists), gurdwaras (Sikhs), gompas (Tibetan Buddhists), pagodas (Chinese Buddhists), sa (Korean Buddhists), tera (Japanese Buddhists), wat (Thai, Laotian and Cambodian Buddhists). But, not everyone is willing to experiment with the new solutions, so there is still considerable resistance.

In the meantime, however, many initiatives have sprung up to find other ways of socialising and spreading religion. Often the idea comes from below, so to speak. That is, it is a matter of attempts made by small communities, restricted groups, specialists and science and technology enthusiasts (especially young people). All in search of an important sociological category: the relationship, to be maintained, created, developed, consolidated, always considering the distinction but also the possible continuity between online and offline. The same applies to the difference but also synergy between audio and visual. This is not an absolute novelty. Various experiences already existed, but they were marginal niche, few in number and little followed, and in any case incomparably less than today.

However, there is a concept that has appeared with some frequency in these two years of a pandemic: synodality, a dimension that is well known to the Christian world, and to the Orthodox world in particular with its various autocephalous autonomies. It is in this perspective that Boston College and the private Andrés Bello University of Santiago de Chile have decided to move, and have organised an online theological course on the theme of "Sínodos y Sinodalidad" to offer theological content at a widespread, mass level. In short, the aim is to increase the capacity for discernment on religious issues on the part of people who are not particularly competent in the field. At the same time, the initiative aims to reduce the cost of attending a university course and to facilitate participation by people living in places quite far from the university centres, which are usually located in the metropolises and major cities. Among other things, the discussion on synodality thus anticipates the event of the synod of Catholic bishops planned for 2022 on the same subject.

From an organisational and logistical point of view, the proposed offer can count on the teaching interventions of the most qualified experts in the world, who are more readily available because of the lower costs for travel and hospitality. In particular, the lectures that professors give at their universities are recorded. As a result, even those who do not belong to the lecturer's university can benefit from a high quality contribution, without any specific differences to what students who have attended the lectures receive. It all started with a course on the thought of Pope Francis, which 3000 students enrolled in. But, now the numbers have grown to 15000 in other courses.

There is also an added value that makes this type of online course attractive. They are attended by people of various languages and backgrounds. This greatly enriches the experience and also makes it possible to see directly the difficulties and procedures involved in courses aimed at synodality. In short, the dialogue is continually put to the test, requires a great capacity for listening and reflection, takes account of ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences and avoids centralising decisions. In a melting pot of orientations and opinions, the most suitable and cost-effective way is sought for the benefit of all. In any case, every effort is made to reach a common understanding.

Because of the future, it is clear that the experience during the pandemic cannot fail to have subsequent effects. It can be foreseen that teaching, learning, research and evaluation will no longer be the same and will most probably follow mixed methods, but with an increasingly qualified and effective digital approach. It should be borne in mind that, at the present stage, there are essentially two obstacles to the ideal exploitation of the advantages of digital technology: the lack of user skills and the operational unreliability of the toolbox. In both cases, the haste and spasmodic acceleration of preparation and verification times have created unfortunate situations that are detrimental to the physical and psychological health of those involved (teachers and students, instructors and digital technicians). In the meantime, however, the ground already gained will not be lost and it will be easy to pursue other objectives.

Women too are benefiting from digital innovations. The *Coordinamento Teologhe Italiane* (Italian Women Theologians Coordination Group) has set up a distance learning course on female theology. The response has been remarkable: 700 people enrolled, not only women and not only from Italy (thanks to the online course). The kaleidoscope of participants is in-

teresting. Such a situation would never have been created by a traditional method: mothers, daughters and grandmothers, active and cloistered nuns, pastoral co-operators, students, Catholics and Protestants. This is made possible by digital technology, in order to exchange experiences and knowledge, culture and skills, disciplines and narratives, opinions and motivations. There is no shortage of obstacles, but as in any undertaking that bears fruit, a great deal of patience and goodwill is required. This must be balanced against the benefit of being able to choose times and durations in connection with the individual pace of life.

