

The Pastoral Care of the Church in Late Modernity

By Triantafyllos Boltetsos*

- *And where did you meet this rascal?*
- *On our parish forum. He's a man of the Church.*
- *What's this forum, Charula? Did our child involve in a cult?*
- *No, Vangeli, it's an internet site, where they discuss...*
- *And why on earth church people are discussing on the internet,
with the children of the world, Charula?*¹

By drawing on the knowledge of the Theology's other branches, and of all sciences in general, the Orthodox Christian Pastoral practice and theory's sacred duty, ministry, purpose, and task is to help, propose, and reveal to the faithful and to society at large ways, means, and principles, which contribute to leading them to the transformation of the whole world, to the ancient beauty, to salvation, or simply to God². In this context, it is called upon to alert people about the events that are taking place around them, affecting them directly or indirectly.

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1. A dialogic scene from the popular TV series «Τὸ Σὸί σου»/“To Soi sou”, Ep. 30 (34:01): <https://youtu.be/5r-EsVXZBd8?t=2034> [31.9.2023].

2. Thus, by participating in a constant struggle of evangelization (or re-evangelization), it takes over the findings and achievements of the other disciplines –of course, primarily from the theological ones–, in order to pass on the scientific data, after a pastoral approach and assimilation, to the people of God and to all interested parties as a way of life with an eschatological perspective. Cf. Tr. Boltetsos, *Τὸ Καινοδιαθηκικὸ πλαίσιο ἀσκήσεως τοῦ ποιμαντικῆς ἔργου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὸ βιβλίον τῶν Πράξεων τῶν Ἀποστόλων*, PhD, Department of Social Theology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens 2012, p. 67· <https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/33320> [31.9.2023].

In keeping with the central theme of the Theology's Conference, worthy of its one-hundred year old history, our minimal contribution lies in trying to investigate, identify, and present an answer to the following question: What is the presence, witness, and contribution of Pastoralism in late modernity, in relation to technology and, more broadly, to the technical or mechanical spirit, since one of the period's typical characteristics is "that it is absolutely related to the technology's explosive development"³. What is its ultimate imprint? What is its exact proposal?

Questions are thus formulated, to which we may not always be able, confident, or prepared to give definitive answers. The primary and crucial question is this: Does the technical spirit function as a new apostle or even an equal to the Apostles, helping to colonize the Church, in its missionary and salvific work? Or, does it act in an "anti-pastoral" way, proclaiming a newer Gospel⁴, a "late-modern Testament", a "meta-Testament"⁵ finally constituting yet another "last temptation"? Are we indeed "embracing" the technical spirit, are we "devoutly" embracing technology, so that both dictate ways of thinking and solutions in cases where our own thoughts and personal effort would otherwise be required?

Let us add here, as a parameter to the occurring issue, a phrase of Saint Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria in the 4th century; almost 1,200 years ago, he had claimed that the arts, the sciences, discoveries in general and their applications in particular, undoubtedly are «τῆς ἀνωτάτω δόξης ἐκμαγεῖον καὶ τῆς θεοπρεποῦς ἐξουσίας εἰκὼν ἐπὶ γῆς ὁ ἄνθρωπος»⁶.

3. "Especially with the possibilities of producing and disseminating information, beyond any limitation of national borders and time mediations"; see Anny Asimaki, Ger. Koustourakis, Io. Kamarianos, «Οἱ ἔννοιες τῆς νεωτερικότητας καὶ τῆς μετανεωτερικότητας καὶ ἡ σχέση τους μὲ τὴ γνώση: Μία κοινωνιολογικὴ προσέγγιση», *Τὸ Βῆμα τῶν Κοινωνικῶν Ἐπιστημῶν/Το Vima ton Koinonikon Epistimon*, IE', 60 (Summer 2011), p. 104.

4. Someone could think something similar regarding Christian Science, etc.

5. In any case, within the context of Protestantism, some have already thought of proclaiming such a "Meta-church". According to another approach, there is talk about a Church in the Metaverse, (as an Avatar); see <https://www.youversion.church/post/church-in-the-metaverse-new-platform-endless-opportunities> [1.11.2023] or *Metaverse Church*, see <https://covchurch.org/2023/01/03/metaverse-church-is-a-ministry-frontier/> [1.11.2023].

6. PG 69, 20C; cf. <https://impiprevezis.gr/index.php/2012-08-15-12-34-18/2014-07-25-22-56-11/73-2014-07-26-14-20-03> [1.10.2023].

Is this ultimately true in our late-modern age? Is this the feeling, or even the impression, that our church life is leaving to us⁷?

In the context of Pastoral Theology, it has already been established⁸ to “adopt” the characteristics resulting from the so-called “three-fold office” («τρισσὸν ἀξίωμα») of Jesus Christ⁹; as a consequence of this “adoption”, the corresponding functions of Pastoral Theology - *communion* (the Lord *as King*), *worship* (the Lord *as Priest*), *witness* (the Lord *as Prophet*) and *Ministry* as the Lord’s attribute par excellence (the Lord *as Deacon*) -, are the result and consequence of all the previous attributes¹⁰. This schema ultimately contributes to a timeless and comprehensive method of outlining the work and content of the Church’s pastoral ministry.

What do we see, then, regarding a dimension of our subject? What is the relationship that Pastoralism has already developed with technology as an application and –by extension– with the technical spirit as a concept? From a brief overview and review of the subject under discussion, we can ascertain the following:

In the field of *society/communication*, we initially had printed matter, audio cassettes and CDs (with sermons and hymns), and video cassettes, video and DVDs (with sacred sites, theatrical works, religious documentaries), until all these were put on a dustbin, in front of the comfort that the

7. It is worth asking ourselves whether the technical spirit entered into a dialogue (systematic or even accidental) with the Church and how, in the context of this “ἔργω ἢ διανοίᾳ” voluntary or involuntary encounter, technology was finally dealt with and utilized in the pastoral work of the Church.

