

The Autonomy of Human Nature against the Hidden God: Post-Modernity, Scientific Evolution and Faith

By Rev. Augustinos Bairachtaris*

1. Postmodernity and Modern Man: The Berlin Wall Fall and the Rise of the *Individualized Privacy*

It is a great challenge for today's Church to be able to transmit and decode its anthropological teaching in contemporary society, a society that is marked by the element of transition to the so-called Postmodernity. As a term, Postmodernity is a point of friction and controversy between those who consider it to be a development of Modernity, i.e. introducing history into a new self-contained period, and those who reasonably suspect that it simply is another phase of the same original Modernity¹.

Postmodernity is a quite complex and multidimensional phenomenon, an inclusive term that encompasses the arts, philosophy, ethics, architecture, economics, politics and religion. Postmodernity reveals the events that follow Modernity (and can be traced back in time from 1789 to 1989), i.e. from the time of the Fall of Bastille to the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

Postmodernity's ideological foundations have been the findings of Schleiermacher, Bushnell, Adolf von Harnack, Lindbeck and others, who

* Rev. Augustinos Bairachtaris is an Associate Professor at the Patriarchal University Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete.

1. P. Vassiliadis, "The Universal Claims of Orthodoxy and the Particularity of Witness in a Pluralistic World", in: Em. Clapsis (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation*, WCC – Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Geneva – Brookline 2004, pp. 193-195.

questioned in their studies the dominance of dogma and the role of Christianity in the evolution of human civilization. The belief that each culture has its own language and symbols to describe the deity opened the door to questioning the authority of church preaching, knocking down the clergy's institutional hierarchy from the top of the social pyramid.

One could summarize Postmodernity's basic positions in the following principles: Firstly, the world is in a constant state of transition, and, secondly, there are no such things as fixed and unassailable truths, values, and certainties. Everything can be subjected to scrutiny and fruitful questioning. Therefore, any final, definitive and absolute knowledge is far from reality; man is constantly evolving and everything is relative, depending on the environment in which it evolves.

Modernity has spoken directly about the power of truth without God, while postmodernity has spoken about God without truth. In other words, it relativized the God of religions by highlighting the supreme role of human reason and science. Religions in general have been accused (many times justifiably enough) of causing wars and suffering in world civilization and the earth's population, because of religious fanaticism, intolerance, extreme dogmatism, fundamentalism and heresy hunting. Therefore, the Postmodernity's basic assumptions are the following:

- There is no absolute truth by which society is able to judge the values of life (*denial of absolutization*).
- There are no objective principles that can predetermine what is good and what is bad in human action (*defense of relativity*).
- There are no obligations or duties towards human beings, apart from those imposed by their own conscience.
- *Tolerance of the other and respect for the human beings' autonomy and privacy* is a fundamental pillar of the Postmodern society's foundations.

Moreover, modern society is distinguished by the citizens' right to dispose of their bodies, their whole being, as they wish, based on their absolute freedom, provided that they do not violate state legislation. Individual life has taken precedence over collective life and general conscience. The fruit of the industrial revolution is the transition from a traditional and religiously structured society to one based on critical rationalism.

The people who belong to these generations seek to liberate themselves from the pressures created by the metaphysical beliefs and values of the older generation; at the same time, they seek to break free from the society's traditional, pyramidal hierarchy. They zealously believe in the scientific progress and human evolution. Through this effort, modern society seeks to free itself from the state's, the family's, and church institutions' rigid framework. Thus, society grows up in a way as being "fatherless"; it denies the notion of the God's paternity with all that this implies, and as a "motherless" society, in that it denies the contribution of the institutional Church; it considers it a burden that delays the general social evolution, because of certain *taboo* subjects which the Church does not touch in the public debate.

As we've mentioned above, society has now moved on, demystifying the values of religion; it uses the methodology of *rationalism* and the findings of the natural sciences that focus on the creation and evolution of the world. On the other hand, the Christian Churches, and more generally all religions, seek to fill the existing gap between the historical past of their dominance and the modern present of their absence, without being constantly successful.

For its part, the Church, in order to be able to be a part of the evolving dialogue with the postmodern agents, must learn to listen, to repent, to pray, and then to speak not through preaching, because preaching is addressed to a specific audience, but mainly through the ministerial act of loving the Other: unconditional, open, ecumenical, universal, warm, transparent, loving, illuminating, transformative sacrificial offering. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us, my neighbor is my living altar and my guide to heaven².

Currently, who is my neighbor? Thus, the gate of the temple is immediately opened and embraces the whole of society, as the Church offers itself to all. In other words, the Church should develop its relationships (make

2. See H. A. H. Ignatios IV Hazim, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, "Every human Being is a creation of God", in: Semegnish Asfaw, A. Chehadah, Marian Gh. Simion (eds.), *Just Peace – Orthodox Perspectives*, WCC, Geneva 2012, p. 6: "God created man to love others and to be gracious with other human beings; and that those human beings must not necessarily be followers of my own religion. The more you know the other person, the more you understand and love him".

them personal, in order for the divine energies to be activated through the person), not increasing its authority. Authority seeks the obedience of the other, while relationship cultivates love and is cultivated by it. The word of the Church, following its archetype which is Christ, must be a word of love, not of command.

