

BOOK REVIEW

TEHNICIZAREA INUMANĂ A VIEȚII [THE INHUMAN TECHNICIZATION OF LIFE]

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Adrian Lemeni, Faculty of Orthodox
Theology Justinian the Patriarch, University of Bucharest,
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The volume *Tehnicizarea inumană a vieții (The Inhuman Technicization of Life)* (2022, 584 pages), published by Basilica Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchate (Bucharest), is an original work, representative for the present socio-cultural context, marked by a strong trend of technicization of life and the loss of the authentic moral signposts, human estrangement and uprooting.

Mr. Adrian Lemeni, Associate Professor of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology *Justinian the Patriarch* of the University of Bucharest, Director of the Doctoral School *Dumitru Stăniloae* and the Centre for Dialogue and Research in Theology, Philosophy and Science of the same institution, analyses scientifically, rigorously, the way the present technological system organizes, impacts, and changes the world, transforming it irreversibly.

The work deals with complex, challenging topics, of interest for the specialists in multiple domains, such as transhumanism, robotization of human's existence and mind, modeled by the excessive use of technology, permanently exhorting to reflection, balance, and human's return to the true values. The author confesses - even since the introduction - the fact that he did not make a priority out of the expression of his own convictions and ideas but aimed to bring into light and to the knowledge of the academic environment, remarkable personalities who analyzed the technology from several perspectives. From the most educated scientists in this volume, the author brings into focus Jacques Ellul, a visionary personality, who had the merit of prophesizing in his works the dawn of a technologized epoch, realizing a precise diagnosis of the technicized society, a few decennia ago. Similarly, another outstanding personality presented is Neil Postman, solid American author, educator, media theoretician and cultural critic, who issued pertinent solutions to problems like technoculture and technoscience, showing that the trivialization of the truth relies on the technological environment revolving around the logic of efficiency of technocratic type, doubled by the appanage of entertainment.

The entire work relies on a series of analyses and deep explanations concerning the human personality, the creation of human as a being with a dichotomic structure, with his

ontological gift received from the Creator, his freedom and independence from everything that could limit and constrain him in this life, destroy his relation with God and replace it with a substitute or an ideological illusion leading to the alienation of the person: “The environment structured via today’s technologies converts everything into calculation, cultivating a logic trusting in the almightiness of algorithms. The divine providence is substituted by a trust in an autonomous power, specific of the technological system. We no longer entrust our life to God but to the computer, which becomes our dominant interlocutor in our own life” (p. 8), so that we forget where we have come from, and we no longer understand where we are going to. The sense of our existence is becoming ambiguous, being compromised, diluted or evaporated by the living of a life that is technicized, screened, mediated excessively, which makes out of man a hybrid, dehumanized being, without the capacity of thinking vividly and living deep feelings. The artificiality and pseudo-existence, invading the human’s soul, pushes him away from God, from the state of vivid watchfulness, focus, self-possession, conditions sine-qua-non meant to develop a healthy spiritual life, intrapersonal and interpersonal, by Christic-ecclesial communion.

Realized in a scientific, rigorous and realistic manner, and approaching each problem in a complex way, the studies and research presented and integrated in this volume bring pertinent solutions to the sensitive challenges of today’s world’s context, offering a topical theological and spiritual answer, regarding the technique, technology and digitalization of human life (technocracy, the challenges of the technological system, the dilution of liberty in the technological aggregate, the technologization of the sacred, the revolution of information technology, the ambivalence of technology, the automatization of thinking and the logic of efficiency, the technological progress and the technicization of man’s existence, the technological addiction and virtual existence, and the technicization of culture and science).

In this context, the themes approached contribute to understanding the changes, challenges, limits emerged with the transformations taking place worldwide, through the contemporary process of globalization, of technical, economic and social order, by eliminating cultural and national differences, phenomena leading inevitably to important effects in the medium and long run, identified and underlined by the author: “today’s technological system integrates models based on a rationality of technical type, expands by obsessively invoking an efficiency legitimating the heavy toll paid in souls and in life, the alienation of life on personal and community level, these being considered collateral losses. What matters has to do with the efficiency of the system, even if man is reduced to an informational sequence, integrated in the network. In this perspective, a logic of a connectionist type, a permissive attitude to what supposes the connection to the technological environments internalizing the spirit of the world are thriving” (pp. 7-8).

