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Journal of Technology, Theology, & Religion

Intersections Between Technologies and Religions: The Next Generation

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Daniel Headrick describes technology as a tool of empire.¹ On the other hand, Pramod Nayar asks how technology and cybercultures might be postcolonialized.² These two radically opposed assessments of technology stage some of the most poignant questions of this global era. The new peer-reviewed *Journal of Technology, Theology, and Religion* (JTTR, available at www.techandreligion.com) will focus on these questions as it asks about the technological means

¹ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

² Pramod K. Nayar, *An Introduction to New Media and Cybercultures* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

of culture, identity formation, difference, unity, and hybridity. Pope Benedict XVI has offered a compelling vision that technologies “bring about fundamental shifts in patterns of communications and human relationships.”³ To realize the post-imperial capacity of technology, our global editorial board moves beyond suspicious reaction to technologies as external interruptions to theological reflection and enables an engagement that describes new potentials in both technology and theology.

The advancement of technology and technology’s relevance for theologians are not new phenomena. *Zygon: A Journal of Religion and Science* has capably addressed intersections between religion and science for many years. Willem Drees, *Zygon*’s editor, has authored cutting edge books. *JTTR* will soon address Drees’ most recently-edited book, *Technology, Trust and Religion: Roles of Religions in Controversies over Ecology and the Modification of Life*,⁴ with a review by Whitney Bauman, assistant professor of religion and science at Florida International University. In the 1960s, the Society of Biblical Literature was already offering a forum for discussing and considering materials in electronic format. In 1975, John Meyendorff, in *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, wrote: “Theologians recognize that science and technology represent a tremendous power for man, given by God to control nature.”⁵ In the 1970s and 1980s, theologians who specialized in science and religion wrote about the impact of technologies. In

³ Pope Benedict XVI, “New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship”, 43rd World Communications Day, May 24 2009, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html.

⁴ Willem B. Drees, ed., *Technology, Trust and Religion: Roles of Religions in Controversies over Ecology and Modification of Life* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

⁵ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975), 96.

the 1980s, David Lochhead, a pioneer theologian, wrote *Theology in the Digital Age*, a book at the forefront of the realization of technology as a powerful tool for creation versus a tool of the powerful.⁶ Lochhead worked through two ways of seeing the computer. He wrote:

One view sees the computer as an instrument of control. Let us describe this as a top down view. Computers, in this view, are machines used by managers in order to impose systems on those whom they are responsible for managing. The other view sees the computer as a technology that creates possibilities. The computer does not manage. It enables. We will describe this view as a bottom up view.⁷

In the 1990s, the top-down view of technology gained attention, fueled by fear and anxiety about the Y2K problem. The debate among theologians over the top-down controlling computer and the bottom-up computer continues in its different forms today. These debates will continue. For example, in the forthcoming review of Peter Scott's 2009 book, *Anti-Human Theology: Nature, Technology and the Post-Natural*, board member Brent Waters (author of *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World*) will continue to explore the tensions that Lochhead anticipated twenty years ago.⁸

⁶ David Lochhead, *Theology in a Digital World* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1988).

⁷ Lochhead, *Theology in a Digital World*, 6.

⁸ Peter M. Scott, *Anti-Human Theology: Nature, Technology and the Post-Natural* (London: SCM Press, 2010); Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

***JTTR* Marks an Important Shift**

In the last forty years, theologians have engaged technology as an external resource to religion and science questions or as an external source that needs to be analyzed, criticized, and restored by theologians. A shift has taken place and will continue. Theologians and theorists interested in religion are beginning to address technology on their own terms as a community-enabling tool. Community has surfaced through a variety of different dimensions, including online church opportunities, digitized diaspora, and the application of postcolonial theological criticism to new technologies.