The Church ought to be present and honest in the public debate, not unloved or unwanted. In this way, it will not sacrifice its truth in a mesh of pluralism for fear of syncretism; instead, it will present its truth through its experience. If her experience is true (which is), it will remain so for eternity, like the light of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, where Christ did not take or bring forth something he had not already in His possession; He revealed something that his disciples could not perceive until that moment with their physical eyes. Since the whole world participates in the saving plan of God's economy, it follows that the Church is called upon to transform the contemporary society ontologically, not superficially. Therefore, the Church must change its narrative and put at the center of its action the suffering servant, the abandoned Jesus, and not its own glorious, imperial past. She should walk with humility towards the Last Days and the Kingdom of Heaven, where there are no thrones, lordships and powers, but only «ἀγγελικαὶ δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τὸ μνημα»^{3!}

2. The Apparent Neutrality of Technological Evolution and the Mutation of the Human Essence

On the occasion of the five hundredth Jubilee of the University of Tübingen in 1977, Professor Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker said: "It is impossible for science, either in its attitude or in its subjects, to escape from dealing with religious matters. And religion must not tolerate the apparent neutrality created by science. It should ask Science: Do you know what are you doing?"⁴.

3. Ἀναστάσιμον ἀπολυτίκιον, ἤχος πλ. β'.

4. J. M. Rees, „Andere Universen – Eine wissenschaftliche Perspektive“, in: T. D. Wabbel

This position is perfectly in line with the reasoning of this conference – that technology and, by extension, artificial intelligence (AI)⁵ are not distinguished by the element of neutrality, but by the fact that they seem to impose a new life attitude, a new transformation of the world and, if we could call it in this way, a new kind of “technical nature”. In other words, we are focusing not on the use of the means of technology in contemporary life, but on the creation of a new spirit, which influences and shapes the essence of contemporary human beings. Thus, our concern is deeply anthropological, religious and scientific.

AI is therefore defined as the interconnection of different scientific fields (computer science, robotics, psychology, logic, neuroscience, engineering, philosophy, linguistics, etc.), aiming at the creation of computer systems with the purpose of simulating human intelligence and behavior. This scientific practice is based on mathematical models and algorithms.

The evolution from engineering to computer science / informatics, which began in the second half of the 20th century, now dominates our lives through the structuring of social life and individual aspirations. The issue that divides contemporary scientific thought is not the good or bad use of technological means, but the impact of technology on the nature of man through the possible modification of his consciousness as a free and self-determined spiritual entity⁶.

As thinking human beings, we have to rise above the dilemma of the two extremes: on the one side, we have the pessimists reeling against technological evolution, those who preach a return to tradition and the past’s “untainted” nature, treating the machine as man’s subordinate and demonic enemy; on the other side, there are the optimists and progressives who “deify” the machine, having full confidence in

(her.), *Im Anfang War (k)ein Gott*, Düsseldorf 2004, p. 51.

5. On this, see St. Russell & P. Norvig, *Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη – Μία σύγχρονη προσέγγιση*, transl. T. Alvas, D. Kartsaklis, F. Skoularikis, Kleidarithmos Publications, Athens 2005; Er. Brynjolfsson & A. McAfee, *Η θαυμαστή εποχή της νέας τεχνολογίας. Έργασία, πρόοδος και ευημερία στα χρόνια των έξυπνων τεχνολογιών*, transl. G. Nathanail, Kritiki Publications, Athens 2016; N. Bostrom, *Superintelligence, Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.

6. N. Nisiotis, *Από την Ύπαρξη στη Συνόπαρξη: Κοινωνία – Τεχνολογία – Θρησκεία*, Maistros Publications, Athens 2004, p. 200.

technological progress, believing that intelligent machines will provide modern man with the answers he is desperately seeking⁷.

The super-machine, for the time being, at least, has not replaced man, because it has no ontological existence. However, in certain work sectors it has already replaced man, particularly in the field of industrial automation. Nevertheless, the key question is whether technology through AI has an impact on the man's ontological status⁸. Questions such as: "What will be the future of human identity? Can humans be equated with the AI's machine function?" are some of the issues that are currently concern the scientific and research community worldwide⁹. Why are we saying this? Because the new super-machines operate beyond the limits of an average human being, reaching those of miracle in front of both initiated people and uninitiated ones. The modern man sees technology as opening to him, easily and effortlessly, unlimited horizons. Nevertheless, technical engineering has (in its turn) succumbed to the altar of the profit of the sponsors' financial resources; thus, society is becoming increasingly voracious in its consumption and over-dependent on the pleasures provided by technology, experiencing an insatiable eudaimonism. Computers seduce humans, yet their anxiety is growing: man's deepest thinking, his imagination and human intelligence are being drugged.

Herein lies the technology's deepest problem: man is inspired more by something heterogeneous and external and not by his intrinsic and self-reliant self-consciousness provided by his being. The element that distinguishes man from the machine is the abstract –yet logically structured– thinking, while the machine is distinguished for the accumulated and structurally organized information that it has been programmed to receive from man¹⁰.

7. U. Eco, *Χρονικά μίας ρευστής κοινωνίας*, transl. Efi Kallafatidi, Psychogios Publications, Athens 2016, p. 17.

8. *Report of COMEST on Robotics Ethics*, World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology, Unesco, Paris 2017, pp. 9-19.

9. St. Giagkazoglou, «Θεολογία και Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 91, 3 (2020), pp. 95-124, here p. 99.

