

Ordo Antichristianus Illuminati®
Religion and the Information Technology Revolution
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The human condition is in the first discrete phase of what scholar's term the "Information Technology Revolution." This fundamental paradigm shift will be the biggest cultural revolution in the human condition since the invention of the Greek alphabet circa B.C.E. 700. At present, with the onset of information technology, the Internet, and digital media and communications, all foreshadowing the rise of artificial intelligence. This initial phase of the Information Technology Revolution affects all cultures, economies and religions of the contemporary global order. Regardless of the antagonistic relationship between technology and religion {take into consideration the current intelligent design debate}, the technological impetus of post-modern society, especially in the "Western societies," has become a means of religiosity.

Scholars like Lewis Mumford, and Conrad Ostwalt posit that popular religion in our information-based secular society has demystified the intimacy of religiosity. Resurgences in popular religion are, embedded in a secular society of relativism, empiricism, and individual religiosity. Popular religion in essence reconciles individual objective truth with the element of imagination and faith in human nature. It is the privatization of religious experience that invokes popular religiosity.

Popular religion is prevalent in cultural forms of media and technology (newspapers, internet, religious-oriented television programming) that raise theological issues to ecclesia and congregations. Popular religion can be studied in its manifestations of imagery and symbology on film, television, the Internet, stage & theatre, and print. Information technology, such as the Internet, media, radio, and television reconciles the elements of culture and spirituality, addressing the boundaries between the culture and religiosity. A synthesis between popular religion now embedded in the media and information technology best illustrated by the intelligent design debate. Technology at various intervals of history has been associated with utopian ideals of social and spiritual enlightenment.

Akin to the printing press, the Internet redefines popular religion via methods of selection and portrayal; vast compendiums of religious scripture, wide ranges of antinomian perspectives toward orthodoxy and doctrine, and Christian Apocrypha are now available for both laity and ecclesia. Purveyors of any religious doctrine can now enhance their audience in a wider information community, expansive even to our present global order. Many participants in the cybercosm of popular religion use the Internet to fortify

doctrinal arguments, such as intelligent design, and deconstruct orthodox convictions.

One of the most liberating features of the media and the Internet is that reality and doctrine is engineered and faith is uncensorable; diverse perspectives transmit into an intersecting global order that connects the sacerdotal offices of H.H. Dalai Lama and H.H. Pope Benedict XVI to the World Wide Web. Moreover, digital media and the Internet are indices of religious and social reformations, beset with the instantaneous production, distribution, and reception of information. Hence, religious institutions that arbitrarily remain outside of the information media revolution will become ghettos of theology, conscripted to obsolescence like the Puritanism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The changes to global religiosity invoked by information technology are irreversible. The chasm of reaction to the synthesis of information technology and religion is as passionate as the theological stress between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. *“Advocates promote the Internet’s ability to make the world a better place, often describing it as a communicative nirvana, a place where access to information equals freedom.”*¹ The lack of personal intimacy with religion in the reality-engineered cybercosm affects *“social and communicative relationships, it also reflects on how its use shapes the soul and cultural values.”*² Individuals who continue to invest in the Information Technology Revolution often find the Internet as a collective congregation, a new sort of cyberchurch.

Researcher John December defines “computer-mediated communication” as *“a process of human communication via computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts, engaging in processes to shape media for a variety of purposes.”*³ The Information Technology Revolution has spawned a depersonalized secular culture where religious scripture and metanarratives are being replaced in the Information Age by a culture of heterogeneity and what H.H. Pope Benedict XVI refers to as a “tyranny of relativity.” Postmodernism in an Internet dominated global order signals the end of doctrinal authority and objective truth. The ability to discern myth and ritual in the cybercosm entails society to redefine religious communications {i.e. watching a broadcast of the 700 club on the Christian Broadcasting Network or video archives of the Vatican available on CTV}.