8. Cf. Al. M. Stavropoulos, *Ἐπιστήμη καὶ τέχνη τῆς ποιμαντικῆς*, Harmos Publications, Athens 1997, p. 58 ff.; *Ποιμαντικὴ προετοιμασία τῶν μελλονόμενων. Προετοιμασία ἀγάπης. Συμβολὴ εἰς τὴν ποιμαντικὴν Θεολογίαν, Ψυχολογίαν καὶ Κοινωνιολογίαν*, National Centre for Social Research – ΕΚΚΕ, Athens 1971, pp. 46-48 and pp. 85-92; *Μυστήριον ἀγάπης - Ἐκκλησία μικρά: ὁ γάμος εἰς τὴν Ὀρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν*, reprint from the Journal *Κοινωνία/Κοινωνία* 18, 2 (March-April 1975), pp. 10-13.

9. “The first to discern this three-fold office were Saints Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom. Eusebius of Caesarea, in fact, observed that of those who had been anointed in the past ‘by a symbol’, as priests, kings, and prophets –for this is precisely the Christ’s three-fold office– none had acquired so much power of divine virtue as the Savior and Lord, the one and true Christ”. See Tr. K. Boltetsos, «Ὁ V.I.P. Χριστός», <https://tvstar.gr/2019/07/10/o-vip-christos/> [5.10.2023].

10. Cf. Al. M. Stavropoulos, *Ἐπιστήμη καὶ τέχνη τῆς ποιμαντικῆς*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

internet and the world wide web have given in the last decades. From then onwards, we've seen the creation of blogspot, websites with the presence of patriarchies, dioceses, parishes and monasteries. There is a certain involvement, without sufficient representation, in social media (mainly Facebook). There is a fairly large presence on YouTube, the social sharing medium par excellence, with even many live broadcasts related to worship.

In the field of *information-testimony*, we have church websites, where believers are informed by official and unofficial sources. Church radio stations have flourished. Although it has proved impossible for a central church television station to be established, a few local churches and private, regional, missionary efforts have managed to succeed¹¹. Apart from these, though, in the first quarter of the 21st century, we have nothing special in terms of vlogs, blogs, podcasts, Twitter (now X), TikTok, Instagram and insta-stories, (YouTube) shorts and the like.

Again, in the area of *ministry*, we don't have anything innovative and impressive to observe in relation to technology. This is understandable, since what is more in need in this area are people, "helping hands", not "the enhancement of communication between people on a universal level"¹², as is one of the definitions of so-called "social media".

However, above and beyond these relevant data, we discern a strong presence, perhaps with a dose of naivety, or even romanticism, from all kinds of technology users, which seems to lead to phenomena where the technical spirit dominates within the space of ecclesiastical reality, even in the most vital moments of its spirituality. Unfortunately, there are many and remarkable examples of where and how we encounter it. For

11. The effort of the missionary association that created the "4E" channel has been commendable. There is "Lichnos" in the Metropolis of Patras, and "Tharri" in the Metropolis of Rhodes – but that's all. There are some notable attempts to broadcast via the Facebook platform (e.g. from the Ecumenical Patriarchate). Some notable theological broadcasts have been or still exist with ecclesiastical content (religious monuments, etc.) either on ERT or on regional stations, as are broadcasts of Divine Liturgies by ERT, STAR Central Greece and some additional regional TV stations, depending on their cooperation with the local churches and the sympathy of their owners towards the Church.

12. Entry «Μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης (= Social media)», <https://el.wikipedia.org> [1.11.2023].

example, we see it on the altar, even during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, when we find mobile phones, watches, etc.¹³. We encounter it when the clock in the temple strikes every hour or half hour, for example from the church warden area, even during the celebration of the Mass... When the clock, which is connected to the bells of the church, is sounded throughout the ecclesiastical-liturgical time.

It has been pointed out that we cannot pray, declaring «*πᾶσαν τὴν βιωτικὴν ἀποθώμεθα μέριμναν*», while at the same time we're looking at our watch, checking our cell phone, answering phone calls, outside and inside the temple, reading flash news, opening e-mails from work, checking incoming messages from acquaintances and strangers on the one side, and on the other, ringing the coins of the "Caesar" in our pockets. All these are placing, transporting, and locating us unashamedly in a cosmic place and space; they are placing us before our earthly concerns.

In this situation, a pastoral comment that it would be possible for us to anticipate would express puzzlement or anxiety: Could it be that all these intercalary techniques express an emerging dominance, a surpassing, a prioritization of the mechanical spirit over the Holy Spirit himself, even in the sacred moments when It administers the Holy Sacraments and provides the Divine Grace?

Of course, the pastoral discernment of the Church of Greece and other local Churches, has been trying for many years now to set limits and boundaries to the "invasion-intrusion" of the technical factor during the Divine Liturgy¹⁴.

13. Such as microphones (which now have an ecclesiastical appearance and cover, with gold-plated two-headed eagles etc.), tape recorders and many more.

14. "The fact that religion and the Church are increasingly occupying TV time on all channels, brings about a mediatization of religious attitudes, in the sense that the beliefs of the faithful are increasingly mediated by the TV image (regardless of whether it is a live broadcast of the Divine Liturgy or TV clips of speeches and exhortations of Church representatives, or a report on a miracle). This mediation combines the three factors that make up the framework for understanding the relationship between religion and the media, to which we've referred above: religious tradition, the professionalism of journalists, the content of the public sphere". See Efthalia Zagnaferi, *Θρησκεία και Μ.Μ.Ε.: Νομικὲς Προϋποθέσεις και Κοινωνικὲς Προεκτάσεις*, Master's thesis, Department of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 2013, p. 21,

Thus, among other things, television broadcasting was forbidden through the Sanctuary, avoiding “incongruous” and “useless” enlargements (“zooms”) on the Holy Gifts and the Holy Chalice, in moments of absolute sacredness and mystery. Similar remarks, in the context of pastoral discernment, are made about the deactivation of mobile phones during sacred services, and against the use of tablets and electronic applications and programs in the chanting of the chapels or in the priestly pulpit¹⁵.

