

# The Modern Man in the Digital Era: Anonymous Individual or Named Personhood?

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In the era of *late modernity*<sup>1</sup>, anonymity on the internet offers the “safety” for everyone to operate above laws and moral principles, thus turning the virtual world into an inhuman one. Many of the crimes that mainly afflict children and young people stem from the misuse of digital technology and from the exploitation of social media by a horde of abusers.

Nowadays, we are experiencing the digital revolution, which has followed the Second Industrial Revolution. According to Auguste Comte’s evolutionary theory, which dominated during the 18th and 19th centuries, while its consequences were manifested in the 20th century, science would provide all the solutions to modern man’s problems. It was a theory that pushed people away from religion and its values, and in several cases, it has been hostile towards it<sup>2</sup>. On the same wavelength, in the 21st century

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1. The term belongs to A. Giddens. Z. Bauman has introduced the term *liquid modernity*, Ulrich Beck the term *second modernity*, Nikos Mouzelis the term *globalized modernity*, and, more recently, Theophanis Tasis introduced the term *virtual modernity*. All terms in contemporary social theory have a common content, since modernity is seen as a continuously evolving process of the modern. See Chr. Tsironis, *Θρησκεία και κοινωνία στη Δεύτερη Νεωτερικότητα. Λόγοι, διάλογοι & αντίλογοι στο έργο του Ul. Beck*, Barbounakis Publications, Thessaloniki 2018, pp. 40-44; N. Mouzelis, *Νεωτερικότητα και Θρησκευτικότητα. Έκκοσμίκευση – Φονταμενταλισμός – Ήθική*, Magdalini Tsevereni, V. Liotzis (eds.), transl. Tina Plyta, Polis Publications, Athens 2014, p. 77; Th. Tasis, *Πολιτικές του βίου II: Η έπιμέλεια έαυτού στην είκονιστική κοινωνία*, Harmos Publications, Athens<sup>3</sup>2017, pp. 45-46.

2. V. Yioultsis, *Γενική Κοινωνιολογία*, Afoi Kyriakidi Publications, Thessaloniki<sup>5</sup>2003, pp. 193-197. Io. Petrou, *Κοινωνιολογία*, Vanias Publications, Thessaloniki 2007, pp. 46-50.

many people believe that technology will provide all the solutions to man's problems in the digital age. Technology, having been autonomous from its functional framework, is deified; once again, man replaces God, looking forward to achieving the coveted immortality<sup>3</sup>.

The speed of change in the internet age is very fast, so that man cannot keep up with it. This is Modernity's main characteristic in contrast to traditional societies. In pre-modern times, changes have been taking place very slowly, so that a person was able to assimilate what was happening in his environment and his life was characterized by stability<sup>4</sup>. In modern times, however, social and technological changes are constantly taking place, so that man is unable to adapt, as he is forced to change what he knew only yesterday, and to constantly learn new things throughout his life<sup>5</sup>. This need for constant adjustment is inhuman; it goes against man's basic psychological and biological characteristics of man and contributes to the increasement of individual and collective suffering<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, in the event that man is cut off from the process of evolution and new knowledge, he is marginalized and left to contemplate "he life that passes and fades away"<sup>7</sup>. According to A. Giddens, modern man is left to deal on his own with the "empty spaces" created by his dissociation from

3. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός άνθρωπισμός. Εικονιστικό ύποκείμενο και τεχνητή νοημοσύνη*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019, p. 12: "Advocating the comprehensive solution to all the problems not only of the West, but of humanity as a whole through technical evolution, the various currents of transhumanism preach the advent of an upgraded human species that will transcend its biological limitations and even conquer immortality".

4. For more information about the pre-modern, pre-industrial society, see St. Hall – Br. Gieben, *Η Διαμόρφωση της νεωτερικότητας. Οικονομία, Κοινωνία, Πολιτική, Πολιτισμός*, M. Spourdalakis (ed.), transl. Th. and V. Tsakiris, Savalas Publishers, Athens, Athens <sup>2</sup>2003, pp. 261-278.

5. Chr. Tsironis, *Θρησκεία και κοινωνία στη Δεύτερη Νεωτερικότητα...*, *op.cit.*, p. 39: "Obviously, we are dealing with a world of "rapid change" [Giddens], a world of global stakes [Beck] and a time of dominant ambivalence [Bauman], as sociological analysis attempts to describe it".

6. Th. Xatzilakos, «Κοινωνία της πληροφορίας, εκπαίδευση και ό –ένδεχόμενος– ρόλος της ορθοδοξίας», in: *Νέες Τεχνολογίες & Οικογένεια*, [Σύγχρονη Ποιμαντική Βιβλιοθήκη 1], Hiera Metropolis Dimitriadou – Academia Goneon, P. Kyriakidis Publications, Athens 2009, p. 124.