It is the privatization of religious experience that invokes popular religiosity. Popular religion is prevalent in cultural forms of media and technology (newspapers, internet, religious-oriented television programming) that raise theological issues to ecclesia and congregations. The Information Age can be studied in its manifestations of imagery and symbology on film, television, the Internet, stage & theatre, and print. In a secular postmodern

society, Americans value popular religion as a source of personal meaning and spirituality. A synthesis of popular religion and the Internet reconciles the elements of culture and spirituality, addressing the boundaries between the culture and religiosity.

Religion and the Information Age coexist where science and art mingle, and where imagination and curiosity mystifies religious imagery in aforementioned cultural forms such as the World Wide Web, theatre, and film. In a society of conservative political architecture, predatory economies, and cultural diffusion, popular religion thrusts our culture collectively and individually toward both a privatization, and communalization of religiosity. Popular religion and secularism in post-modernity does not challenge the institutions of ordered religion; rather it reconciles a method of science or theistic science, with the aims of religion.

Prior to the development of the World Wide Web, programs such as *Coast to Coast AM with Art Bell*⁴, and the *700 Club* on the Christian Broadcasting Network reached millions of listeners in a cybercosm of radio and television waves where society could enter the time and space of ritual and spirituality. Simply by listening to the radio and watching the television, the faithful and skeptic alike were able to experience a sense of intimacy and 'being there.' With the advent of the Information Age and its synthesis with popular religion, millions of individuals connect 'online' to a spaceless, transcendent reality, setting up personalized temporal and spatial communities. Unlike radio and television broadcast, the individual contains the sole engine of entry into the "Information Highway" where popular religion and passionate ideologies have taken a front seat with a dictatorship of relativity and apathy.

Blaise Pascal described the human condition as lying between the Infinite, the Holy, and the Nothing. It is in this fragile balance between relativity and certainty of faith that one must peruse the Internet, as a means to an end in the search for enlightenment. There must be a transformation of theological reflection in order for the Information Technology Revolution to thread together the global community rather than isolate entire societies from one another in the cybercosm of time and space. Religious ecclesia should heed the progress of academia in the art of communication and reality-engineering in the Information Age.

The interplay between culture and popular religion can be executed on a variety of methods. One progressive framework posited by scholars at the 1993 academic conference in Uppsala, Sweden entitled "Media, Religion, and Culture"⁵ "suggests macro-level analyses of society as a whole, meso-level analyses of institutions, and micro-analyses of individual perception and empirical meaning." {*paraphrase, Hoover & Lundby 1997; pg.*

6}. Religion is not limited to occurrences in a sacred realm, as modern scholarship contests whether the “sacred” is marginalized and secularization moves society into insular camps or that culture and religion are inseparable. Religion subsists in theories of socio-cultural development, in relation to the realms of myth and ritual. Nonetheless, the thought and practice of religiosity in the human condition is innate.

With the Internet as common ground for dialogues of the sacred and secular, investigators of religious and cultural studies approach information technology with a threefold strategy: a search for schema of ritual and mythic meaning in patterns of life, communalism, and authentic personal identity. Contextually, the nature of the Internet permits audiences to exit proto-orthodox constraints and enter into engineered reality apart from the ordinary world. The premise here is that the Information Technology Revolution is not just ideological and theological manipulation, but a cultural phenomena best studied under anthropology and theistic sciences. The shift from the Internet and information technology as a product of culture to a *web of culture* parallels the adaptation of religious doctrine to print during the Medieval Reformation. Privileges of information, authority, and religious practice are redefined. Thus, the impact of the Internet upon popular religion and scripture mimics the profound changes that are occurring in the realms of media.

The electronic church is located at the confluence of media and revivalist movements. In a telescopic society of information technology, televangelism has experienced an upsurge in advocacy, and popularity. Televangelism is attractive widely to a large conservative Christian audience, and as a ritual performance, is telecast to a broad specter of culture. Religious oriented programming has captivated a diverse audience of television viewers since the onset of television. The pattern of religious broadcasting was established in radio, where sectarian organizations petitioned the Federal Communications Commission for sustained airtime and productions intended to elucidate consensual facts and objective truths of religion. The National Council of Churches, the United States Catholic Conference, the New York Board of Rabbis, and the Southern Baptist Convention produced some of these early programs.