At the same time, however, the digital recording and broadcasting of the Divine Liturgy themselves abolish the conditions for the formation of communion relations between persons, especially when the faithful consider that, when they are watching the Mass from a television receiver or behind a computer screen they are “performing their religious duties”, risking “to be lost in the illusion of participation, while they are physically absent from the temple, something that requires a corresponding asceticism”¹⁶.

<http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/135139/files/GRI-2014-13130.pdf> [1.10.2023].

15. June 2018: The Ecumenical Patriarchate calls on priests who have long since begun to use “smart” electronic devices in their lecterns to leave their tablets, laptops and mobile phones and return to the traditional books: As it is clearly stated in the decision of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, “[...] from now on, the use of electronic devices during the Holy Masses in the Ecclesiastical Lecterns, as a substitute for the Liturgical books of our Church, is judged to be totally contrary to the order and unacceptable, scandalizing the faithful”. It is also added: “It is therefore necessary that the use of such technical means in the Holy Temples and the Divine Worship be completely avoided, as it will eventually lead to the secularization of liturgical life”, <https://orthodoxia.info/newsorthodoxia.info/news/ἀπαγορεύονται-tablets-και-κινητά-στα-ψαλτήρ/> [1.10.2023].

February 2019: The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece has also recommended in the past that there should be “economical and meticulous” use of electronic media in churches without substituting liturgical books: “In such cases, the devices in question are placed on the stand-books in such a way that they are not held or carried by hand by the singers or readers, so as to scandalize even one of the faithful”, <https://www.orthodoxianewsagency.gr/epikairota/oi-ieropsaltes-o-iso-kratis-kai-ta-tablet/> [1.10.2023].

16. N. Pappioannou, «Ἡ ψηφιακὴ ἀναμετάδοση τῆς θείας Λειτουργίας: Ὅροι καὶ προϋποθέσεις», <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2022/09/i-psi-fi-ki-anametadosi-tis-thias-l-i-tour-gias-ori-ke-proipotesis/> [1.10.2023]. Important material in this direction was gathered at the 1st International Conference on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoralism on 14 June 2021, <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2015/04/1o-diethnes-sine-drio-psi-fi-akon-meson-ke-orthodoxis-pimantikis/> [1.10.2023].

Let us not again forget the remarks of scientists about the effect of technical means on the psychology of the priests themselves when there is live television/internet transmission, as they are trying to avoid doing something wrong, an awkward or misunderstandable move, thus affecting their own prayerful state. Something similar happens to the participating faithful themselves, when they see the camera pointed at them when they are entering the temple or worship the holy icons, when they are in their pew, or even when they are going to the Beautiful Gate to receive the body and blood of Christ...¹⁷.

Furthermore, there is another image, already familiar because of the modern tourists, that we can discern it now in modern believers: during a spiritual occasion, a pastoral activity, many times they pick up their mobile phones to take pictures and even worse – because it takes more time – to take a video, inside and outside the church, any sacred, ritual, ecclesiastical moment, neglecting their personal experience, degrading the personal view and freezing the vivid personal memories for the sake of the electronic lens, which is called upon to capture these experiences forever; yet, the only thing it manages to do is to take up space on cell phones, computers and hard drives, with no further use or benefit.

It is very important the fact that the Holy Ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew I and the Church of Greece under the presidency of the Blessed Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and All Greece, as well as Most Reverend Archbishops, have from time to time drawn attention to this often inappropriate relationship between the sacred and the technical spirit, emphasizing that it distorts the ecclesiastical experience, the faithful are scandalized, and liturgical life is being led to secularization¹⁸.

17. At the same time, all these objections and concerns (in the context of sociology, pedagogy, psychology) that apply to the expansion of the technical spirit to every aspect of our lives also apply to believers.

18. Let us note here that recently the Pope of Rome has also asked about taking measures and be causes about AI. August 2023: Pope Francis has warned that AI would become dangerous for the society, highlighting its subversive potential and ambiguous implications, and urging those who will develop or use AI to do so responsibly. In a statement, Pope Francis referred to the threat of algorithmic bias in technology and called on the community to be vigilant “so that a logic of violence and discrimination does not take root in the production and use of such devices to the detriment of the most fragile and excluded”. At the same time, he pointed out how “the protection of the

Of course, it is interesting for someone, who is reasonably absent from an ecclesiastical historical event or a worship occasion, to see photos and snapshots of them, exactly as was done from time immemorial with the written reports and dispatches, so as to have the relevant information, to formulate a “picture”. But this technical recording, as an arduous and laborious process, has to possess a certain rationale, measure, and awareness¹⁹.

We could realize, however, that something great and special is being created by the technical spirit of the late modern age, in particularly fruitful ways and imaginative practices, in relation to the galloping technology, as things are being led to an unprecedented digital reality, which seems to be “omnipresent”. Thus, a new basis is being set up and established, which, as it affects man, it affects the believer and the pastoral theory and practice as well.

Therefore, we are once again being confronted with the uncritical, the indiscriminate and the immoderate; with an apparent “manipulation” of man by the technical spirit, which naturally has its exponents, admirers and accomplices, those who benefit from this emerging domination – that is to say, from what appears in the contemporary pastoral critical eye as a “change” of man, even within the Church, who appears to be and functions more as a consumer, a “user”, rather than a believer. This is due to a prevailing thought: “since there is the technical presence, the mechanical possibility, to make use of them in a timely-untimely manner”.

Let us imagine the following strange picture: During the performance of sacred services, in the churchyard or even inside the church, “church-

individual’s dignity and the concern for a brotherhood essentially open to the whole human family are necessary preconditions for the technological development that will contribute to the promotion of justice and peace in the world”. Pope Francis’s remarks are combined with calls from some AI experts to ensure that the algorithms’ development is properly “aligned” in supporting the human rights and other broad social values. <https://orthodoxia.info/news/papas-fragkiskos-osoi-anaptyxoyn-tin/> [1.10.2023].