7. Y. Parios, «Σήμερα», in: *Έπαφή/Εραfi* (1992), *στίχοι-μουσική/lyrics-music*: St. Spanoudakis.

the security of traditional society; therefore, he fails to build his personal identity<sup>8</sup>. This makes him unable to produce meaning in his daily life, which also has consequences for social cohesion, since this lies at the heart of the crisis of the early 21st century<sup>9</sup>.

Within a few years, “new” habits have been replaced by “newer” ones. Where we used to gather in “internet cafes” as teenagers, today’s teenagers are not only unaware of their existence, but continuously live in an online world, since they are now “wired” with smart devices and the fast 4G and 5G satellite internet. It is the place of their own freedom, where they are expressing their deepest desires and fears, looking for experiences and quests that would hardly be possible in their real social environment with its prohibitions and boundaries between what is allowed and what is forbidden. A tragic consequence is the perception of young people –and not only of them– that without the internet there is no life; their everyday life becomes tedious: «άνια, βαρεμάρα» / “Boredom, tedium”, as the now classic (greek) song says<sup>10</sup>.

Modern man is therefore consumed by surfing the web and seeking to experience a “parallel” truth, which he is deprived of in his daily life, thus isolating himself from his social environment<sup>11</sup>. As it has been pointed out:

8. A. Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society”, in: U. Beck, A. Giddens, S. Lash (eds.), *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 57-109.

9. G. Kounnousiis, «Ο σύγχρονος κόσμος του εικοστού πρώτου αιώνα: μιὰ πλούσια κοινωνία ανισοτήτων», *Ἐκκλησιαστικός Κήρυκας/Ekklesiastikos Kyrikas* 28 (2022), pp. 63-83.

10. Ξύλινα Σπαθιά/Xylina Spathia, «Ἀδρεναλίνη»/“Adrenaline”, in the LP: *Ξεσσαλονίκη/Xessaloniki* (1993): «Ἀδρεναλίνη κανέννας δὲν θὰ μείνει / μαύρη κατάρρα, άνια, βαρεμάρα / Ἡ μέρα σβήνει, Ἀθήνα εἶσαι καμίνι / ὥσπου νὰ φέξει νὰ δοῦμε ποιός θ’ ἀντέξει» (= “Adrenaline – no one will remain / black curse, boredom, tedium / The day fades, Athens you are furnace / until dawn comes, we’ll see who will endure”).

11. Chr. Tsironis, «Ἡ ἀντινομία τῆς οἰκειότητας: Ἐπικοινωνία καὶ ἀποξένωση στὸ διαδίκτυο», in: *Ἀνθρωπος καὶ Κοινωνία. Συμβολὴ στὸ διάλογο Θεολογίας καὶ Κοινωνικῆς Θεωρίας*, Vanias Publications, Thessaloniki 2013, p. 266: “Of particular scientific interest is the management of the social identity’s structural constructs on the Internet. Social identity is now being shaped during a process in which the absolute commitment to the immediate social environment is loosening [...]. This situation seems to be uneven in terms of the degree to which it is embedded in the contemporary world. For some, it leads to a process of disengagement from strict boundaries of roles and rules; for others, to a disengagement from personal and social responsibility”.

Most sociological research shows us that the majority of the internet users are not so much attracted by the opportunity to enter into a world as by the opportunity to exit from one. This second opportunity has so far proved to be more attractive: the internet is widely used as a refuge, not to break down walls and open windows; it encloses a zone of comfort that is entirely individual, far from the hustle and bustle of the chaotic and dirty world of life and its challenges to the peace of mind and soul. Most people avoid offline communication with others because it is potentially a source of anxiety and irritation due to different opinions and incomprehensible disagreements [...]. Instead of expanding the quantity and improving the quality of human integration, mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity, the Internet has facilitated isolation, separation, exclusion, hostility and conflict<sup>12</sup>.

Modern man and especially the most recent generations divide their daily life between “two worlds”: one online and one offline. The use of the internet facilitates contacts, working relationships and professional activities<sup>13</sup>; still, the “other” world, the offline one, has neither disappeared nor is it going to change in the near future. These “two worlds”, although separated as two opposing camps, they nevertheless need to be reconciled to properly functioning for the benefit of human social relations; otherwise, there is a risk that they will overlap, creating huge rifts in human relations<sup>14</sup>.

21st century technology has evolved into modern man’s “new deity”<sup>15</sup>. He has been captivated with its metaphysical dynamism, since it can turn everything upside down, correct it and find the solution to any problem that mankind has been so far preoccupied with it. In the face of all this, man is filled with awe for technology, while at the same time he totally put his trust on it; therefore, he creates new substitutes for religious faith<sup>16</sup>.

