

GMI ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Selamat Karo-Karo¹⁾

¹⁾Darma Agung University, Indonesia

email : selamatkaro@gmail.com

Abstract

Ecclesiology in the Digital Age is the study of theology in the digital age to fulfill its mission. The church continues to engage in theology within its context as a transformation toward realizing the kingdom of God. Challenges and opportunities are maximized. The church, as part of technological development, must respond positively and utilize it optimally as an instrument in realizing the church's mission. Technology assists the church in its fellowship by building member relationships, carrying out missions, promoting programs, and so on. Therefore, human resources must be prepared early. Perhaps this will also support the accelerated revitalization of churches in this quadrennial.

The purpose of this research is to enable the church (GMI) to respond positively to the presence of technology in the digital era as a manifestation of the church's mission. The church as an organism will continuously exist if it promptly utilizes technology to accelerate revitalization toward a church that is financially and theologically independent.

The researcher, acting as the instrument, will conduct the research by collecting primary data through interviews with informants, direct observation, and several documents and literature as secondary data. The key data collection technique will be triangulation (combined), data analysis will be inductive/qualitative, and qualitative research results will emphasize meaning over generalization. Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe, illustrate, explain, and provide more detailed answers to the research problem.

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1. Introduction

The church exists because of God's calling. The church as an organization and organism must experience development and growth to be healthy. The church is an ekklesia, meaning a group of believers called from darkness to miraculous light. The church must continue to theologize in its context as a transformation to realize the kingdom of God. As a community of faith, it is never free from challenges that come from the context in which it exists and theologizes. Advances in information technology and the influence of social media are areas where the church must also deal and take on the role of salt and light. In situations like the current situation, the church is again tested to continue carrying out its function. Michael Griffiths, citing Hans Kung's opinion in his writing **The Church and Its Calling Today**, said, "The church cannot possibly survive without constant renewal of form... It is impossible to simply maintain the Church throughout time in its original form like the Ancient Church. Changing times demand changing forms.

The development of science and technology is progressing rapidly. Like it or not, technological progress flows relentlessly, spreading rapidly, even transcending the boundaries of space and time. This progress is transforming systems in every aspect of human life. Most importantly, the presence of technology has made human work easier, communication systems simpler, and so on.

We must acknowledge and appreciate these technological developments, as their emergence has been a significant aid to humanity, as human or manual labor has tended to be abandoned and computerized systems have shifted. Amidst this digitalization, the church is a key player. As part of this technological development, the church must respond positively and utilize it to the fullest as an instrument for realizing its mission.

The question arises: how churches respond to the advancement of digital technology. Are churches anti- or open-minded? It turns out that almost all churches have used technology in their church activities, a small example being the use of multimedia during worship. The problem is that for some churches, the benefits of digital technology have not been used as an instrument to accelerate the church's progress. In fact, digital technology today is a promising market for evangelism. Churches in developed countries have made great strides, technology is used to aid mission, and many souls have been saved and joined the church fellowship. It is time for the people, as redeemed people, to utilize digital technology in their mission. Methods need to be dynamic, creative, and relevant; otherwise, membership growth will slow or even stagnate. GMI, at 114 years old, still has approximately 140,000 members. This number is not directly proportional to its age. This is a

problem we must face together. What must we do? The author believes that churches must respond and utilize digital technology as an instrument and a relevant method for mission.

2. Research Method

The research method used by the researcher in this study is a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. "We use processes, principles, and procedures to approach problems and find answers." Qualitative research methods are used to examine natural objects, where the researcher serves as the key instrument. Data collection techniques are combined, data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. Qualitative research aims to preserve the form and content of human behavior and analyze its qualities, then transform them into quantitative entities.

This research was conducted within the Indonesian Methodist Church at the Reinata Sunggal Resort in Deliserdang. The object of the research was the use of digital technology in GMI churches throughout the Resort. The subjects were the congregations/churches within the Reinata-Sunggal Resort. The data used were primary and secondary. Primary data included interviews and observations, while secondary data included documents, books, and literature.