19. There is a marked difference from “then”, a few decades ago, when photographic film had 12/24/36 “stops”, when developing took days and was expensive, where the user was subjected to a certain amount of judgement and discernment, to today, where digitalization tempts us to indiscriminately take hundreds or even thousands of photos, which we often don’t have time to sort out afterwards or to look at again.

goers” bending their heads over the “glowing” screen of their mobile phones, and as other “navel gazers”, not performing their prayer mentally, but being focused on digital platforms and on other intangible realities.

Let us now pass to Pastoralism as such. The use of all these technical means in the Church can be useful and blessed, but it can only become accepted when it is proven to be a springboard for the activation of the “careless” believer, when –by assisting in the pastoral mission– it energizes the detached man and awakens the interest of the non-knowledgeable person to get up, to be mobilized, and to physically be there; to participate, body and soul, with utter simplicity in the events taking place within the Church in all the dimensions of Its work.

It is indeed possible, as it is advertised and appears at first sight in this period of late modernity, for Technology to be provided at a price much more “advantageous” than in the past and to be able to provide “free of charge”: an exedra-preaching place, an exedra-place of promotion, an exedra-place of pupilage.

In this context, the central question that arises concerning the divine indwelling of every believer is the following one: can the technical spirit and technology possessed by it help, substitute, replace the bema, the holy Places, the holy Ambo, the Holy School? For example, the same question can be asked about the holy journeys. Is it experientially, empirically the same? Is it equally uplifting and mind strengthening for someone to visit in person Jerusalem, Constantinople, Mount Athos, or other holy places, which are connected to our faith, e.g. the tomb of St. Paisios in the Monastery at Souroti, or that of St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki with his myrrh-flowing relic, with just seeing them via an electronic website, a digital platform, with making an online visit, or a virtual pilgrimage²⁰? The interesting point here is that technology “guides” us to exhibit such behaviors – that is, to the temptation of indulging in remote digital-electronic “visits” to the holy places of faith.

However, what is ultimately the most important thing for Pastoralism is the capability of the believer, of God’s every child, to “enjoy” the life

20. For example, in Jerusalem; <https://www.skylinewebcams.com/en/webcam/israel/jerusalem-district/jerusalem/western-wall.html> [10.10.2023].

of the Church without difficulties and exclusions; to be inspired and to serve the evangelical “*and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*”²¹. In other words, no gates or walls should be built, no barriers should be erected, no prohibitions should be issued that would override the status of the Church, the love of God, so as to prevent man from becoming a partaker of every divine (inter)communion.

In this pastoral principle, the God-inspired examples in the history of the Church are sufficient, essential, and crucial. In adopting its economy, the Church is engaged in some very interesting pastoral actions when it comes to benefiting man. A very well-known example –of course, there are many more²²– is, when there is no water to administer Holy Baptism and the latter is absolutely necessary, it is allowed to be administered by air – an emergency baptism. And if in this case there is not even a clergyman to administer baptism, the sacrament can be performed by any layman, man or woman.

We can easily understand that in every age, from the “archaic” history of the first Church to late modernity and in any other age that will be succeeded it, there could be no excuse or justification for anything that will prevent the Church “from functioning, communicating, witnessing, and ministering”. And this, as we have said, is the perennial pastoral principle of the unhindered Church²³.

21. *Matthew* 16, 18.

22. No particular building and technical infrastructure are required in order for the great sacrament of the Holy Eucharist to be celebrated. Apart from the edifices, it can be celebrated in an atrium, a cave, a catacomb, or even in a field. Even a “Holy Altar” is not absolutely necessary. The only presupposition, because it has eschatological implications, is that there must be a holy relic. Even if there is no special amice, a cloth on the priest’s neck is enough. A suitable piece of cloth or rope can be used as an amice, since the essential thing is not the material from which it has been made, but its functionality and symbolism. See G. Zaravelas (deacon), «Τὸ ἐπιτραχήλιο καὶ ἡ ἀναγκαίωτα τῆς ἀμφίεσῆς του», <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2021/05/to-epitrachilio-ke-i-anagkeotita-tis-amfiesis-tou/> [10.2023].

23. Cf. Str. Theodosiou, «Ἐπιστήμη, Θεολογία, τεχνολογία καὶ κοινωνία», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 90, 3 (2019), p. 68: “In its turn, Science has ceased to produce ‘Spirituality’. Without the existence of spirituality, Technology is more often than not an agent of destruction, not of preservation of a civilization. Instead of serving man’s real needs, it produces fictitious ones, leading him into a maelstrom of new fears that ultimately deprive him of his supreme good, his Freedom!”

It cannot be hindered by the lack of electricity, since there is the light of the candles, the lamp and finally there is the «Φῶς ἰλαρόν», the «φῶς τῆς ἀγίας δόξης τοῦ (ἀθανάτου, οὐρανίου καὶ μάκαρος) Θεοῦ Πατρός». It cannot be hindered by the lack of microphones and loudspeakers, since there is the natural human voice crying out to the Lord²⁴, even when the voice is waning and hoarse, as in the case of the neophyte Saint Bessarion of the Agathonos.

It cannot be hindered by the lack of tele-mission, from the moment that what is important in Orthodox pastoral action is the movement, the missionary's own course: «ὡς ὠραῖοι οἱ πόδες τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων»²⁵ to preach the Lord of Peace. Finally, we would metaphorically say, that "it cannot be hindered by the lack of telematics, as «Ἔστι Δίκησ ὀφθαλμός, ὅς τὰ πάνθ' ὄρα»²⁶.

Besides, most of us have experienced to some degree the beauty of simplicity in humble chapels, in mountains and rocky islands; without the presence of any technological device, memories are sculpted and experiences of a beautiful, genuine, simple ecclesiastical sacramental life are recorded. In contrast, of course, we must bear in our pastoral thinking the future (from the most stormy and dystopian to the extraterrestrial and spacial). In this pastoral vision of the future, we need to know the limits

24. *Psalms* 76, 2.