12. Z. Bauman – Th. Leoncini, *Γεννημένοι ρευστοί. Μεταμορφώσεις της τρίτης χιλιετίας*, transl. Soti Triantafyllou, Patakis Publishers, Athens 2019, pp. 89-90.

13. Th. Tasis, *Πολιτικές του βίου II: Η έπιμέλεια έαυτού στην είκονιστική κοινωνία*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

14. Z. Bauman – Th. Leoncini, *Γεννημένοι ρευστοί...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 86-88.

15. Technology has been described as the “religion of the virtual society”; see Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός άνθρωπισμός...*, *op.cit.*, p. 58, where the writer notes: “A religion for the irreligious, a kind of meta-religion, where technology promises to redeem the human race from toil, sickness, old age and death”.

16. V. Yioultsis, *Η «άλλη» θέαση του κοινωνικού*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2005, p. 407: “In order to believe, people have always asked for proofs. To be

For many people in the age of the information society, with the wealth of knowledge provided by the internet, certain search engines, such as Google, are becoming infallible deities: if something is not written in it, then it is not exist! Thus, the meta-sociological problem of technology is at its core a problem of human quality – and that is where we must seek a solution.

Still, we have to make it abundantly clear that technology is not a negative thing. It contributes to the evolution and progress of humanity; it solves many problems and facilitates the everyday life of people who are now living in a globalized world. With technology, everything has come closer and people's social and working contacts are as instant as never before. Technology, according to Orthodox theology, is a gift from God to man. Man's creation in the image of God has creativity as its characteristic element. Of all creations, only man can activate his gifts by using his intellect and create civilization. Still, we must be very cautious: the pride hidden in the technology's indiscriminate use can lead humanity to destruction instead of progress; having been self-contained, it is deified, and that means hubris and punishment<sup>17</sup>. Technology at every stage of human civilization is a means to progress and not an end in itself. In cases where moderation is lost, a variety of problems arise for human society and the whole world.

A serious dependence on the internet, especially among young people, has already been identified worldwide, having been described as an addiction. Human relationships are now predominantly virtual and reality has been replaced by fantasy; users remain invisible in the global web behind their screens and electronic devices. While cyberspace is a new way of life for millions of people around the world and offers the opportunity for socialization, people are suffering from loneliness as never before in human history. Beyond the digital world, there is

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absolutely sure, it took a demonstration of powers, miracles, real miracles. And in our time such miracles can only be offered by the 'new deity' – Technology. In the eyes of modern man, therefore, only technology has nowadays the power to perform miracles, and genuine ones at that. For technology is man's last faith, his last love; under its influence, he is often ready to deform even his own face".

17. This is, after all, the meaning of the narrative of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament; *Gen.* 11, 1-9.

chaos<sup>18</sup>. The modern man's room or personal space is transformed into solitary confinement. The creation of many and usually fake identities on the internet allows their users to violate any legal and ethical rules of real life, just to "live" virtual reality<sup>19</sup>. Life is thus transformed into a game dominated by lies, mockery and criminality. Apathy quite often prevails over the challenges of everyday life, leading to the society's dehumanization. A typical example is the preference for video recording of criminal acts against fellow human beings in the public space, rather than active involvement to stopping them and rescuing the victim<sup>20</sup>. Where the image prevails, the body and the senses are absent, and therefore the concept of managing freedom and taking responsibility for the success or failure of whatever choices modern man makes<sup>21</sup>.

The modern disembodied man is the vision of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, according to which the body was considered to be devalued and consequently unimportant. For this reason, philosophers also turned to the cultivation of the soul and the ideals of the spiritual man, since the central element in their teaching was the superiority of spirit over matter<sup>22</sup>. In contrast to ancient Greek philosophy, Orthodox Christian theology emphasized from its very beginnings the synamfoteron – man's psycho-physical unity. For this reason, all heresies that affected the Church have been fought theologically; any doctrinal error against the Trinitarian God had a direct negative effect to man's salvation<sup>23</sup>. Man

18. Th. Tasis, *Πολιτικές του βίου II: Ἡ ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ στὴν εἰκονιστικὴ κοινωνία*, *op.cit.*, pp. 306-310.

19. K. Zorbas – M. Tsikritsis, «Ἡ νέα φιλοσοφία τοῦ Facebook καὶ τοῦ Blog. Μιὰ πρώτη ἀνθρωπολογικὴ προσέγγιση στὶς νέες μορφὲς τῆς διαδικτυακῆς ἐπικοινωνίας», in: *Νέες Τεχνολογίες & Οἰκογένεια*, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

20. On the contrary, the Church proposes a more humane civilization based on sacrificial love as a universal value for the construction of an equal and just society. A typical example is the parable of the Good Samaritan, *Luke* 10, 25-37.