Digital diffused religion

Diffused religion does not cease to be so in the digital age. In fact, in some ways, it can be said that it is strengthened by the use of the tools of digitalisation. After all, what are the contents and values that people talk about daily? In a recently completed national survey in Italy, here is the ranking of the words mentioned during the 164 qualitative interviews conducted on a sample stratified by educational qualification, gender, age, population density and interregional area: life 2992 times, children 1915, state 1569, sons 1563, home 1410, family 1326, Church 1293, time 1167, problems or difficulties and religion 1109, example or testimony 1026. As can be seen, religion is one of the most frequent topics. So even if it is not an absolute priority, it is hardly missing from everyday discourse and therefore also from interpersonal digital communication.

Among other things, Christopher Helland [10, pp. 205–224] speaks of "religion online" and "online religion". The former is said to be a diffused extension of "offline religion". In reality, "offline religion" is nothing more than religion as we knew it until the beginning of the digital era, that is, until 1991, when the World Wide Web was born and the Internet, which had arrived in the 1980s, began to spread even more. Finally, "online religion" is to be understood as all those religious people who live their experience online and belong to communities operating just online.

The novelty of the Internet has produced an enormous amount of data available to scholars, made easily accessible for free. However, several doubts arise as to their reliability, and above all as to the impossibility, or almost impossibility, of questioning the subjects who have unwittingly provided information that is useful for representing their attitudinal and be-

havioural profiles. The obstacle of an adequate assessment and, in practice, of the researcher's interaction with the individuals in question remains.

In particular, the representativeness of the "online religion" is problematic concerning the broader reality of society as a whole, and not only of frequent users of the digital network. It should also be borne in mind that "online religion" performs several functions: it is a catalyst for subjective attention, but also an intermediary between different existential options. On the one hand, it plays the role of traditional "offline religion", of organised historical religions, but on the other hand, it is an instrument of interaction between people, an opportunity for dialogue, a pretext for inter-subjective relations.

The religious community existing on the Internet is elusive, ethereal, and cannot be traced back to concrete entities to the point of constituting a set of references for sociological investigation [3]. At the very least, a questionnaire can be administered, with all the risks of a high mortality rate of the sample identified, but it will certainly not be without complications to implementing a qualitative approach.

Moreover, some turn the digital network itself into a religion, with its rituals, its dependencies, its subserviences, its habits, its hierarchies, its symbolisation. It is no coincidence that we speak of cyberreligion, Internet as religion, digital spirituality and so on. Ultimately, the new sacredness would be given precisely by the digital world, which is worshipped and revered as a divinity capable of solving almost everything and giving the greatest satisfaction. An example of this is the relationship that is established between some videogames players and the console and/or the screen: an inseparable bond, almost a disease without a remedy, an extreme trust in the gratifications deriving from an exceptional result, a win, a higher score than others. The connection is so strong that it is easy to imagine the value of the presumably original meaning of religion as a bond, with the difference, however, that here we are dealing with a toy-machine, whereas religion in itself would involve an interactive process between people on both a human and transcendent level.

Olivier Servais [15, pp. 218–220] goes so far as to suggest that the symbolism of videogames is constructed in a similarly religious manner, even in the absence of clear and explicit religious elements such as crosses and candles. Even in the concrete representations of some digital games, if it is true that expressly religious symbols are missing, it is nevertheless the atmosphere, the context, that recalls a spiritual aura, through allusions,

glimpses, vague references. For example, some of the buildings depicted resemble temples, churches, mosques, synagogues, pagodas and other typically religious structures.

In short, religion manages to be so diffused that it peeps out even where it is not expected.

Keywords: Diffused religion, digital diffused religion, digital religion, digital society, socialization, televangelism.

Ключевые слова: Распространенная религия, цифровая распространенная религия, цифровая религия, цифровое общество, социализация, телеевангелизм.