25. *Rom.* 10, 15.

26. The secret to this case is based on a very important observation: "Modern Technique is initially self- presented as a kind of 'disconnection' from nature. It is undoubtedly related to modern technology and its methods, i.e. to a technology which is no longer based on cooperation with nature and the 'binding' of its forces (as, for example, the sail of a sailboat to the force of the wind), but on an intervention in its structure and the release and transposition of energy (explosion, electricity). However, it is something greater than that. It is about a certain 'attitude of man in the world', which is guided by the technical spirit"; see G. D. Ioannidis, «Ὁ Σπ. Κυριαζόπουλος καὶ ἡ κριτική τοῦ τεχνικοῦ πνεύματος» (29.1.2020), www.academia.edu/41836880/ [1.10.2023].

and preconditions²⁷ of how far the *κατ' οἰκονομίαν*²⁸, can be reached when the *κατ' ἀκριβείαν* is not possible to be followed²⁹.

In the current period of late modernity, Pastoralism, as it has always done, is dealing not only with a variety of ecclesiastical or theological or religious issues, but it would be more accurate to say that –to a lesser or greater extent– that it is dealing with everything that concerns man; it reflects upon that, it theologizes and offers proposals. It is therefore reasonable that it has already dealt, quite extensively, with a multitude of issues related to technology. Still, we must admit that this

27. Of course, by the grace and providence of God, the then militant Church will deal with these issues by the example of the triumphant and the illumination from its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Simply, the relevant reflection would help us so that nowadays, living and being in safety, we do not “burn” people at the stake, when possibly this action will leave no room for luxury for the future believers. For this very reason, the foundations must now be laid and the Orthodox theology and its pastoral theory and practice must be brought to the forefront, so that the people of the Church can walk the path of life «ἐν Χριστῷ ζῶντι».

28. Cf. in: N. Eyth. Mitsopoulos, *Θέματα Ὀρθοδόξου Δογματικῆς Θεολογίας*, Symmetria Publications, Athens 2008, p. 84: “Commenting on Paul, George Florovsky in his book *Τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ ζῶντος Χριστοῦ*, p. 3, also points out that ‘the Church is the Body of Christ and its flock. In Apostle Paul’s mind, the two terms –body and flock– are closely connected”. Also, the late Professor Elias Voulgarakis has spoken of “incarnated theology” in his book *Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ κόσμος*, p. 60 ff. It is a pastoral response to the use, utilization, and presence of every application of the technical spirit in the Church.

29. A useful parameter for the present and future Pastoralism is the reference of Marios Begzos, Professor emeritus of the Theological School at the University of Athens in his work: *Νεοελληνικὴ φιλοσοφία τῆς θρησκείας, Θεολογία-Τεχνολογία καὶ Ἰδεολογία*: “Technology promises freedom, but does not guarantee it. Technology promises man’s liberation from necessity, but does not guarantee it. Technocracy may wish for a better future for all of us, but it is not able to reassure us of a decent outcome of the scientific applications in our daily lives. There is something that transcends the limits of technology. That is human freedom”, in: Str. Theodosiou, «Ἐπιστήμη, Θεολογία, τεχνολογία καὶ κοινωνία», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 90, 3 (2019), p. 70. A similar scientific and experiential concern is looming in the writings of Alexander M. Stavropoulos, Professor emeritus of the Theological School, who describes the need for future pastoral preparation in many of his texts, such as: «Ποιμαντικὴ τοῦ μέλλοντος», *Ἐφημέριος/Efimerios* 16 (1998), pp. 248-249; «Τὸ μέλλον τῆς Ποιμαντικῆς», *Ἐφημέριος/Efimerios* 17 (1998), pp. 264-265; «Προκλήσεις ποῦ ἀντιμετωπίζουσι οἱ ἱερεῖς ποῦ ζοῦν καὶ ἐργάζονται στὸ κέντρο τῆς Ἐνωμένης Εὐρώπης σήμερα», Reprint from *E.E.Θ.Σ.Π.Α./E.E.Th.Sch.Pan.Ath.*, vol. N° (2015), Athens 2020, <https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holySynod/commitees/pastoral/stavropoulospro2020.pdf> [1.10.2023].

valuable engagement treats the technological means and forms mainly as symptomatology, not on the level of ontology. We think that the time is ripe for it to paving the way towards this latter direction.

In our case, what is at stake is not the diagnosis of the usefulness or danger that some technological or mechanical means may entail for the Church and its faithful. There has been extensive literature on television, information media in general, the internet and mobile phones, digital platforms for entertainment and information, and the various forms of electronic applications in our daily lives. Many times, the assessment is that they are a “double-edged knife”, with its positive and negative aspects.

On the other hand, when we want to approach ontologically the phenomenon of the technology, technologization, technical and mechanical spirit, and similar neologisms, such as for example *technosexuality*³⁰, in the life of the Church, in how it touches the way of life of the faithful Christian, we must modify our perspective, our way of thinking. Thus, we believe that we are immersing into the dynamics of this Conference when we go beyond the thought of simply distinguishing whether something is for good or for evil, and put aside the notion of usefulness.

At this point, we could recall the example we’ve used a little earlier, not by accident, concerning the presence of the clock in the Church. The clock, the hour, and the role they’re performing are not double edged. They are simply, coldly and mechanically recording the passage of time. The point in the preceding example is the “invasion” of the time of the mechanical spirit in every sacred service and especially in the Holy Eucharist, i.e. the time when the joyful Eucharistic meal is laid out, and

30. Cf. <https://el.alegsonline.com/art/96694> [10.10.2023]: *Technosexuality* means two things: 1. A great love for gadgets; it is a fusion of two words: *technophile* and *metrosexuality*. It was first used by Ricky Montalvo to describe someone who was in love with himself and his urban lifestyle, including gadgets such as mobile phones, PDAs, computers, software and the internet. 2. A different word for *robosexuality*. This concept of *technosexuality* is an amalgamation of the words *technophilia* and *sexuality*. Furthermore, the term *technosexual* is sometimes used as an insult implying that one prefers a sex toy to a real sexual partner.

in our lives in general³¹, which poses great difficulties in experiencing the events according to the “way of the Church”³².

