

Does the Development of Technology Bring Us Closer to God?

The view of an orthodox theologian

Marek Ignaciuk

The question asked is a very broad issue with many layers; therefore we have to ask an additional question: what was the time and place of the development of technology? This development is something completely different in the first years of Christianity, in the Middle Ages, during the Industrial Revolution and today. We cannot agree more, that the process of building Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (VI Century) was the peak of the engineer skills, architecture. Its beauty was attracting not only the inhabitants of Byzantium but also influenced the Christianization of the Kievan Rus. The representatives of the Kievan Rus Vladimir, after having participated in the liturgy in Hagia Sophia, are believed to have said "We felt as we have been to heaven". Then the country was baptized and therefore came closer to God.

The main task of the Christians is evangelization, passing God's Word no matter where one is, what the political system would be, or the difficulties that missionaries encounter. What helps them is their faith and of course, technology. Means of transport such as cars and planes (that we would not have thought of 150 years ago) – is this the development of technology? Yes, definitely! Have they helped in preaching the Gospel?—Most certainly!

I am consciously neglecting other aspects of technology's development. Some of them were far from spreading love, brotherhood and peace but still, they have been used to make God closer to people. If someone says that planes are used in wars, railways were used in slave transportation and that Columbus' discoveries brought death – they are right. Though, here I would like to focus on the brighter side of life.

All of us live in a world where television, radio, mobile phones and Internet are around all the time. The multitude of means that are used is broadly understood by the Church. The Orthodox understanding of the word Church (in Greek: ἐκκλησία or Ekklesia) is seen as a community of people that are led by a bishop, therefore the Church is the faithful and the media is used for the Church. The time we live in is not very friendly for the Christianity. It is rather more fashionable to be an atheist which is what is associated with development, technology and the intellectual attitude that offers empirical interpretation, instead of "superstitions and witchcraft" offered by Christianity according to definitions by 'intellectuals' and 'people of science'.

The development of technology in the 21st Century has gained such a momentum, that an average citizen is not able to keep up with the novelties and innovations developing each and every day. However, if there is certain demand for this modern equipment it means that people are using it to contact with the other people, to get to know more about the world, and get breaking news. Often, we get to know about the local events or concerts from our iPhones, not from an advertisement displayed at the Town Hall.

Mozaik 28, *Living in a World of Technology*, "Does the Development of Technology Bring Us Closer to God?"
Marek Ignaciuk, Fall 2011.

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These are the challenges that Church needs to face and be open to. TV and radio broadcasts of worships enable the sick to spiritually participate in the celebrations of Easter or Christmas. They let people meditation and pray; isn't it dialogue with God? Haven't the disciples that were performing in the amphitheatres reached the people? Haven't they made their listeners closer to God? This comparison is not as abstract as it may seem if we take into account what the amphitheatre was for the ancients and what Internet is for us today. The Disciples of Christ were preaching not only in the temples, first and foremost they were using the blessings of technology they could access. I have no doubt that the priest preaching on TV or radio brings theology, ecclesiology and knowledge about the liturgics closer to the listeners. This is an obvious example of how technology helps to approach God.

Are these activities legitimate/valid/relevant though? Isn't it easier to approach a young person in the environment full of icons, frescos and the Orthodox songs? Of course it is easier, but first you have to make this person come to the church. And here comes the issue of our laziness.

Nowadays, to believe often means to be ridiculed and in the best case scenario the attitude is neutral. It is not prohibited to go to church on Sunday and even though it is not forbidden, the number of youth in attendance is very small. Some churches in Western Europe are being sold and transformed into discos not because of the benefit it gives to the community, but because of the lack of the faithful. Where are they? What do they do in their spare time, during the day when they are supposed to fulfil the words "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you."

On Sunday nobody works – just as God said – but at the same time not many go to the church to pray. Is technology so absorbing that it distances us from God? It is enough to say how much time we spend watching TV or using the Internet – using these time robbers or as extreme Christians frame it 'Satan's activities'.

In this situation, the contemporary Evangelists use the technology and engineers' inventions in order present theological treaties via radio, make Church Council decisions available online, and let people know about community meetings via text message. This brings us closer to God.

However, apart from that activity, there is a different one. What about e-confessions or e-prayer? These forms can have an effect that is extremely different from the assumed one. The idea is very innovative, but even the young people active in the online fora question its sensibility. Even those, who accuse the Church of conservatism, are against these solutions. Conveying information, broadcasting homilies, documentaries on TV – Yes, sacraments – No.

In the Orthodox Church the sacrament is God's seal that is exercised by a priest or bishop and I cannot imagine that this could ever be done via cable. To sum up, I would like to stress that technology can bring us closer to God, but we have to remember, that when using a knife you can

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both slice bread and kill a person. It depends only on how we are going to make use of the blessings and achievements of civilization.

Marek Ignaciuk has graduated from the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw. His passions are music and cars. He is doing his best to teach at school what he was taught at university. Marek is an eager coffee drinker and biker.

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