For this work to advance, *JTTR* will be a multi-disciplinary journal. *JTTR* is well positioned with the most prominent theologians working at the intersections of technology and religion as well as theorists of technology working on complex cultural challenges. There is no coincidence that there is a common founding editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Theory and Theology* (<http://www.postcolonialjournal.com>) and *JTTR*. These two Sopher Press journals will work together to propel new directions in technological scholarship, as is reflected in the new books in the What's Coming section below.

Meet Our Outstanding Board Members

Our board represents the history of the intersections between technology and religion, ranging from early pioneers such as Albert Borgmann, Debbie Herring, and Carl Mitcham to young scholars such as Timothy Hutchings (UK and Sweden) and Lerone Martin (USA) as well

as senior scholars who are setting the pace for the next generation of intersections between technologies and religions.

Among the board members' senior scholars working across disciplines are Heidi Campbell (media, religion and society), Noreen Herzfeld (computer science and theology), Athina Karatzogianni (media, culture and society), Sanjoy Mazmudar (technology, religion and environments as an urban planner), Pedro Oiarzabal (Basque studies, diaspora, migration and Internet), and Brent Waters (bioethics and technology).

Albert Borgmann has taught at the University of Montana since 1970, with special interest in philosophy of society and culture with special emphasis on technology. In 1984, Borgmann authored *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*.⁹

Heidi Campbell, at Texas A&M University, is a frequent commentator, sought by the news media and technology-religion meetings such as the Christian New Media conference at the City University of London in October 2010 – Theological Refraction of the Internet.

Debbie Herring was one of the early pioneer technology-theologians. In 1997, she spearheaded and founded the Cybertheology website: <http://www.cybertheology.net>. Debbie's Ph.D. was awarded by the University of Sheffield for her dissertation, "Contextual Theology in Cyberspace."

Noreen Herzfeld, at St. John's College, brings her background in computer science and theology to help the journal's sophistication at the intersections of technology and religion.

⁹ Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Timothy Hutchings III is a newly minted Ph.D. from the University of Durham, where his doctoral thesis was entitled, “Creating Church Online: An Ethnographic Study of Five Internet-Based Christian Communities.” In a forthcoming review article, he will look at new books that evaluate Facebook and other social networking tools as crucial to the future church.

Athina Karatzogianni, Lecturer at Hull University, is author of *The Politics of Cyberconflict*, *Cyber Conflict and Global Politics* and *Power, Conflict and Resistance in the Contemporary World: Social Movements, Networks and Hierarchies*.¹⁰

Lerone Martin is assistant professor of American religious history and culture at Eden Theological Seminary. His doctoral research concentrates on “Selling to the Souls of Black Folk: Atlanta, the Phonograph, and the Transformation of American Religion and Culture.” Lerone expects to receive his doctorate from Emory University in spring 2011.

Sanjoy Mazumdar is professor of planning, policy, and design in the Department of Asian American Studies and the Program in Religious Studies at the University of California, Irvine. His research focuses on the interrelationships of cultures and environments.

Carl Mitcham is the Hans Jonas Chair at the European Graduate School and Professor of Liberal Arts and International Studies at Colorado School of Mines. The EGS website describes Mitcham as “one of the leading philosophers of technology with a focus on the ethics of science,

¹⁰ Athina Karatzogianni, *The Politics of Cyberconflict* (London: Routledge, 2008); James Gow, Athina Karatzogianni, and Rachel Kerr, *Cyber Conflict and Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Athina Karatzogianni and Andrew Robinson, *Power, Resistance and Conflict in the Contemporary World: Social Movements, Networks and Hierarchies* (London: Routledge, 2009).

technology and medicine.” Mitcham authored some of the earliest philosophical literature on technology, including *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis*.¹¹

Pedro Oiarzabal is research scholar on migration at University of Deusto in Bilbao, Spain. His research examines diaspora creation and diaspora interaction with information and communication technologies as well as both the meaning of identity in both homeland and diaspora realities, with particular emphasis on the Basque case.

Brent Waters is the Director of the Jerre L. and Mary Joy Stead Center for Ethics and Values and associate professor of Christian Social Ethics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.