Pastoral thought continues to approach the issue on another level, in one of its other thematic unities: the pastoralism of leisure. Therefore, among the arguments about the value of technology, is that it ensures excess, free time for man, for more meaningful activities, rest, and entertainment. I wonder, how is the resulting free time “utilized”, where is it channeled? At the end of the day, is man, literally and figuratively, rested or entertained?

An indication for our unpreparedness to spiritually engage with the modern mechanical spirit is the answer to questions such as: What are we doing while we are waiting for the machine to “do the job”? While, for example, transferring files, “installing”, “downloading”, “uploading”, “backup”? Are we simply “killing” our scarce and precious time, the time that the machine theoretically saves and economizes, by simply waiting for the job to be done, like small children waiting for an adult to finish

31. In this context, a quote from a book by Françoise Dolto, a French child psychoanalyst and disciple of Jacques Lacan (1908-1988), is very interesting: “The ‘secular’ religion preaches the ‘rosy future’, but the Gospel says that things are rosy today, and for everyone, even for those who ignore it. We all live today in two dimensions: on the level of space-time and on the level of an otherworldly time (!!!) We know space-time with our senses, industry, economy, science, technology, arts, work. Through these... we are interconnected... in space-time... past and future... via the fleeting present. Yet the meaning of the whole eludes us. The otherworldly-time and the otherworldly-space, invite the desire – where our desire aspires to reach them. This is where the Gospel leads us. The path we must follow is Jesus”; see Françoise Dolto – G. Sévérin, *Tὰ Εὐαγγέλια καὶ ἡ πίστις – Ὁ κίνδυνος μᾶς ψυχαναλυτικῆς ματιᾶς*, transl. Elisavet Kouki, Hestia Publications, Athens 2002.

32. All these at the moment when the church time has a different relationship with man than the conventional one. “If it is not ignored, the spiritual and salvific use of time is clearly underestimated, since there are many who believe that here and now, only in this temporal world the existential cycle of man is completed; they reject the existence of a soul, afterlife, resurrection and the kingdom of heaven, ideologies which they consider anachronistic and outdated by modern man, a worshipper and supplicant of both science and technology, which are considered capable of solving all issues [...]. The writer and thinker Christos Malevitsis writes: The human drama is played out between time and eternity... When we understand what time is and what eternity is, then we will understand who we are. What we are seeking in time and why we are seeking eternity...”; D. Theophilou (fr.), <https://www.romfea.gr/katigories/10-apopseis/19141-oxronos-kai-i-pneumatiki-tou-xrisi> [1.10.2023].

the work so that they can then have his or her attention and get on with their lives? During the “save” process, could we really say “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon us”? During “loading”, could we say a “Lord’s Prayer”? During the “install” process, could we restore (reinstall) to our memory those who are in need or have asked us for a prayer of our own?

They used to cross or kiss the letter to be mailed to their children abroad, in the front during a war, etc., reassuring themselves that it would have arrived, to convey their love, to find them well. And now? Has the technical and the fast, the immediate and the sure, set the spirituality of everyday life aside? Will it be so outdated, outmoded, old-fashioned, outside the norms of late modernity, to cross an “e-mail” on our screen before pressing “send”?

Another pastoral concern has to do with the little pieces of paper (the so-called *diptychs*), where we write the names of our people for their health and repose of their souls. In many cases, handwriting has been replaced by having a file on our computer and printing out the names and taking them to the Church. Is that bad? However, our thinking and our memory, which we used to write the names for the memorial service, is most certainly being replaced by “copy – paste – print”.

From this point onwards, we could broaden the debate. Since “the technological instrument is the expression of a thought process and its creation was preceded by a theoretical framework”³³, there is an opportunity nowadays to x-ray the concept of this expression and to diagnose the practical framework in the life that followed and on which it was applied. From the onslaught of the technical spirit, we’ve reached at the dangerous point of perverting the spirit of pastoral practice and theory, and shifting the center of gravity from the Christ-centered, the anthropocentric, and the pastoral-centered to the technocentric.

33. Al. Katsiaras, «Είσοδικόν», *Ἐφημέριος/Efimerios* 5 (September-October 2023), p. 6. Two other texts are not only very helpful on these matters, but also extremely illuminating – the result of profound introspectiveness on behalf of their writer: «Τεχνολογία: ζήτημα (ἀπλῶς) χρήσεως ἢ καὶ φύσεως καὶ στάσεως;», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 90, 3 (2019), pp. 5-17 and «Ἐπιλεγόμενα. Προπατορικὸ ἁμάρτημα καὶ τεχνικὸ πνεῦμα», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 91, 1 (2020), pp. 195-230.

Of course, the task of pastoral practice is not to divide, isolate, and exclude; it is to assist in the governance of the ship of the Church; to help the passengers of the ship of the Church and those wishing to board on it. Thus, from the conclusions it has been reaching at discussing the engineering spirit, it has no intention for a quarrel to break out between “engine-lovers” and “engine-haters”. Obviously, it wishes to settle things in such a way, so that the work of the Church is not adversely affected; that its purpose is not altered; that secularism is not introduced through the back door of our comfort, convenience and ignorance of danger³⁴.