The steps in writing this research include:

1. Introduction, which describes the background of the problem, the problem formulation, and the objectives and benefits of writing this research.
2. The second section describes the definition of concepts and theoretical foundations relevant to the problem being studied.
3. The third section presents the writing methods used in this research, from data collection methods to data and information collection procedures.
4. The fourth section outlines the results of the study on the problem to be discussed. This chapter also presents the opinions of various respondents regarding the reasons for deviating from the established rules.
5. The fifth section is the concluding chapter of this research. This chapter presents the conclusions of the research and provides answers to the problems raised. This chapter also presents suggestions/recommendations in line with the proposed problem.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Church's View of Technology

Genesis 1:28 "God blessed them, and God said to them, "...subdue the earth.."

"Fill the earth and subdue it" is God's mandate to humans to guard and manage God's creation. The phrase "subdue" comes from the Hebrew word, *kabash*, which means: to submit, to subdue, not to be interpreted as an effort to exploit and destroy nature. 'Subdue' is clearly related to human responsibility to maintain it according to God's own plan and purpose and God's own way. This is different from the view of Lynn White, Jr. in his famous article entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *Science* (vol. 155, March 10, 1967, pp. 1203-7). White actually misunderstands Genesis 1:28, especially the phrase "subdue the earth" or (subdue the earth) as a bad command, which causes an environmental crisis. This view is refuted by Eric Katz, who says that the word "subdue" is related to human activities in using natural resources. Singgih further explained in Gulo that "ruling" and "conquering" actually mean "protecting." It seems that the mandate to humans is anthropocentric. Martin Harun, however, observes two emphases related to the mandate in question: first, God's supreme power. Humans are seen as God's representatives under His sovereignty. Second, a static understanding of the world. Nature is seen as complete and offers no opportunity for innovative techniques. This means that nature, already complete, is not seen as a means to change the natural order.

Historically, the church has been confronted with the rise of science and technology, leading to the emergence of the term "sacrificium intellectus," a concept that requires believers to remove philosophy from the theology of faith. According to Hardyanto, it is time to banish this "sacrificium intellectus" from history, as science is a tool for humanizing humanity and for seeking true truth. Science and technology have become the driving force behind faith in world development. A similar sentiment was expressed by the Methodist Church Father, John Wesley. Wesley valued reason (intellect), which plays a role in faith and shapes understanding of everything that needs to be understood. Clearly, technology based on reason/knowledge is essential in church life.

3.2. The Church and Digitalization

Futurologist Alvin Toffler, in his book "Future Shock," predicted a major shift in human civilization. His predictions were indeed fulfilled, with human civilization shifting from an agrarian to an industrial system and from industry to today's technology. In 1980, Toffler developed and refined his ideas in his writing "The Third Wave." The Third Wave, translated as "Gelom Tiga," is a post-industrial wave that began in the mid-20th century. This era ushered in high-tech systems such as computerization, communications, robotization, and so on, and in the 21st century, digitalization has arrived. Devi Anantha, Deputy Secretary for Public Services at the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (PANRB), stated during the opening of intensive mentoring for the management of SIPP and SP4N-LAPOR in Badung Regency, Bali, that in the Industrial Revolution 4.0, digitalization is an absolute necessity, including in the field of public services.

The digital lifestyle is a phenomenon for today's millennial generation. According to research from McKinsey and Company, Indonesia is the fastest country to adopt digital technology compared to Brazil and China. In addition to the fastest growth in digitalization, the way Indonesians consume digital content is also changing. This explains that the digital lifestyle is a lifestyle revolution (even a lifestyle culture) due to the increasingly rapid development of information and communication technology. By using digital tools, work can be done more efficiently in the sense of saving costs and time, and can be more effective because work goals can be achieved faster than before. Experts say that the main goal of the digital lifestyle is to optimize productivity by using various tools from the benefits of information technology.

So how does the church position itself in this development of digital technology? Become a part of it or is the church simply a spectator? From the results of the seminar and panel discussion held by the Student Executive Board of the Faculty of Theology, Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW) with the theme "Religion in the Digital Era," it appears that the church recognizes the role of social media in good evangelism, but the church remains a spectator. We have mentioned above that the main goal of a digital lifestyle is to optimize productivity. Of course, this applies to all aspects of life, including church life. Media has become a fertile mission field considering that Indonesia's population is now around 255.5 million people. Of that population, those who are active internet users are around 72.2 million people and social media users are around 74 million people. What is interesting in this data is that mobile phone users are around 308.2 million devices. From this data, we can see that the Indonesian people/church are not far from the use of digital technology. Digital technology users, especially the internet, are dominated by millennials, often also called the digital generation. In terms of church, the digital generation and millennials will always look for innovative, immersive, engaging, and customized online experiences. The Internet as a digitalized medium is therefore a fertile ground for evangelism marketing.

