

## **TECHNOLOGY, RELIGION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

### **An Exploration from Comparative Multi-Polar Perspective**

Proposed Venue: University of Madras  
Proposed Dates: 13 & 14 December 2017

The University of Belgrade (Seminar for Social Sciences – Faculty of Philology) and the University of Madras (School of Philosophy and Religious Thought) are proposing to jointly organize a conference on the topic: “Technology, Religion and Cultural Identity – An Exploration from Multi-Polar Perspective.”

#### *Rationale:*

There is a perceived crisis in the formation of cultural identity in our globalised world, primarily because of a lack of integration between different spheres of life. Needless to say that technology and religion are two important spheres of life today. However, the construction of cultural identity goes on with a striking lack of substantial dialogue between religion and technology. The notion of culture is reduced from transcendental realm to the sphere of pragmatic concerns wherein an individual negotiates his/her cultural identity with personal computer, personal phone or other technological gadgets. A person is led away from social and transcendental relationships, and led towards the private world, even in extremely narcissistic manners. Going that way, a culture leaves traditional fulcrums and searches for its identity in technologically created sites and opportunities. Such a fundamental reorientation could bring perplexed results and therefore it should be a matter of concern for everyone, and especially for those committed to the field of knowledge to intuit future trends.

From the perspective of this concern, the conference proposes to explore the relationship between technology and religion. The exploration begins with the assumption that technology today is one of the main drivers of social change, and it impacts upon the dynamics of religion. For example, it slowly but steadily weakens the hold of religion over even the eschatological ‘other world’, by substituting with virtual ‘other worlds’. Technology is at work to produce more attractive and persuasive virtual reality that could be engaged in the personal quest for self-fulfillment.

Consequently, the traditional ideological competition for better revolutionized world is replaced by revolutionary growth of technology and spectacle of endless series of technological revolutions. A traditional human revolutionary subject is replaced by depersonalized collective of technologists who perform revolution by changing the environment, conditions of life and interconnections. Basically speaking, the analog dynamics of life is transferred into digital surroundings that demands intensive adaptation of thinking and behavior. The process of rising digital technology inevitably affects cultural identity. A person born in digital environment tries naturally to adapt herself/himself by adopting and following virtual simulacra that seem to offer more opportunities for self-realization. Why to wait for the religious ‘other world’ while we can find unlimited possibilities in virtual world that are within the click of a mouse?

In such a context, cultural identity formation is weaned out of the traditional sources to go for virtual simulacra as the basic resource for self-fulfillment. Transcendental sources of identity are sought to be replaced by immanentist and pragmatist sources, projecting an unwarranted antagonism between religion and technology. What would be the impact of such one-sided focus, mediated by technology? Would the formation of cultural identity be incentive and wholesome in a context of conflict between religion and technology? Should we not think in terms of mutuality between religion and technology? Can religion and technology come together to form healthy identities for human beings and contribute to peace and harmony? These are some of the lead-questions to be probed into.

The proposed conference intends to address these and similar questions from the perspectives of modern and postmodern culture in the frame of Christian and 'Hindu' religions. These two streams of religions are in the limelight contrast to technology as prevalent cultural form. Many adepts of technological belief and many of adherents of the two mentioned religions are present all over the world today, and they have many similarities between their doctrines and practices. Some of the questions the conference intends to raise are:

- What is the place of theology of traditional religions in the frame of technology?
- What Orthodox and other forms of Christianity have in common with Hinduism in relation to technology and modern construction or postmodern deconstruction of identity?
- Does technology facilitate migration from traditional Indian religions to European religions which may be seen as entities closer to modernization?
- Can cultural identity be enriched by a dialogue between religion and technology?
- What are most effective ways of cultural identification with technological simulacra that supports new social "reality"?
- Is the era of artificial intelligence generating artificial faith?
- What are the differences in theological and technological understandings of 'another world'?
- How is personal subjectivity transferred to technology and how expectation for final technological solutions shapes personal identity?
- Is it possible to modernize without rejecting religious source of cultural identity?
- Is there any benefit from competition between theology and technology?
- What do 'Hindu' religions, philosophies and Christianity have in common towards technology?
- Can technology and religions together work for a world free of sufferings, hunger, and pain?
- Where lies the balance between science and religion?
- Does technology possess the real knowledge and religion only illusion?

#### Call for Papers:

Research papers related to any of these questions can be presented during the conference. We invite proposals for about 300 words, to reach us by 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017 at [petralist@gmail.com](mailto:petralist@gmail.com) or [gnanapat@gmail.com](mailto:gnanapat@gmail.com). A scientific committee will select the proposals and communicate to you by 30<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

Those selected will be given 20 minutes to present their paper, and 10 minutes for clarifications and questions.

Best papers will be published in peer reviewed journals.

## **SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE :**

Prof. Rajnath Bhat, BHU, Varanasi  
Prof. Aleksandar Petrovic, University of Belgrade  
Prof. Ljiljana Markovic, University of Belgrade  
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