We support our position with some examples that affect the life of the everyday person and, of course, every believer. There is a widely sold “miraculous” robot-scooter that “conscientiously” turns every corner of the house, cleaning, picking up trash, even mopping floors! In his image one can effortlessly think that, in this case, the following biblical dictum is being “tested”: «ἐν ἰδρωτί τοῦ προσώπου σου φαγῆ τὸν ἄρτον σου, ἕως τοῦ ἀποστρέψαι σε εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐξ ἧς ἐλήφθης»³⁵. Someone who knows the inner workings of the texts of the faith can easily realize that this sentence is not so much a commandment or –even worse– a “curse”. Rather, it is another revelation of our corporeality, which underlines the blessing of our materiality. With our fatigue, we keep our body healthy, so that we can provide for our livelihood and therefore remain alive, growing in «σοφία καὶ χάριτι καὶ ἡλικία». With the invasion of the mechanical spirit into our daily life and its mechanical “benefits”, we have avoided

34. Thinking rationally, it is not right to abandon technology “in cold blood”, because in the future we might need it even more. Let us not hiding behind words. At some point, man will go to places off Earth, somewhere in space, where some people will live there, and maybe there will be no paper, no candles, no books in material form. If we want to continue serving people pastorally-ecclesiastically, then the appropriate and corresponding means must be found. Of course, all the above could happen after mature theological reflection, not under the pressure of any necessity and with a deep awareness that the ideal is the existence of material means to help us experience the precious sense of our corporeality. The sound of the spinning paper, the smell of the candle, the fragrance of incense - we can already fully understand in our days the high value of the “handmade” material, not the industrial one, as well as the value for our memory of the scent, aniseed of bread, basil, bay and palm leaves that our Church distributes to us according to the occasion.

35. *Gen.* 3, 19.

“jobs” and “chores”, so that we then have the need to spend our lives in gyms or running in the streets, covering kilometers without any purpose. At this point, a second pastoral thought emerges: I wonder if not today, but maybe tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, there will be a machine that will turn the rosary, making the relevant “count” while we pray, the “exoskeleton” that would make our penances relaxed, simple and pleasant, or whether we would have a “chip” imprinted on a part of our body that would continuously pronounce “Lord have mercy on me”, so that we could enjoy the associated participation by hearing it, we would “embrace” it, with or without objection?

As we have been wondering a lot about what the technical, mechanical spirit means for the Church and for her pastoral work in particular, we think that it might be of assistance for our thinking if we would treat it as the equivalent of the “material spirit”. Thus, what do we as the Church say about the material spirit? Not to submit to it, and by implication not to be secularized, without ignoring that in this context there is also the so-called “secularization”³⁶, which we cannot “reject”, since we are exist into the world. We are using the world, we are living in it, but we do not become “the world” (in its post-Fall sense³⁷)³⁸. Yet, for someone to succeed in knowing this spirit and diagnosing the ways it influences life (in this

36. Cf. Al. M. Stavropoulos, *Ἐπιστήμη καὶ τέχνη τῆς ποιμαντικῆς*, *op.cit.*, p. 82, note 84.

37. Cf. *John* 16, 32-33: «ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔξετε· ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον».

38. Thus, just as the material spirit has experienced a change, a “good alteration” and a new meaning in the Church since its archaic times, similarly, the *pastoral-governmental* must contribute by proposing its use, as the Church wants it and benefits its faithful, by transforming the existing technological means according to its own fearless “will”, under the prism that the spiritual basis of the Church’s experience does not harm anyone but simply transcends and utilizes it, without altering itself, encapsulated from external factors. In fact, the text that puts the technical-mechanical-mechanistic spirit in its proper place is the awe-inspiring Gospel of Judgment. It is here that once again God’s charity reveals to us the secrets of eternal life. It is striking the fact that it does not speak of money and the economic spirit, which were of prime importance for the societies since their earliest beginnings, it does not ask for great technical works and miraculous constructions, which have always impressed; on the contrary, with compelling simplicity, it asks for the human touch, for saving love towards the fellow human being, towards the neighbor, towards anyone in need.

case, church life), he or she must obviously “possess” it metaphorically, so that will eventually possess literally.

A further pastoral consideration has to do –regardless of whether the person who does not know about technology or does not know how to have access to it– will ever be added to the “illiterate neighbor” - whether the so-called technologically illiterate will be the object of the pastoral concern of our Church³⁹. Will those who do not have access to –and the ability to use– technological means be the new “poor of God”, the new “minimal” brothers? Of course, again, what the Gospel will primarily seek, through the *digital literacy* of the people, will be the human approach, the comforting touch, the manifestation of the glorious, unconditional, unpretentious and selfless Christian love.

Because of the people’s dependence, especially of the younger ones, on technology, the unconditional surrender to the technical spirit, especially as opposed to the Holy Spirit, and in relation to the human spirit (mentally and physically), seems to be one of the major issues that Pastoralism will have to face after the late modernity’s end, the *future Pastoralism*.

The “interesting” and “beautiful” thing is, that the reflections that are being developed by *Θεολογία/Theologia*, as a conference, a journal, a science, a concept, and an attitude of life, can relate to and “nudge” (as they used to say in the old days – that is, a decade ago) social media, to become a major concern of all sciences, every social practice, giving the satisfaction of the ontological offer to Man, and to our own Pastoral theory and practice.

As we are slowly moving to conclude the exposition of our thoughts, we would like to site a few lyrics from a secular song – “What You Don’t Understand”⁴⁰: “Come over here and turn off the computer / say

39. In 2015, a major conference was held centered on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoralism (<http://www.dmopc15.com/el/> [1.10.2023]), which highlighted, among other things, the need for the Church to explore and train its staff in digital literacy (in order to better understand digital media and their use in Pastoralism), as well as how the concept of “virtual reality” is linked to the concept of “virtual holiness”, “virtual spiritual life” and “virtual relationships”.

40. «Τί δὲν καταλαβαίνεις», interpreted by Arleta (2018), with lyrics by Sunny Baltzi and music by Lakis Papadopoulos from the album CD Single, in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>

we're kids now and you don't have a router / Leave the computer, leave the computer // *Tonight I've become an enemy with technology* / leave the keyboard and the excuse. / You don't have a battery, stop the excuse. / *I don't want screens but candles, beautiful light to shine* / to look into your eyes when they're dark, / hands to hold you when they're dark. / Come over here and don't e-mail me / because I don't have internet, what don't you understand. / What don't you understand, *you are living in the other room*".

