The Spirit or the Spiritualization of Virtuality?

Pneumatological Aspects for a Digital Anthropology

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1. Introduction

2. Virtual worlds and "digital anthropology"

- Human identity as *informational pattern?*
- Spiritual relationships between technology and humans?
- Relationship between religiosity, *virtual reality* (VR) or *augmented reality* (AR)?
- "Rather than a general distinction between the digital and the analogue, we define the digital as everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to the binary – that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s. The development of binary code radically simplified information and communication, creating new possibilities of convergence between what was previously disparate in content."[1]
- „Digital anthropology fails to the degree it makes the nondigital world appear in retrospect as unmediated and unframed. […] Online worlds are simply another arena, alongside offline worlds, for expressive practice, and there is no need to privilege one over the other. Every time we use the word *real* analytically, as opposed to colloquially, we undermine the project of digital anthropology, fetishizing predigital culture as a site of retained authenticity."[2]
- „In the study of technology and religion, one finds terms like 'virtual reality', 'virtual worlds' or 'virtual churches' used to describe a diversity of phenomena […] For example, 'virtual' is often used to differentiate religious communities and practices that are principally 'online' or in 'cyberspace' from those who are in physical space or in the 'real world'."[3]

3. A theological anthropology of the digital

- „As such, bodies, and thus relationship between these bodies, can be read as flexible for different contexts, and flesh can be read as something that stretches into these digital spaces."[4]
- „Modernity has been an age eminently dominated by sight. With the digital age we could assist to a reconfiguration of our senses that puts touch at the core of our life experience. Haptic intelligence is studied in relationship to virtual reality, while technology becomes wearable and touchable. Digital media are becoming the environment we are immersed in. Our relationship with them is tactile before being visual or acoustic."[5]

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[1] Daniel Miller and Heather A. Horst, "The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology", in: Digital Anthropology, ed. Daniel Miller and Heather Horst, London/ New York 2012, 5.

[2] Miller and Horst, „The Digital and The Human", 13.

[3] Joshua L. Mann, „Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Religion", in: Believing in Bits, ed. Simone Natale, Oxford 2020, 196.

[4] Scott Midson and Karen O'Donnell, "Rethinking Relationships in Cyberspace," in: Theology & Sexuality 26: 2–3 (2020), 83–98: 93.

[5] Gemma Serrano and Alessandro De Cesaris, "Towards a Theological Anthropology of the Digital Age", Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society, 7:1 (2021), 335-354: 341.

4. Pneumatological sketch

4.1. The question of hiddenness and immediacy

- The Hiddensees of the Spirit: „Dieser ist, da er uns nicht wie der Sohn als Person direkt gegenübertritt, gewissermassen eine verborgene Hypostase".[6]
- „Dabei muss der Geist an dritter Stelle stehen, da in ihm Gott uns unmittelbar berührt. Der Geist wirkt aber aufgrund des Werkes Christi, oder anders gesagt, durch den Geist berührt Christus uns, der daher an zweiter Stelle stehen muss".[7]
- Convergence or divergence between this graced touch and the "touch" of the virtual worlds?

4.2. The question of the secret behind the relationships

- „Vielmehr bleibt auch die menschliche Person letztlich Geheimnis, das sich in Beziehung enthüllt, aber nicht durch die Gleichsetzung mit der Beziehung aufzulösen ist. Wenn nun bei der trinitarischen Person dieses Geheimnis nicht gesehen wird, wie sollte es dann für das Verständnis der menschlichen Person voll zur Geltung kommen und umgekehrt: Wenn dieses Geheimnis der menschlichen Person eigen ist, muss es da nicht erst recht der trinitarischen Person zukommen?"[8]
- „If we recognize the tyrannical aspect of transparency, of authenticity and of visibility, then opacity, invisibility and secrecy appear as necessary elements in order to keep our individual and social balance. […] Secrecy and opacity are fundamental aspect of the social practice inside every community."[9]

4.3. The question of beauty and aesthetics

- The Holy Spirit is "God's finger" painting the icon of being with uncreated light.[10]
- "Nobody can represent the image of the Lord, except in the Holy Spirit."[11]
- Painting the icon of God in the human being (Basilius of Caesarea, Diadochus of Photike, Myrrha Lot-Borodine)
- Performing the "Imago Dei"[12] – where is the work of the Holy Spirit?

5. Conclusion

- Digital anthropology in the mirror of pneumatology

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[6] Herwig Aldenhoven, „Der Zusammenhang der Frage des Ausgangs der Heiligen Geistes mit dem Leben der Kirche", zuerst erschienen in: L. Vischer (Hg.), Geist Gottes – Geist Christi. Ökumenische Überlegungen zur Filioque-Kontroverse. Bericht und Vorträge zweier Tagungen auf Schloss Klingenthal, Frankfurt am M. 1981, 134–143, nachgedruckt in ders., Lex orandi – Lex credendi. Beiträge zur liturgischen und systematischen Theologie in altkatholischer Tradition, Hg. Urs von Arx, Freiburg 2021, 168–180: 172.
[7] Aldenhoven, „Zusammenhang", 173.
[8] Aldenhoven, „Zusammenhang", 180.
[9] Serrano and De Cesaris, „Towards a Theological Anthropology", 347.
[10] Paul Evdokimov, L'art de l'icône. Théologie de la beauté, Paris 1972, 13.
[11] Evdokimov, L'art, 13.
[12] Karen O'Donnell, "Performing the imago Dei: Human Enhancement, Artificial Intelligence and Optative Image-Bearing", International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church 18 (2018): 4–15.