In the first part of the volume, entitled “The prophetic lucidity of Jacques Ellul’s thinking”, the technological system is presented in the light of the present changes and fretting and fussing on the level of the human society, this technological system following “its own logic of self-development, proliferates, extends at an exponential speed, man finding himself in an universe of extremely varied machines and techniques” (p. 25), in a tsunami, devastating for human existence, in all the intrinsic aspects of life, a tsunami which man can no longer detach himself from. Thus, on a social level, the technological system erodes the authentic and political democracy, uniformizing all the civilizations, because, although the citizen is informed and over-informed, his thinking is alienated. “In a technicized society,

what matters has to do with the image promoted in the media; it is no longer man or the consistency of his ideas that matters but the image and the emotional attitude triggered and amplified via the technological environments” (p. 28). The more the citizen is connected to the mass-media, the more limited the freedom of expressing their own options and convictions is, the technical process finally leading to a significant dilution of democracy.

In this complex framework, the technological system is defined “as environment for promoting ideologies and rigorously organizing the insignificant”, action leading to formatting a collective mindset, uncertainty, insecurity, by bombing with so much information of total and overwhelming diversity, because the information transmitted via the today’s technological environments is instantaneous, polymorphic, kaleidoscopic and fragmentary, taking on the apparel of propaganda and convincing emotionally and by persuasion. “The technological system represents not just an environment favorable to propaganda but is the framework of rigorous organization of the insignificant. All that is profound is [dealt with as if it were] not worth discussing. What is secondary and ridiculous, in exchange, becomes object for discussion (...). The logic of entertainment, specific of the technological system, transforms everything into show. The problem is not to be against having fun, but the fact that absolutely everything is transformed into entertainment, and culture and thinking are alienated” (p. 33).

After a detailed and profound presentation of the notions of technique and technicization, both from a scientific and a theological perspective, the author concludes that “the presence of the Holy Spirit in our heart, the work of the grace are realities that the technological system cannot grasp. The grace cannot be scanned, calculated, and measured by technologies (...) God does not want man [to be] a little robot, the way the technological system favors the mould of robotized existence, man’s transformation into an executant and automatized sequence. Ellul mentions that God’s efficiency is not measured by success, in terms expressing a comfortable situation in history, but by the faith strengthened in the logic of the Cross” (pp. 135-136).

Next, technology is presented as a religion absolutizing the immanent and the organization of the spirit of this world, turning us into prisoners nailed on the earthly. Technology as religion is aimed at eternalizing the fallen condition, immortalizing on the level of the immanent. Technology as a secular religion, as a global ideology, internalizes the spirit of the world and claims us entirely for this world. By the present technologies, the spirit of the world is internalized also in the life of the Church, and the solution for solving this problem is found as well in Theology, by the spiritual tradition specific of the Orthodox spirituality which indicates consistent signposts on the way to going beyond the spirit of this world.

The author explains the fact that “technology is used to construct the sacred in the spirit of the New Age religiousness. Transcendental meditation and the extension of one’s mental capacities by the evolution of the human conscience, so as to acquire by autonomous effort the conscience of one’s own divinity, are methods supposing the integration of information technologies” (p. 150). Therefore, by today’s technological environments, a gnostic spirit is promoted, manifested via the trend of dematerialization of the existence: “The digital world is disembodied, dematerialized. Digi-utopia presents the virtual environment as a world with unlimited liberty and infinite possibilities. In this utopia, it is believed that it will be possible to reach the moment when the human conscience, equivalent

to digital information, becomes immortal by deliverance from the matter, being transferred on external technological memory” (p. 154).

After having presented Ellul’s vision concerning the secularization within Christianity, a deep look is taken at the living of the Christian faith in the context of the present technologies, showing that technology as religion of the technicized society desecrates the world in a manner no ideology has ever managed to desecrate it before, fundamentally alienates the living of a traditional spirituality, including the condition of the Christian faith. The Christians do not need to disdain or neglect in an absolute manner the need for technology but should just have discernment and a state of vivid watchfulness, so as to understand if using a certain technology is really useful, checking the technological need and conditioning.