10. When talking about robots, we should distinguish two major categories: a) the deterministic robots, which operate on the basis of the data they have already received; as a result, their mode of operation is predictable, and

To conclude: From the moment that AI can and does influence (directly and indirectly) man's psychological disposition and his perception of the nature of things, then historical religions cannot ignore the role of technology in shaping life. Once again, the relative dichotomy between creator and creation is put forward, only in this particular case we are not talking about God and man as "*in his image and likeness*", but about human intelligence (the creator) and artificial intelligence (the creation). As long as the balance between the two is maintained, the development of technology can remain human. However, as soon as technology is developing uncontrollably and unlimitlessly, then stricter criteria are required from the ethical point of view, so that the existence and freedom of man is not under threat.

In order for that to be achieved, the special committees have proposed that the technology and the questions raised by its rapid development must be included in the basic bioethical principles. These are *autonomy*, *utility*, and *justice*. In other words, through autonomy, man must maintain intact his right to freely and independently decide if he wants to cooperate with machines or refuses to do so. Utility refers to the extent to which technology through intelligent machines helps and acts

b) the cognitive robots, which operate autonomously, learning from their "experiences" and the information they receive from their environment. In the latter case, their way of reacting is unpredictable. This second category of intelligent machines raises many questions in relation to ethics, because their behavior cannot be predicted; their use is entirely dependent on the ethics and ideals of the group controlling them. In this case, who can prevent the abuse of the robots' functions and abilities to the detriment of humanity? On the other hand, we do not have the right to totally ban the freedom of research. It is therefore necessary for us to set, as it's already happened, certain ethical criteria on the basis of which the design and production of robots should take place. Such principles are, for example, inclusion, accountability, reversibility, and traceability. The first principle allows to stakeholders having access to all relevant information concerning the design, construction and use of robots; the second one concerns the knowledge of the impact of robotics on present and future generations; the third principle involves the possibility of continuous control and reversibility to a prior, safer phase of robot production; and the last one allows either the complete cancellation of machine production or the overriding of all the above steps. See the excellent contribution by Prof. Petros Panagiotopoulos, «Χριστιανική Θεολογία και σύγχρονη τεχνολογία: Ἡ τιμὴ ἐπὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον νὰ διαβαίνει», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 91, 3 (2020), pp. 59-94. See also B. Siciliano & O. Khatib (eds.), *Springer Handbook of Robotics*, Springer, Berlin – Heidelberg 2008, p. 1499 ff.

in the interest of humanity, and justice is linked to equal and fair access for all to the use of robots, i.e. for not permitting to the economically powerful having exclusive access to them¹¹.

The times we are living in are perhaps critical - the era of the triumph of technology and the digital revolution, where both sides, namely the sciences and religions, are called upon to conduct an honest dialogue based on the data and information of the current knowledge. Man has always sought to decipher the world, to interpret the way and form of the universe's functioning, the cosmic whole. Clearly, and beyond any qualms, natural scientists should be proud of the achievements of technology and of the analysis of the elements of matter and the fundamental forces of physical reality, as well as of what they have so far contributed to the evolution of world civilization.

Despite all these, this success should not lead them to a narcissistic attitude, or to an *a priori* and collective rejection of the element of human religiosity. Science –and digital technology in particular– must not become a tool of war against religion; this would abolish the fundamental basis on which the Enlightenment was founded, namely the freedom of thought¹². Modern man, wanting to get rid of the norms and rules of the institutional, medieval Church and the model of the anthropomorphic God, completely rejected any reference to the “traditional” God, while at the same time he absolutized knowledge, study, and scientific observation as elements of the human intellect, replacing God with man. Descartes's famous dictum “Cogito, ergo sum” has been the fundamental principle of the transition to the age of modernity, having as its ultimate goal the absolute domination and use of nature for the benefit of man. In this process, man has desacralized nature and sacralized engineering – and now, it's technology's turn. This kind of belief is called *scientism*, with R. Dawkins¹³ as its main exponent.

11. P. Panagiotopoulos, «Χριστιανική Θεολογία και σύγχρονη τεχνολογία: Ἡ τιμὴ ἐπὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον νὰ διαβαίνει», op.cit., p. 71.

12. A. McGrath & Johanna Collicut McGrath, *Τὸ λυκόφως τοῦ ἀθεϊσμοῦ*, transl. B. Adrachtas, Paraskevi Triantafyllopoulou, Ouranos Publications, Athens 2010, pp. 306-315. See also A. McGrath, *L'illusione di Dawkins. Il fondamentalismo ateo e la negazione del divino*, Alfa & Omega, Caltanissetta 2007.

13. R. Dawkins, *L'illusione di Dio. Le ragioni per non credere*, transl. Laura Serra, Monda-

Still, a key initial question is the following: What is real and what is reality? Is it possible for science and technology to have the exclusive privilege of the omnipotent human reason? In other words, can the natural sciences alone grasp and interpret the entire reality, without the slightest aid coming from philosophy, linguistics, theology, anthropology and the other humanities? Are we as global humanity facing a change of the existing worldview, looking for the “posthuman” in a “metaverse”? Is the biblical worldview included in this process or it is excluded from it? Who and why has absolutely identified science and technological development with a materialistic, de-spiritualized and anti-clerical ideology, entrenched behind its own “scientific dogmas”?