In a society of conservative political architecture, predatory economies, and cultural diffusion, evangelist notoriety such as the Christian Broadcasting Network thrust our culture collectively and individually toward both a privatization, and communalization of religiosity. Evangelist websites on the Internet cater to the information technology paradigm by disaffecting populist concerns as socially dysfunctional. Internet teleministries use information technology and digital media to identify and coalesce disparate groups in society disaffected with conventional places of worship. Whereas

evangelical-fundamentalist channels use the Internet to preserve populist top-down ecclesiastic authority, heterodox movements such as the “New Age” and the resurgence of scholarship on ‘Gnostic’ Christianity sensationalized by “The Da Vinci Code” use the Internet to conjure bottom-up relationships.

Resurgences in popular religion are, embedded in a secular society of relativism, empiricism, and individual religiosity. Popular religion in essence reconciles individual objective truth with the element of imagination and faith in human nature. It is the privatization of religious experience that invokes popular religiosity. Popular religion is prevalent in cultural forms of media and technology (newspapers, internet, religious-oriented television programming) that raise theological issues to ecclesia and congregations. Popular religion can be studied in its manifestations of imagery and symbology on film, television, the Internet, stage & theatre, and print.

Information technology, such as the Internet, media, radio, and television reconciles the elements of culture and spirituality, addressing the boundaries between the culture and religiosity. Christian evangelical media stems from a hybrid religiosity derived from revivalist movements that mirrored secular society through a sacred (fundamentalist) lens.⁶ (Ostwalt 2003) Christian evangelism appeals to personal religious experience. There is an upsurge in our society of such a phenomenon that appeals to personal emotion, and the zeal of religious conviction. Evangelism is a zealous invitation to enlist spiritually in the Christian community and experience an epiphany of a new religious life, to be ‘born again’ in the spirit of the Christ. The term evangelist occurs no less than three times in the New Testament books of Acts, II Timothy, and Ephesians, used in substantive form. The early apostles such as Saint Paul, and Barnabas, were set apart from the emergent Christian community as itinerant, preaching missionaries. To the unaffiliated, or unfamiliar, evangelists are endowed with a type of appeal to preach to congregations new to the Gospels, paving the way for later missionary work.

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The onset of televangelism in American politics has recently been a controversial issue since the 1970s. Fundamentalist minister Jerry Falwell used a program called Old Time Gospel Hour as a platform for political influence among staunch conservatives, through the founding of "The Moral Majority," a conservative think-tank, and "The Liberty Lobby," another political organization funded by donations from Falwell's broadcasts. Falwell withdrew from politics amidst sexual and financial scandals that plagued the arena of Televangelism in the 1980s.⁷ Evangelical minister Pat Robertson used his position as host of The 700 Club, a central program of the Christian Broadcasting Network, to inaugurate his own political career, culminating in a run for the presidency in 1988, and the subsequent founding of his own political organization, "The Christian Coalition." Televangelist ministries also founded and developed their own universities, such as Falwell's "Liberty University," "Oral Roberts University," and Pat Robertson's CBN University, renamed "Regent University in 1990."

The case of Pat Robertson typifies the evolution of modern televangelism from grassroots "Bible Belt" fundamentalist radio broadcasts toward an altogether conventional television presentation to a broad scope of audience. While other televangelists continued to hold to more traditional "worship and preaching" production, The 700 Club rapidly became a popularized central program of the Christian Broadcasting Network. The "700 Club" broadcasted a sophisticated "Christian talk show" format. As the "700 Club" grew popularized with audiences, its parent Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) evolved into "The Family Channel," a widely carried cable service featuring "family-oriented" re-runs of television programming and motion pictures.