Basically, the theme of the Conference: "Orthodox Theology *on the way* to the 'intangible reality' of late modernity" is very special and probably anticipates the crucial debate of the next 100 years. As for our topic, one can ask a pseudo-question: From the moment that Technology and the technical spirit –its guiding force– provides us with conveniences and facilitates every aspect of our lives, is it not foolish, elitist and incomprehensible for the Pastoral Church to question and perhaps even exclude this convenience? Would it not facilitate its work to an enormous extent? Would it not take it to another level⁴¹?

An answer to this could be the following: on the one hand, there is the deep ascetic spirit⁴² that characterizes the Church, acting both therapeutically and preventively for man as a psychosomatic unity; on the other hand, the question sounds like: "why does not the Church's Pastoralism accept, unreservedly and uncritically, the guardianship, pressure, violence, even rape of its "being" by the technical spirit, since there may be... collateral benefits?". The answer could even be accompanied by some snapshots of our everyday life: Our mobile phone is ringing, and feel compelled to answer "in a hurry", becoming slaves to the so-called telecommunication "facility". We put down our spoon, swallowing quickly, possibly without masticating it, in order to answer

com/watch?v=H88HAKbxKUQ [10.10.2023].

41. Spirituality is one of Pastoralism's essential qualities. "We consider the results of technological applications to be positive when they meet the real human needs indicated by Spirituality. Otherwise, when Technology is the underlying cause of our fictitious needs for the purpose of profit only, it is then judged as Anti-Humanist and is condemned"; Str. Theodosiou, «Ἐπιστήμη, Θεολογία, τεχνολογία καὶ κοινωνία», op.cit., p. 68.

42. Cf. Al. M. Stavropoulos, «Ἀσκήση καὶ Τεχνολογία», *Ἐφημέριος/Εἰσημέριος* 4 (1999), pp. 22-23.

the phone. And if we don't do this, we certainly stop, putting aside our plate, to see on the caller ID who is calling us. Also, at other times, we do not even see the food we are eating, because our eyes are fixed on the film on the television or on the "shorts" succeeding each other "in the blink of an eye", on the tablet or the game we are playing on our mobile phone, behind or next to our plate, forever missing the pleasurable experience and contemplation of the meal⁴³.

We're even interrupting or "getting lost" in the conversation with our interlocutor, relative, friend, acquaintance or stranger, to see what it lies behind every "beep", every notification sound on our mobile phone or smart watch, the e-mail, "Viber", "Messenger", "What's up", "TikTok", "Google" and thousands of other applications and games. The scene reminds us of the lyrics of a well-known songwriter, who says something about an advertisement for a Greek beer⁴⁴: "I know that everyone believes in mirrors / in screens, in photocopies and projections. // But I'm going to tear my mirror to pieces. / I know that what it's hiding behind is you. // You who look through your black eyes / to reflect only me in life". («Ξέρω πώς όλοι πια πιστεύουν σε καθρέφτες / σε όθόνες, σε φωτοτυπίες και προβολείς. // Μά εγώ θά κάνω τόν καθρέφτη μου κομμάτια. / Ξέρω ότι αυτό πού πίσω του κρύβει, είσαι έσύ. // Έσύ πού φάχνεις μέσ' στα μαύρα σου τά μάτια / νά καθρεφτίζεις μόνο έμένα στην ζωή»). All the above are the things we somehow want to avoid in our church life in every historical era.

Pastoralism as Practical Theology, i.e., as a practical application of theological ideas, speaks on the basis of real human needs and concrete examples from everyday life.

Perhaps now we can better and more easily understand what we've mentioned above about the cautionary and detached position

43. In the same way, with the help of the technical spirit, the mental benefit of exercise is lost. Cf. «"Άσκηση σε χάπι": Οί έπιστήμονες βρήκαν ούσία πού "μιμείται" τά όφέλη τής γυμναστικής», <https://www.oioygeia.gr/eyzoia/epanastatiko-neo-farmako-mimeitaitin-askisi-meionei-to-varos-kai-enischyei-to-myiko-systima/> [1.10.2023]. In contrast to this, we are reading the following: <https://www.cnn.gr/kosmos/story/381583/ta-souidika-sxoleia-afinoun-ta-tablets-kai-epistrefoun-sta-vivlia#lmhbgvknkjcwffpvh8p> [1.10.2023].

44. <https://youtu.be/H0HH9gTESH8> [1.10.2023].

we sometimes have to adopt against the seductive or even subduing presence of the technical spirit. This obviously leads us to think that knowledgeable and sensitive scientists must set limits, draw red lines, and formulate inviolable principles. Perhaps, at this juncture, the time is ripe for us to formulate a charter of human rights against the technology and technical-mechanical spirit, which, for example, will guarantee the right to technological silence and simplicity, as well as its compatibility with human psychosomatic functionality.

Finally, if man is substituted in all aspects of spiritual and indeed pastoral work because of the existence of similar technical possibilities, i.e. in witnessing [preaching or mechanical reading of answers by artificial intelligence (AI) to questions on matters of faith and metaphysics], in society-communication (by sending out heaps of informative e-mails and newsletters), in Worship (with digital means to sing in the absence of chanters or with chanters based on the electronic pamphlet or mechanical chorus), in ministry (delivery of charity parcels by drone, with help received from BoxNow boxes, based on a QR or barcode), then Christian teaching seems to lose its foundation and the meaning of the supreme sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ tends to be distorted in the minds and souls of people: Man, as the image of God, sacrificing for his fellow man as the image of God, aiming at *the image* of God, which is absolute happiness, peace and fullness – in other words, “life without end”, our “lost” Paradise.

We believe that somewhere at this point the Church’s Pastoralism is present, operating and caring during the era of late modernity.