Perhaps the fact that, in the course of history, religious thinking has been characterized by an initial distrust of scientific progress is responsible for this behavior. Thus, initially the Enlightenment and afterwards the industrial revolution welcomed with optimism the domination of mechanical man over the forces of nature and promoted tolerance and flexibility over the moral principles that until then had prevailed.

In this context, Stephen Hawking attempted to establish the *Grand Unified Theory*¹⁴, thinking that he would be able to prove through physics two things: firstly, what holds the world together internally, and secondly, that the presence of a Creator God is not necessary; the universe is capable of explaining itself. We can therefore understand that within this model of observation and experimentation there is no room for the meta-empirical element, religion and God¹⁵.

Also, let's not forget that the findings of the natural sciences are based on the principle of uncertainty and statistical probability. Every scientific proposition is provisional, because it may or may not be verified. In any case, science and technology are based on the autonomy of things and on the emancipation from the past myths and cosmogonies¹⁶.

dori, Milano 2007, p. 62.

14. St. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Bing Bang to Black Holes*, Bantam Books, Toronto 1988, pp. 175, 218.

15. H. Küng, *Η αρχή των πάντων – φυσικές επιστήμες και θρησκεία*, transl. Ev. Theodorou, Ouranos Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 57-62.

16. Georges Bataille, *Θεωρία της Θρησκείας*, transl. Ch. Gemeliaris, Ypsilon Publications, Athens 2002, pp. 94-95.

By what right, therefore, are the findings of rational understanding are judged as superior to the empirical knowledge of the senses and faith? How is it possible to isolate one part of human nature and, based on that, attempting to explain the whole? How can science and technology explain friendship, love, trust, justice? Why is the objectivity of experimental sciences perfectly identified with truth, excluding man's thymic, will, emotion, imagination, faith¹⁷?

3. Technological Development and the Modern Man: The Science's Subjectivism and the Element of Faith

In the 20th century, new technologies has been undoubtedly developing at a great speed, eventually leading on the invention and use of intelligent machines. Similarly, the international community has developed various institutions and ethical and moral committees, which constantly monitor the consequences of the presence of machines in human life. Automation in industry, improved product quality, freeing workers from heavy and unhealthy work, the application of telesurgery, increased agricultural productivity, contribution to education, etc. are just some of the areas where machines have made a positive and tangible contribution. Yet, behind every positive contribution there is a corresponding underlying concern, lest we as a human society lead to a hybrid one, resulting in social unrest and destabilization.

A rather urgent concern, which divides the contemporary scientific community, is the range of autonomy of intelligent machines, their "training" to mimic social and emotional states of the human environment, their evolution in military industry, as well as their contribution to the battlefields (e.g., the use of drones and the machines' decision making on behalf of humans when required by them, have transformed both the

17. As faith in God, Saint Isaac the Syrian mentions the following: "Faith is a gift of divine grace, and is born in the mind. It is an inward movement which fills us with certainty of those realities which cannot be ascertained by paper and the letters of the alphabet, but can be known by the faithful's mind". See Isaac the Syrian, *Άσκητικά*, vol. 2; *Λόγοι Α'- Γ'*, transl. N. Kavvadas, Thesvitis Publications, Thira 2006, p. 79.

way battles are fought and the ethics and laws of war). In other words, the degree of the machines' "anthropomorphism" is problematic. It is therefore imperative for us to consider the extent of the influence and use of intelligent machines in society, so that values such as equality, personal integrity and justice are not affected. In addition, the political dimension of the issue should also be examined; in the name of the citizens' security and the fight against terrorism, the use of smart machines is likely to disrespect and violate the relevant legal framework defining and safeguarding the public sphere¹⁸.

After all these, we can claim that technology cannot be considered morally neutral. Its value is determined according to its contribution to the life of modern man, who is overly addicted to speed, automated life and the quick results he demands on a daily basis. In the face of this form of life, the role of religion is therefore questioned and challenged. The ethics of AI, Robotic ethics, the Human Enhancement ethics and trans-humanism are related aspects of the same issue, i.e. the influence of technological development on modern man, which, in conjunction with the new bioethical concerns that have already developed, are an integral part of the broader bioethics¹⁹.

Science claims an autonomous, independent human being; therefore, it obviously rejects the institutional church as a religious, collective expression because it is based on obedience and a strict system of structured hierarchy. As long as religions will seek to hetero-determine man's life by imposing "unquestionable" rules, the sciences will therefore insist on freeing man from such situations through the use of rationalism. In other words, the man of Modernity and the sciences is the mature

18. On this, see R. van Est *et al.*, *Human Rights in the robot age: Challenges arising from the use of robotics, artificial intelligence, and virtual and augmented reality*, Rathenau Instituut, Hague 2017.

19. For this subject, see Ap. Nikolaidis, *Από τη Γένεση στη γενετική. Έγχειρίδιο Βιοηθικής*, Grigoris Publications, Athens 2006; Archim. Nikolaos Chatziniolaou (now Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki), *Ελεύθεροι από το γονιδίωμα. Προσεγγίσεις Όρθόδοξης Βιοηθικής*, Kentro Bioithikis kai Deontologias, Athens 2002; M. Vantsos, *Τò ἐπιστημονικά ἐφικτό και τò ἠθικά ὀρθό. Προσεγγίσεις Όρθόδοξης Βιοηθικής*, Ostracon Publishing, Thessaloniki 2016.

citizen, who can use his own mind without being guided by others²⁰.