We are looking to expand the board internationally with scholars who are addressing the intersection of technologies and religions. We are excited about the cutting edge work that is being done, such as the November 2011 meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia “Wired Asia: Towards An Asian Feminist Theology of Human Connectivity.” *JTTR* seeks to partner with groups such as this throughout the world.

What’s Coming?

Our pipeline of articles in the first six months reflects the popular interests among theologians with papers on virtual church, Facebook, cyborgs and identity formation through cyberspace. The pipeline of book reviews in the first six months reflects the direction of future research.

¹¹ Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984).

Here is a partial glimpse at just some of the books that will be reviewed in this journal in the first few months:

*Cyber-Racism: White Supremacy and The New Attack on Civil Rights*¹²

Diasporas in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics and Identity, by board member, Pedro Oiarzabal¹³

*Different Cultures, One World: Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims About Globalizing Technology*¹⁴

*The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in the Digital Age*¹⁵

*Mediating Piety: Technology and Religion in Contemporary Asia*¹⁶

Technology and Religion: Remaining Human in a Co-created World, by board member Noreen Herzfeld¹⁷

When Religion Meets New Media, by board member Heidi Campbell¹⁸

¹² Jessie Daniels, *Cyber-Racism: White Supremacy and The New Attack on Civil Rights* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

¹³ Pedro Oiarzabal, *Diasporas in the New Media Age: Politics, Identity and Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Henk Jochemsen and Jan van der Strep, *Different Cultures, One World: Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims About Globalizing Technology* (Netherlands: Rozenburg Publishers, 2010).

¹⁵ Cathy N. Davidson and David Theo Goldberg, *The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Francis Khok Gee Lim, *Mediating Piety: Technology and Religion in Contemporary Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁷ Noreen Herzfeld, *Technology and Religion: Remaining Human in a Co-Created World* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

We are also seeking reviewers for the following books:

Contemporary Media Culture and the Remnants of a Colonial Past (2009)¹⁹

The Internet Generation: Engaged Citizens or Political Dropouts (2010)²⁰

Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace (2009)²¹

JTTR: Just the Beginning of the Technology and Religion Momentum

To engage these critical questions in person as well as in a journal, *JTTR*'s founding editor has organized a special session at this month's American Academy of Religion meeting. The session is "Technology and Theology: Intersecting Realities." It promises to be a "wildcard session" not to be missed at AAR in Atlanta, Georgia, on Sunday, October 31, 2010, from 5:00 to 6:30 pm. (See your program planner, page 77; it's session A31-303, currently scheduled for the Marriott Marquis hotel in room M103-104. AAR members can find more information at <http://meeting.aarweb.org/sessions/A31-303>).

AAR uses wildcard sessions to assess the interest and demand for scholarship in a new area, as a means to justify a new AAR section. The wildcard panel will include Noreen Herzfeld, a *JTTR* board member; Joseph F. Duggan, *JTTR* founding editor; two scholars from Iliff School of Theology, Deborah Creamer and Michael Hemenway; and Wan Wei Hsien from Malaysia. We

¹⁹ Kent A. Ono, *Contemporary Media Culture and the Remnants of a Colonial Past* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009).

²⁰ Henry Milner, *The Internet Generation: Engaged Citizens or Political Drop-outs* (Boston: Tufts University Press, 2010).

²¹ Mohammed El-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis *Islam Dot Com: Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

welcome *JTTR* members to attend this wildcard to demonstrate to AAR the need for a specific section that aligns with the vision of this journal and even further looks ahead at the potential between technologies and religions. In addition, there are more than thirty other papers and groups dealing with technology at this conference (<http://meeting.aarweb.org/sessions?utf8=✓&type=all&terms=technology&scope=both>).

JTTR promises to offer our readers leading scholarship on the intersections of technologies and religions from multi-disciplinary perspectives that emphasize theological concerns as well as opportunities. *JTTR* will provide leadership to the academic community around the world by ushering in the next generation of scholarship on the vital intersection of technology, theology, and religion.