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A Methodological review on digital theology and the study on the relationship between the social media use patterns in the era of big data, using Hong Kong as a test case

Методологический обзор цифровой теологии и исследование взаимосвязи между моделями использования социальных сетей в эпоху больших данных с Гонконгом в качестве тестового примера

This paper investigates the relationship between the use of social media and the impact on one's interpretation of bible. The paper starts from reviewing the methodological development of digital theology and then, examining the concept of big data and its impact of humanity in light of the fast-changing technology. The paper concludes by reviewing the data collected by the author in a survey conducted in Hong Kong 2019.

В этой статье исследуется взаимосвязь между использованием социальных сетей и влиянием этого фактора на толкование людьми Библии. Она начинается с обзора методологического развития цифровой теологии, а затем переходит к рассмотрению концепции больших данных и её влияния на человечество в свете быстро меняющихся технологий. Статья завершается обзором данных, собранных автором в ходе опроса, проведенного в Гонконге в 2019 г.

Introduction

Digital theology is not a static concept but a fluid concept. The meaning of digital theology is changing in accordance with the technological development and its associated application. With the fast development in the digital technology and its application, the field of digital theology has also undergone a paradigm shift. Digitalization has been and embedded into our life making it part of our daily life. According to a worldwide survey conducted by the Global Web Index in 2018, the time people spent on social media increased from 90 minutes per day in 2012 to 135 minutes per day in 2017. In January 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that video game addiction would be listed as a disorder. Further, in a nationwide survey conducted by the medical researcher Brian Primack (2017), he found that the likelihood of depression, anxiety, and a sense of social isolation increases with an increase in one's social media usage. Together with the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and social media, our relationship with digital world is far more complicated than we used to think ten years ago. Digital world is not passively existed as a choice for us but actively involving in our life shaping our daily routine, values and perception.

Theology in this sense is not limited to the abstract discussion and understanding of God or our relationship with God but extends to the impacts of the development of digital technology on our religious life and our perception in related to our faith. Of course, scholars use different terms to refer to different perspective of similar kind of activities. For example, religion sociologist prefers to use digital religion making it more objective to be study as a phenomenon [7, p. 1] However, the choice of using digital theology in this paper implies that the subject of research does not separate the context with the core religious activities but to see them as a whole. We do not only interest in the religious activities in the narrow sense but how it interacts with the ever-changing environment. Also, as theology, we specifically interested on both sides including how the ever-changing environment affect our religious beliefs, activities and communities and, the other way round, how should we theologize the changing digital environment in light of appropriate theological framework and concepts.

This paper seeks to review the methodological development of digital theology and hypothesize that the change in methodology is highly related

to the changing nature of digital technology. Then, this paper seeks to point out the future direction of research in this area using the survey conducted last year in HK as a testing case.

Research History

I will do a review on two major streams of methodology in this section. The first is the four waves proposed by Heidi Campbell and the next section will review how the technological development affect the biblical interpretation.

In the collection on Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion, Heidi Campbell and Brian Altenhofen outline four waves of digital research development in theology and religion. The first wave, dated at the beginning of two thousand years, was descriptive wave in which scholars focus on analysing whether the development of digital technology will bring a positive or negative impact to religion. The subject of focus was how different religious groups were performing religion online and how people engaged in these online platforms. This wave of research was situated at the time when the broadband and the use of internet became more popular and the speed became faster than before. This technology mainly facilitate text-based platform in which the new religious group and activities were based on. The second wave is categorical focusing on finding the right typology to describe the new phenomenon triggered by the new digital technology providing room for new form of religious activities including virtual temples and cyberchurches [7, p. 8].

The third wave is theoretical beginning in the mid-21st century. More data can be gathered concerning believers' online ritual, community and identity. Scholars seeks to find a theoretical framework to explain and interpret this larger set of data generated from the embeddedness of the internet in everyday life. Scholars not only interested in the online religious behavious but how it interacts with the offline religious activities. The core digital breakthrough causing this wave is the emergence of Facebook and other social media. The emergence of social media is a paradigm shift in digital theology because it transforms people's life and habit and generates enormous amount of data which cannot be accessible before. The emergence of social media, big data and AI surely create a revolution to our life including our religious life which will be discussed in next section [7, pp. 9–10].