4. Is Technological Progress Always Human?

Let us move now on to the second question: Is scientific progress always human progress²¹; Is humanity ready to accept progress at any price? More particularly, in the modern times, social progress has become synonymous with economic development²² and, while man is trained from an early age to become a skilled operator of scientific and technological means, he is nonetheless indifferent to the art of love, prayer, justice, solidarity, friendship. Apart from their positive aspects, almost all of the scientific developments in informatics, genetics, economics, technology, medicine, have also undesirable and negative effects. Modernity's belief that the scientific man through technology will solve all problems, giving answers to the questions of creation, life and death, has proved to be, if not wrong, at least very optimistic. The spread of poverty, illiteracy, infectious diseases, the development of the weapons industry, the constantly worsening ecological crisis, and the spike of nuclear and space competition are just a few examples proving that the modern man model has partly failed.

However, science and faith have not ceased to weigh life fairly, to pose great and honest problems, to seek the genuine and authentic in the manifestations of life and creation. Thus, our next view is that both technology and theology are in need of being self-critical. Both sides should maintain an attitude of moderation, exchange of views and dialogue, rejecting the dogma of authority. The foundation and meaning of reality cannot be either the one or the other; they are both of them. We must explore the complementarity between science, technology and theology. Therefore, instead of the model of conflict, fusion and rejection,

20. J. H. Brooke, *Ἐπιστήμη καὶ θρησκεία*, transl. Vasiliki Vasaki, Crete University Press, Herakleion 2008, pp. 188-234.

21. H. Küng, *Ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων*, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

22. C. Castoriadis, *Domaine de l'homme. Les carrefours de labyrinthe*, Seuil, Paris 1986, pp. 138-143.

we are opting for that of complementarity and mutual enrichment of reality for humanity's sake²³.

We live on a very small planet on the edge of one of the 100 billion galaxies that exist, each of which has over 10 billion stars. We rotate around our axis at over a thousand kilometers per hour, while the earth rotates around the sun at over 100,000 kilometers per hour. Meanwhile, our entire solar system moves at 800,000 kilometers an hour around the center of our galaxy. We are obviously unable to grasp this state of things in its entirety, the entire reality we have just described, because of our finite horizon. With the most powerful telescope located in Arizona, with a mirror diameter of 8.4 meters per lens, one can see the light of a candle at a distance of 2.5 million kilometers away; yet, we are still far from observing the limits of the universe's horizon²⁴.

To put it more simply, the enthusiastic vision that had prevailed with the passage from so-called Modernity to Postmodernity, where man, having preached the death of God and having believed in the omnipotence of the human intellect and the neurons of the brain, thought that science would replace religion, thus eliminating the causes of wars and religious rivalries for dominance, with peace finally prevailing alongside the economic prosperity of peoples, did not become a reality. On the contrary, it was understood that the more man studied thoroughly cosmic time and space, penetrating deeper into matter, the more he moved away from himself, from his being. The more powerful man becomes in economic, political, military and scientific terms, the more possessive he becomes. He does not liberate his spirit; he surrounds it with more thoughts, desires and boundless self-centeredness.

Despite the fact of symmetry between mathematics and the laws of nature, science is unable to explain the original cause that animates the universe, attributing it to chance and conjecture. We therefore distinguish between an enigmatic macrocosm and an enigmatic microcosm. Due to his finite logic, man cannot acquire knowledge beyond the spatiotemporal experience provided by the world, which is a creation, i.e. it has a moment of beginning [or, for some others, big bang], and it is not self-created,

23. H. Küng, *Ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων*, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

24. H. Küng, *Ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων*, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

although some natural scientists advocate the self-creation of the universe (Richard Gott and Li Xin Li). Others argue that everything comes from nothing, and that man is an aggregate of coincidences and combinations of millions of protons and neutrons.

But how is it possible for man using physical material things to interpret things metaphysical? Some circles of mathematicians (like an older one in Vienna) consider that all metaphysical experiences are absurd because they cannot be tested, while mathematical and experimental propositions are valid only if they are tested and proven to be real²⁵. On the other hand, there are voices such as that of Emil du Bois Reymond, who had declared that man will never be able to solve definitive questions, such as those related to the source of motion, the essence of matter and energy, the origin of thought and language, the freedom of will and the origin of life. In fact, Nils Stensen, a descendant of a family of Dutch pastors and one of the pioneer anatomists, declared in 1670: “Human evidence is of no use unless God’s grace comes to us from above”²⁶.

Thus, the vital question is the following: What is man’s place in nature, in the infinite, in nothing and in the whole? Can technological progress provide answers to these questions?

The cause of everything, according to theology, lays beyond this design. God is lovingly immanent to the material world, yet without being limited by it, or mixed and confused with it. God is not an idea, nor is Christianity an ideology; He is the Being, the Actual Being, with whom man is related in a state of freedom and love²⁷. Again, God is not simply a higher power, because usually with this phrase we posit a world-centric or sociocentric –not to say naturalistic– conception of the divine. On the contrary, God is a spiritual reality, known only through the direct experience of man’s free consciousness²⁸.

25. H. Küng, *Ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων*, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

26. R. Chiaberge, *Τὸ Σωματίδιο τοῦ Θεοῦ – Ἀπὸ τὸ Big Bang μέχρι τὴ θρησκεία, τὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὴ Θεωρία τῶν Χορδῶν*, transl. G. Tsitsovits, Periplous Publications, Athens 2009, p. 27.