In the second part, entitled “Signposts from the history and philosophy of technology” subjects specific of the present technological system are described and debated, trying to understand the world and the human in such context, exemplified by the mechanization of the body and the reciprocity man-robot promoted via diverse technologies, but also by the reductionism of the contemporary technological system, which sees the world as if it were a mega-machine. The authors presents perspectives related to the historical context and elements of reference of the industrial revolution, the informational society as a post-industrial society, the nature of technology as a practical application of science or of magic essence, and the ambivalence and non-neutrality of technology, which always offers the new possibilities at a cost, which, more often than not, is imperceptible and leads to the alienation of life, of the powers of the body and of the soul through today’s technological environments.

In the third part of the volume is confirmed and debated from multiple perspectives “The technicization of thinking, feeling, life and faith”. Here are highlighted valuable ideas on progress and automatization, the automatization of thinking and the logic of efficiency, the accelerated rhythm of the existence and the erosion of empathy, the utopic eschatology of technological progress, the robotization of man’s existence via the anesthesia generated by the technological environments and via the technicization of the essence of the existence. In this part is illustrated the modelling of the mind via the information technology, which exerts by the present technological environments an action of scattering of man’s mind, effect maintained by the television and by the interaction with the computer. The infantilization of thinking is put in relation with the technological or digital addiction and with the diminution of the experience of inwardness in the virtual environment, an action leading inevitably to a structural modification of the neuronal networks.

The fourth part is called “Transhumanism - utopia of the technological religion” and reunites under this title themes such as: The ideological and philosophical roots of transhumanism; The relation between transhumanism and technology; Transhumanism, dystopia and genetic engineering; Christianity and transhumanism; The utopia of transhumanism, expression of the trust in the autonomous power of the logic of technical type.

“Transhumanism and post-humanism - Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Adrian Lemeni affirms (pp. 527-528) - are aimed at approaches of improvement of the human condition, via radical transformations of the biological organism, by means of technologies and nano-technologies. The result of the interactions with these technologies leads to a post-human entity, perceived either as a new biological species, or a cyborg, or a digital and disembodied

being (hyper-humanism)”. So, for transhumanism, as religion of the technicized society, a religious dimension is claimed, promoted by the technocratic elite of the world, which considers the traditional religions as retrograde by the cultivation of a mentality hostile to progress (p. 537).

In relation to this technological environment, the society as a whole needs to realize a series of actions, to assume it, to exploit it, turning it into a support and a supplementary way of learning, filling it with education-favoring stimuli, teaching the young how to “live” in this new environment, how to become critical of and autonomous in relation to this huge flow in which everything is mixed together: value and non-value, necessary and accessory, beneficial and malefic, comfort and danger. Theology needs to offer a viable and efficient alternative to the life based on communication and communion between persons replaced with a robotic behavior based on standardized rules and impersonal procedures. The new technologies changed the world, the way in which we communicate, interact, collaborate, work, get information and learn, yet technology also needs to offer an ontological and providential vision on the human existence, needs to lay the foundations of an applied Christian ethics, relying on the hope in God’s work, beyond people’s strategies. “History is led by God and is accomplished in the eschaton, beyond the Luciferic pride of those who believe that by the autonomous power of the technological system they will be able to control all. The solution does not consist in a rejection of technology, in an isolation, but in a way of living renewed by the work of the grace, so that by every situation we may give thanks to God, turn everything into a gesture of thanksgiving to God’s glory” (p. 135).

With expertise and open vision, Associate Professor Adrian Lemeni is a road-opener and mind-opener and, at the same time, a confessor of the authentic Christian faith, faithful to the teaching and spirituality of the Holy Eastern Fathers, contributing to the understanding of the way in which the contemporary man needs to adapt, to absorb the new, yet remaining anchored in the tradition and finding the best way to reach salvation and deification, by a life lived in the authentic Christian spirit, according to the divine commandments and evangelical advice, in the middle of this digitalized and technicized world.

To conclude, what characterizes the volume *Tehnicizarea inumană a vieții (The Inhuman Technicization of Life)* is, doubtlessly, its theological-scientific value, critical and analytical at the same time, as it manages to bring together topical themes of a tremendous significance for today’s world, visions and empirical research of famous people of the domain of technology, which emphasize the ambivalence and non-neutrality of the new technologies, and the present approach remains open, as the author wishes to explain in a future volume in what spirit we can take advantage of technology and of the technical logic putting them in the service of life, without adapting Life to their image.