4. Ecclesiology: A Model of the Church's Vocation in the Digital Age

4.1. The Church Builds "Mystical Communion" Relationships

Technological developments ultimately play a role in building community/fellowship as the body of Christ. In this digital era, according to Cardinal Avery Dulles, among several models of church vocation, the one called "mystical communion" is particularly relevant. This concept is known as "ecclesiology from below." "Mystical communion" is a fellowship that seeks to delve into the secrets of faith. In this sense, fellow members of the community share experiences of faith and God's love. Unlike the hierarchical model of institutional relationships, which emphasizes reciprocal service from one another, the "mystical communion" model of relationship building is more open and democratic. According to Cardinal Dulles, social media in this digital age is highly relevant for building fellowship. As previously explained, digital technology users, especially millennials, account for 50% of the Indonesian population. This number is significant for building a network of love within the faith community and even beyond. This resource should be utilized to its fullest potential. While social media or the internet has traditionally been used primarily for building friendships, exchanging information, and expanding personal connections, such as expressing emotions, lifestyle, family relationships, hobbies, and so on, there's no harm in also using it as a medium for fellowship in love and sharing faith.

4.2. Digital Media Technology with Mission, Socialization and Promotion

The reason social media is so important is because it has a significant impact on the delivery and dissemination of information. Cox and Warren even call the media revolution like an unavoidable tsunami. This means the church must open its doors wide to technological transformation. This certainly starts with pastors, Gospel teachers, Church Councils, and Lay Speakers. Church ministries and ministers of the Gospel, as the salt and light of the world, must not ignore the role of technology. Implementation certainly requires competent

human resources, as the church must prepare experts. In the context of GMI, STT is the right place to prepare students. Servants of God must be proficient in understanding the vital role that information technology media plays. Any use of technology by a church will be meaningless if it ignores the mission of reaching the world, encouraging spiritual growth, and increasing discipleship activities. Failure to understand its theological context will leave the church behind an important tool in our modern global environment. The reason social media is so important is because it has a significant impact on the delivery and dissemination of information. Cox and Warren even call the media revolution like an unavoidable tsunami. This means the church must open its doors wide to technological transformation. This naturally begins with pastors, Gospel Teachers, Church Councils, and Lay Speakers. Church ministries and ministers of the Gospel, as the salt and light of the world, must not ignore the role of technology. Implementation requires competent human resources, as the church must prepare experts. In the context of the GMI, STT is the right place to prepare students. Servants of God must be proficient in understanding the vital role played by information technology media. Any use of technology by a church will be meaningless if it ignores its mission to reach the world, encourage spiritual growth, and increase discipleship activities. Failure to understand its theological context will leave the church behind an important tool in our modern global environment.

Likewise, opportunities and possibilities are wide open as a promotional medium. One church stated, "Social media can be an important part of a church's online presence without being daunting. There are ways to use church social media that don't hog all your time or your volunteer resources. Learn how to use social media to enhance and promote your church."

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Maximizing the use of digital technology for church needs is a new paradigm in ecclesiology. The church must not be apathetic or fail to capitalize on existing opportunities to advance God's work. Opportunities are readily available, so they should not be wasted. A church that survives and exists is a dynamic church that participates in change, experiencing a transformation in theology, or what is known as contextual teleology. The church must be able to actualize needs in the form of services that can stimulate church development. Opportunities are wide open, considering that 50% of Indonesia's population, or 146.2 million, uses digital technology (internet and social media).

5.2. Recommendations.

With the rapid demand for a change in the ecclesiological paradigm, the Indonesian Young Evangelical Church (GMI) in revitalizing the Church is now the time to make digital technology a convergent service. Realizing our Vision and Mission will be more significant if assisted and implemented with technology. Promotion, outreach, and evangelization via digital media will certainly accelerate the implementation of our church's goals. Preparing competent personnel is not easy, but it's not impossible. As an institution that prepares prospective servants, it's time to include courses that support these competencies.

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