27. P. Evdokimov, *Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία*, transl. Ag. T. Mourtzopoulos, Rigopoulos Publications, Thessaloniki 1972, p. 99.

28. N. Berdyaeu, *Θεῖον καὶ Ἀνθρώπινον – Ἡ ὑπαρξιακὴ διαλεκτικὴ τῶν σχέσις*, transl. P. Antoniadou, Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2000, p. 21.

The question that arises between the sciences and theology is if a Creator God interferes in the way the cosmic universe works. This principle cannot be accepted meritoriously by a great portion of natural scientists; the latter ones deny the existence of an omnipotent, personal, and anthropomorphic God. In our opinion, this exactly is the moment of self-criticism for the science of theology and for the Church itself, which is related to the way the biblical text is interpreted and used. Perhaps, it could be proved helpful for both sides to consider God not as the creator of the universe, placed at a specific moment in time in the past, but as eternally into the world, as the source and beginning of creative energy, and as an eternal into man's consciousness, as law and spirit.

Modernity has spoken forcefully about the power of truth unmediated by God; Postmodernity has spoken about God, rejecting the notion of truth. In other words, the ideological turn that both movements made was epoch-making; they "relativized" the God's role in history. How did they manage to accomplish this? On the one hand, by highlighting the superior role of science and technological development as a product of the human intellect; on the other hand, by developing an "atheistic faith" centered on human ability for rational thought.

At the same time, and in the name of absolute freedom, the modern social trends allow people to treat their bodies as they wish, rejecting the restrictions and values that have been set by the family, cultural, social or national environment. Thus, individuality has taken precedence over collective life and general consciousness. Technological development, digital reality, AI and biotechnology seek to reproduce a human being who is healthy, perfectly predictable, manageable and tending towards functional "perfection".

Therefore, we could observe an *absorption* of the human nature, as Eutychius would have put it, by the "nature of technology", which has replaced divine nature. How tragic, but also how true, Nicolai Berdyaev's words are, when he says that man's dehumanization follows two directions: one goes towards the naturalistic conception, and the other towards the technocratic one. In both cases, man is dissolved either as a creation of nature or as a creation of the machine. The

concept of the human person is lost, because the inner concept of the person disappears, which is gradually replaced by the machine²⁹.

Thus, we are witnessing the projection of a new, digital, personality with a strong and inviolable password and a digital sociability that is limited to photos and videos on social media. Technological development is based on communication, yet it is deprived of society³⁰. In other words, technological progress has collectively changed the essence of man from a social being to a solitary being. Modern man has become totally dependent on the use of technology; this dependence has led him to a state of subordination and spiritual paralysis. Daily but imperceptibly, the technology's dynamic influence leads to the loss of human freedom; when and wherever society and the relationship between people, the building block of freedom, is absent, man lives independently of his neighbor and environment. Thus, freedom is expressed as a meeting of persons³¹. On the contrary, individual independence activates personal profit and self-interest as valuable principles. In other words, we are living in a liberal and peaceful environment, but one characterized by alienation and indifference to one another³². We share a non-communal life, exchanging hostile glances only when our personal interests are threatened.

5. *Internet Humanity*, the Ethics of Responsibility and the Church's Role in Contemporary Society

With the uncontrolled opening up of space-time by the achievements of technology and science in general, man found himself in a state of

29. N. Berdyaev, *Τὸ πεπρωμένο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὸ σύγχρονο κόσμος*, transl. Eytychia Gioultsi, Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1980, pp. 38-41.

30. Chrysostomos Savvatos, Metropolitan of Messinia, *Ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἡ ἀνάπτυξη τῆς σύγχρονης τεχνολογίας. Μία πρόκληση γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Θεολογία*, Kalamata 2019, p. 32.

31. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew I, *Συνάντηση μετὰ τὸ Μυστήριον – Μία σύγχρονη ἀνάγνωση τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2011, p. 167.

32. Chr. Arvanitis, *Θρησκεία, ἰδεολογία, πολιτισμὸς στὴ σύγχρονη ἐποχὴ*, Epikentro Publications, Thessaloniki 2020, p. 13.

uncertainty and increasingly disoriented³³. This disorientation gap is filled by faith, which has nothing to offer in terms of scientific information, but it does have to offer a lot in terms of understanding reality and primarily treating many internal problems of human existence. The choice of faith on the part of man is, of course, purely a matter of personal freedom and will, and is in no way, as some have claimed, a “spiritual disease and weakness”. Faith, and by extension the Church, gives modern man a sense of security in a vast universe.

On the other hand, technology and the natural sciences should work not towards proving that God exists, but understanding the workings of the universe, leaving room for the biblical narrative. Through the language of worship, religion seeks the unifications of the objective with the subjective. At this point, we must distinguish the element of fiction and the anthropomorphic representation of the divine from the infinite, immeasurable, undiscovered God, who, as an archetypal light, illuminates, warms, heals, builds creation. According to our theology, the whole comes from the first creative cause of causes, i.e. the Creator God.