A notable lasting legacy of televangelism is the impact on sustaining-time broadcasting or public service religion. Conventional churches and church organizations saw their airtime gradually erode as paid time televangelism rose to prominence. By the mid-1990s virtually no national or network-based sustaining-time broadcasting persisted. A number of organizations supplanted by televangelism participated in the founding of their own cable network, The Faith and Values Channel (originally the Vision Interfaith Satellite Network), in 1988. The Christian Broadcasting Network evolved from the vision of Pat Robertson.

The Christian Broadcasting Network aired its first telethon to raise funds in the fall of 1963. This telethon was named "The 700 Club"² because Pat Robertson asked seven hundred people to pledge \$10 a month to maintain the new station and keep C.B.N. on the air. Three innovations adopted by CBN helped the fledgling network grow rapidly to into formidable religious broadcasting networks with access to the world. The first innovation was the

use of the telephone to provide ongoing contact with the audience. The 700 Club provides a telephone number on screen so viewers can call to ask for prayer and counseling during and after each program. A second innovation was to follow the lead of a cable network called Home Box Office (H.B.O.) and Cable News Network (C.N.N.) to build its own satellite earth station as early as 1977. A third innovation of CBN provided 24 hour religious programming to the nation's growing network of evangelist cable stations.

Program content on the 700 Club stresses a worldview with biblical foundations, based on the belief that there exists a set of moral absolutes revealed in Christian scripture that should dictate social institutions, laws, and public policy. Religious conservatism and the rapid ascendancy of religious based television programming were interdependent during the 1980s. Programming listed on the Christian Broadcasting Network Internet site include: "The 700 Club," "CBN News Watch," "CBNinteractive," "Living the Life," "Christian World News," "Scott Ross's 'Streets of the World'," and "One Cubed."

The description of the Christian Broadcasting Network listed on the contents of their Internet site state: "The mission of CBN and its affiliated organizations is to prepare the United States of America and the nations of the world for the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Our ultimate goal is to achieve a time in history when 'the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.'"⁸ The network like many others this writer has observed uses innovative mass communication via television, the Internet, broadcast radio, and print to carry a message of religious significance as seen by its administrators, and founder.

The Christian Broadcasting Network and its evangelical programming use information technology as a means of galvanizing viewership in a post-modern society where technology has virtually erased geopolitical boundaries. The canopy between sacred and the secular is not widened but bridges despite the scandals of such ministries from the Bakkers, Jerry Falwell, and Jimmy Swaggert. Ostwalt notes evangelism as a cornerstone that founded the popular megachurch movement in contemporary society. Evangelical marketing of religion at once galvanizes a fundamentalist discontent against secular society while employing the very media such ministries preach adversity to: "...it is certain that the use of media, particularly television, connected evangelical culture to secular popular culture in a way that was new and novel, and this experience provided evangelicalism...a sense of relevance and power through participation in a popular secular medium."⁹ (Ostwalt 2003)

In a society of conservative political architecture, predatory economies, and cultural diffusion, evangelist notorieties such as the Christian Broadcasting Network thrust our culture collectively and individually toward both a privatization, and communalization of religiosity. Religious scholars notice “public evangelism” having “recurring elements of popular religiosity”¹⁰ (Lippy 1994). Such an institutionalization of styles of religiosity in televangelism has a reciprocal relationship with social structures scholars classify as religious and secular. Lippy offers that “most who watch religious programming do not know or even care about the connections televangelists might have with formal religious institutions”¹¹ (Lippy 1994)

C.B.N. explains that its large financial profit, based solely upon audience contribution and donations from the private sector, reciprocates to the viewer in the form of humanitarian relief funding. At present, C.B.N. is multifaceted, providing evangelist broadcasts in over two-hundred countries in seventy-one different languages, with the afore described 24 hour prayer telephone hotline. The itinerant evangelical role of the biblical John the Baptist is reflected in the televangelism of the Christian Broadcasting Network. The network portrays an evolution in interactivity between the missionary and the Christian, whose religious piety and devotion is glamorized in the often-sensational broadcasting of televangelism.