Although we say that he is a person, God is not just a person among others; He is something that transcends the concept of a person, just as He even transcends the concept of the non-person. In fact, Maximus the Confessor, speaking of the way that man comprehends the divine nature while he is seeking to grasp the concept of God, emphasizes that *not being* is more appropriate than *being*³⁴. That is, indescribability and discursive inability is more akin to the nature of God than definability, because God exists within contradictions and strangeness³⁵. And like God, man as His creation is a living contrast moving between the finite and the infinite. This means that God contracts before human wisdom and expands in the mystical life; or else, He is hidden by being revealed and is revealed by being hidden. He surrounds the world and He is surrounded by it

33. N. Elias, *Time: An Essay*, Blackwell, Oxford & Cambridge 1993, p. 69.

34. Maximus the Confessor, *Μυσταγωγία*, PG 91, 664 A-B: «καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὸ μὴ εἶναι μᾶλλον, διὰ τὸ ὑπερεῖναι, ὡς οἰκειότερον ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ λεγόμενον προσιόμενος».

35. R. Bultman, *Ἰπαρξὴ καὶ πίστις – Δοκίμια Ἑρμηνευτικῆς Θεολογίας*, transl. F. Terzaki, Artos Zois Publications, Athens 1995, p. 163: “God must be a hidden and mysterious God, full of contradictions and enigmas. Otherwise, our inner life would become static, and we would lose the possibility of experiencing the fullness of life”.

without being identified with it; He is neither a “super-terrestrial” nor an “inter-terrestrial” being. God’s primacy over the world is not temporal but ontological. However much we may have seen part of His infinite nature, by divine dispensation, we should never boast of it. From the moment that His nature is infinite, so our knowledge of Him must be infinite; never static and immovable but always in a state of eagerness and spiritual alertness, to be set anew at the beginning. This explains why man, no matter how deeply has penetrated in the mystery of God, he will never be able to entirely comprehend Him³⁶. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I characteristically states in this regard: “The divine essence is completely unknown, inaccessible, invisible, and inexpressible to the human mind [...] the apophatic path excludes the possibility of understanding God through the intellect, since He always transcends human knowledge and dogmatic formulation”³⁷.

Thus, although the knowledge of God cannot occur without the human intellect, it nevertheless cannot be achieved solely through it – or because of it: between God and man there is *the divine concealment*³⁸. God, in His concealment, remains imperceptible, inconceivable, and inexpressible, revealing Himself only when and to whom He Himself wishes to do so. It is no coincidence that the language of poetry is closer and more akin to the ascetic and mystical practice and spirituality of the Church than the scientific language, seeking to ascribe words and concepts with an objective meaning. Moreover, there cannot be such a thing as “objective spirituality” in life; spirituality is always subjective. On the top of that, it comes into conflict with the objectification of the spirit. For this reason, we would say that spirituality is not of this world; it invades the present world. In other words, spirituality is a complex condition; the two elements –the divine and the human– coexist without one absorbing, alter, divide, or separate the other. Man is not demoted; he is transformed.

The Church has received the call to carry out God’s plan of healing and

36. H. Küng, *Ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων*, *op.cit.*, pp. 235-238.

37. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew I, *Συνάντηση μετὰ τὸ Μυστήριον – Μία σύγχρονη ἀνάγνωση τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας*, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

38. *Matthew* 11, 25: «Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν: Ἐξομολογοῦμαι σοι, πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἔκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις».

reconciliation for the world, not to condemn it. Throughout the course of history, whenever the Church has played the role of the accuser against “godless” science, it has been defeated³⁹. Therefore, the Church’s basic duty is to protect life and express an authentic morality, not of hollow preaching but of the responsibility ethics that refers to the integrity of man, his neighbor, and the environment. This responsibility ethics are based on four ontological pillars: a) person, b) freedom, c) justice, and d) love.

The Church, therefore, should not avoid but rather utilize the scientific findings and discoveries, not to convince people that God exists, but to be able to converse and empathize with contemporary man, and to listen to him. The Anglican theologian and physicist John Polkinghorne has expressed this idea exceptionally well, saying that scientists and theologians can work together to understand the world, while being aware of the vast ocean of truth that lies unexplored before them⁴⁰. Faced with this, the Church is nowadays called to perceive the present society as that leaven, as the primary material, into which the Holy Spirit will infuse the Lord’s theandric body to transform the world through the Eucharist.

Another thing we can observe is that unlimited growth has significantly contributed to an individualistic cultural model. The practice of economic liberalism, the well-known “laissez faire, laissez passer”, is also reflected in the realm of beliefs, faith, free choice, ideology, and generally, contemporary social culture. Thus, Postmodernity does not deny man’s faith in God as a natural necessity or personal expression on an individual level⁴¹; however, it does deny faith that is transmitted by any collective, institutional body that seeks to impose itself on man through dogmatic teachings⁴².

39. R. Chiaberge, *Τὸ Σωματίδιο τοῦ Θεοῦ*, *op.cit.*, pp. 147-149.

40. J. Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1996, p. 72.

41. How simply but also how forcefully Basil, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Iviron, raises the question of faith in human nature, saying: “Just as man needs oxygen for this life, so he needs the power of faith for eternal life [...]. As God we often worship not God, but an idol. And as faith we call not the boldness of abandonment and unconditional trust in Him, but a transaction of interest, which we regulate according to our will. This is not faith; it is witchcraft that seeks to subjugate God to man”. See Archim. Vasileios, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Iviron, *Φῶς Χριστοῦ Φαίνει Πᾶσι*, Iviron Holy Monastery Publications, Karyes 2002, pp. 105, 107.

42. Chr. Arvanitis, *Θρησκεία καὶ πολιτικός Φιλελευθερισμός*, Harnos Publications,

Of course, if one considers the extremely aggressive missionary activity of Western Christianity in Africa and Asia, combined with the misanthropic colonial model of governance and political expansion of the imperial European powers in the world, then he is right... Therefore, Postmodernity has indeed brought to the fore a great and substantial challenge for global Christianity: Can the Church change? Can it repent for its historical mistakes? Or, in natural terms, can the Church “evolve” into something else, corresponding to the assumption that modern man is experiencing an existential tragedy, perhaps even schizophrenia, for which the Church may bear some responsibility? Let these questions not surprise anyone, because man’s relationship with God is based on conversion, or, rather, on repentance and forgiveness; a free person is one who repents, is freed from certainties, strives daily to find his bearings, and is not distracted by the arrogant belief that he is the owner of the divine grace and salvation⁴³. In order for someone to truly experience God’s freedom, that is, the loving union with Him, one must abandon all attachment to principles and perceptions asserting that man meritocratically “possesses” divine grace! This freedom, which is based on the experience of God, presupposes a conversion, a repositioning of the center of our lives, which must be continuous and incomplete: the more we approach to God, the more we realize our insignificance⁴⁴.

All of us, without no exception –believers, non-believers, indifferent, atheists, theists, creators, fundamentalists, conservatives, progressives–, are part of the internet humanity, and that is something that cannot be changed. What can be changed, though, is for the Christian Church to

Athens 2019, pp. 231-249; see also Fr. Collins, *Ἡ γλῶσσα τοῦ Θεοῦ*, transl. Thr. Ketseas, Papazisis Publications, Athens 2009, pp. 172-180.

43. K. Ware, *Ἡ ἐντὸς ἡμῶν Βασιλεία*, transl. I. Roilidis, Akritas Publications, Athens 2006, pp. 82-83: “Repentance is not a paroxysm of remorse and self-pity; it is a conversion, a repositioning of the center of our lives in the Holy Trinity [...] it is not the feeling that someone has reached to a dead end; it is a way through which they will get out of it. It is not self-hatred, but confirmation of my true self, created in the image of God. Repentance means that I look not downwards, at my own shortcomings, but upwards, at the love of God. Not looking back and blaming myself, but looking forward with confidence. Repentance is not seeing why I failed to become something, but what I can still become with the Grace of Christ”.

44. M. C. D’Arcy, *A Monument to Saint Augustine*, Sheed & Ward, London 1930, p. 108.

promote, through modern means and timely discourse, the prospect of freedom as an unsaturated and non-fissionable society of persons. This freedom is based on love; it has nothing to do with the autonomy provided by modern life. In contrast to the secular autonomy, the Church promotes the heteronomy of freedom based on sacrificial love as an integral part of the social life.

Furthermore, the Church is often unable to keep pace with technology, because it is a product of the pre-technological world and the pre-modern period. Therefore, its overall perception of man and the world completely differs from that of technology. The theologians' approach should be eschatological and anthropocentric, and in no way apologetic or accusatory. At the same time, they are not entitled to deny natural scientists their right to searching for truth and knowledge. However, they can criticize the laboratory methods used by scientists when life itself is threatened or endangered.

Science responds by saying that the world derives its meaning from its own matter, from itself, from its being, and not from some external factor, such as the creator God. On the other hand, the Church is called not to rewrite the Ten Commandments using a computer program, but to re-engage and re-formulate the concepts of life, death, love, consciousness, wisdom, reconciliation, justice, solidarity, and creation related to social reality, which is in a constant state of rapid changes.

Science and faith have different starting points: The former starts from ignorance, doubt, and the unexpected, while the latter starts from certainty, trust, underlying knowledge, and experience. When these two paths have different principles as their launching pad, how is it possible for them to meet at the same point (at zero point), reaching at the same conclusion? Can these two elements, faith and science, which are seemingly opposed to each other, coexist using different methods? And if so, to what an extent?

In one of his last interviews, Dimitris Nanopoulos, Professor Emeritus of Theoretical Physics, said the following: "We are living in an incredibly interesting era, in which the human species is rapidly evolving through the accumulated knowledge of centuries. The universe will never die, because it will continue to expand. On the other hand, humans are

changing and transforming into a biotechnology hybrid. Therefore, Earth will be transformed into a technology park, and colonization of Mars will be a reality and not a science fiction scenario”⁴⁵.

Therefore, our final question is the following: Currently, what are the dominant value codes? Is humanity in danger of losing its essential autonomy to algorithms, digitization, and artificial intelligence? The fears of the “technophobes” against the “transhumanists”, who believe in a liberated and joyful humanity thanks to technological progress, are well-founded⁴⁶? Can the Christian Church and man’s faith in God the Creator act as a counterweight to the reservations, expectations, and plans of technology? At the end of the day, what is exactly what we want? A sacred that withdraws into itself, or a sacred that opens up to the world?

45. <https://www.lifo.gr/proswpa/athenians/dimitris-nanopoylos-i-alithini-epanastasi-pragmatopoietai-me-myalo> [29.9.2023].

46. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός Ανθρωπισμός. Εικονιστικό ύποκείμενο και τεχνητή νοημοσύνη*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019, p. 102.