"The Da Vinci Code" is the latest in popular culture threaded to such films, and novels, as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *The Matrix*, *The Godfather*, and most recently, *Passion of the Christ* that not only popularizes but also mystifies Christian heritage and private religiosity. In the latter works of popular religion, orthodoxy and faith are the guardians of tradition, whereas in *The Da Vinci Code* we are returned through pseudo-history to the roots of mysticism in Christianity. Religion is justified in invoking faith, as secular culture is saturated with religiosity.

"The Da Vinci Code" published in 2003 by Random House (New York, NY) rides a popular wave of revulsion against perceived scandal and corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. Since the novels publication, it has become a record bestseller, igniting passionate debates about religion and sexuality, feminism, the exclusory faith of the Catholic Church, renaissance art, and esoteric symbology. Catholicism in its ecclesiastic attachments to the secular arms of law and society, appeals to the disenchanting and faithful complete with ritual, spirituality, history, and art. *The Da Vinci code* mystifies doctrinal religiosity, offering new meaning through cryptic symbols of the sacred feminine. Popular films and novels, according to scholar Conrad Oswald, prospect the meaning of metaphors and symbols in Christian mythology without trivializing religion or cultural heritage.

Brown teases the reader with esoteric codes and enigmatic puzzles contained in renaissance art that is coalescent of a greater symbology of the sacred feminine. The popular trend to study and debunk the novel reflects an extensive scientific study, and ecclesiastic obscuring of texts and artifacts that trigger a quest for latent religiosity and personal understanding. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim explains that religion is a “feeling of mystery.”¹² The *Da Vinci Code* invokes feelings of mystery by popularizing symbols in Christian iconography of the sacred feminine. The sacred feminine permeates the symbolism of Rosicrucian, Freemasonic and other occult traditions of which this writer is intimate.

The Internet disposes of the dichotomy of religion organized around immanence-transcendence in the human condition. As the Information Technology Revolution matures the global order by coagulating cultures and religious belief systems, the great world religions will lose their historical flexibility by a failure to endure increasing metaphysical concerns {such as intelligent design}. Radio broadcast programs such as *Coast to Coast AM* address this paradigm shift with a wide-ranging variety of topics, and have their nightly shows directly on the spiritual pulse of our society.

Innovations in computer-mediated communications and the emergence of global media conglomerates and the periphery of religiosity play a crucial role in the Information Technology Revolution. The global environment of contemporary history exacerbates the proto-orthodoxy of ancient religious doctrine by pushing them into relativity. Hence the dichotomy of the global order in the face of the Information Technology Revolution will either continue to mature from its initial stages of religious and information diffusion, or, fracture under the bane of fundamentalism that has experience resurgences throughout civilization.

The point of entry into this thesis intimated at the paradigm shift into the Information Age and how its maturity will affect religiosity. These changes will continue to mature deeper into existing social and cultural structures, at once redefining them and deconstructing them. The Internet has privatized religiosity and in accentuating the finitude of the human condition, a sort of metaphor for divine providence has been invoked at an intersection between spirituality and technology. “*In promoting a more remote and individualistic style of religious practice, the coming of the Internet has contributed further to the privatization of religion that has been so much of a feature of the modern period.*” {Beckerlegge, 2001, pg. 228}. The World Wide Web represents merely the first step in the Information Technology revolution and its link with religiosity.

The dichotomy between religion on the Internet and physical places of worship reciprocates an illusory digital divide in the notion that the human

“spirit” is tangibly different than the flesh that incarnates it. The digital divide between privatized religiosity and the religious cybercosm will continue to expose the fragility of the great world religious traditions while at once reinforcing religious communalism of the cybercosm. . Regardless of the antagonistic relationship between technology and religion, the human condition is only in the initial stages of the Information Technology Revolution that will initiate unparalleled shifts in the paradigm of religiosity and science.

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