21. St. S. Fotiou, *Ἀνθισμένες Συνειδήσεις*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2017, pp. 76-78.

22. N. Matsoukas, *Ἱστορία τῆς Φιλοσοφίας. Μὲ σύντομη εἰσαγωγὴ στὴ φιλοσοφία*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2001, pp. 160-173, 248-252.

23. N. Matsoukas, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ αἵρεση στοὺς ἐκκλησιαστικοὺς συγγραφεῖς τοῦ Δ', Ε', ΣΤ' αἰώνα*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1992, p. 295: "The incarnation brought about the reception of humanity by the deity, with substantial, thus leading to the healing of (sick) human nature. This has implications throughout creation and history".

is a complete person only when he is fully free, so that he can reflect and take responsibility for his actions<sup>24</sup>. On the contrary, the individual, as long as it lacks freedom, is irresponsible and therefore avoids the consequences of his actions. Anonymity leads to a depersonalized society, and the concealment of identity leads to extreme individualism, where lawlessness and criminality of all kinds prevail<sup>25</sup>.

Capitalist society, an essential feature of which is the consumer culture, is identified with material goods. This material world, which was one of the 20th century's dominant features, seems to be shaken by the evolution of technological culture. In the 21st century, the dominant element is the deconstruction of the material world through the internet, which projects a new virtual, intangible model of life. The culture of late modernity is, on the one hand, detached from matter in a disembodied world and, on the other, attached to matter, since technological culture without matter is non-existent! In both cases, matter is devalued to such a degree that its proper use and transformation, as put in the context of the Christian faith, seems impossible.

The internet era has reached to a point where the provocativeness and seduction that the absence of matter offers to man is highlighted. Man is consumed with acquiring as many virtual "friends" as possible on social networking platforms. He acts stupidly and dangerously just to get "followers". He writes whatever he thinks of without considering the damage he will cause to some of his fellow human beings or to the

24. The patristic dogmatics on the person were not originally developed at the level of anthropology, but that of theology: Basil the Great, *Ἐπιστολή 214 Τερεντίω κόμητι*, PG 45, 180C; *Ἐπιστολή 236 Ἀμφιλοχίῳ Ἰκονίου*, PG 32, 884AC; Gregory the Theologian, *Λόγος 29, Θεολογικὸς Γ΄ Περὶ Υἱοῦ*, PG 36, 73A-104D; *Λόγος 40, Εἰς τὸ ἅγιον Βάπτισμα*, PG 36, 359A-428D; Gregory of Nyssa, [M. Βασιλείου] *Ἐπιστολή 38*, PG 32, 325A-340C; *Πρὸς Ἑλλήνας ἐκ τῶν κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν*, PG 45, 180CD; *Περὶ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τρεῖς Θεοὺς*, PG 45, 120A; *Κατ' Εὐνομίῳ, Λόγος Α'*, PG 45, 304B. In this way, the concept of the person for Orthodox theology is directly linked to the man's nature, essence and substance, and has a purely ontological content; see John Damascene, *Κεφάλαια Φιλοσοφικά 42*, PG 94, 612A-613D.

25. Ch. Taylor, *Οἱ δυσανεξίες τῆς νεωτερικότητας*, Greek transl. M. Pagkalos, Ekkremes Publications, Athens 2006, p. 33. S. Kaïtatzī-Whitlock, «Διαδίκτυο ἀσυδοσίας ἢ διαφανῆς Παγκόσμια ὑποδομή;», *Τὸ Βῆμα/Το Vima*, <https://www.tovima.gr/2021/10/23/opinions/diadiktyo-asydosias-i-diafanis-pagkosmiadimosia-ypodomi/> [20/06/23].



wider society. He orders and buys everything on the basis of what it is suggested to him, after the special software (*cookies*) have collected and classified his wishes and desires. Boredom-based illiberal choices are not arising from real wants and needs, but from wish lists. In this way, free-will, the ability of man to freely think and choose, is crushed and eliminated. The result is man's abolition as a person. In general, the internet is the place where matter is crushed and the human body is absent. It is the moment when technology managed for the first time in human history to eliminate simultaneously the three dimensions of nature: space, time and matter. As it has been defined, the internet is an "Instantaneous, Global, Disembodied Communication Machine", because everything is instantly done (time), without any real distance (space) and operating only mentally (body and matter)<sup>26</sup>.

Digital navigation in virtual reality disrupts the human person, since it deprives the body and the senses of the experience.

The body is an integral part to "physical" communication. It is one of the factors which are shaping the communicative context and defining many of its terms. The experience of the body as an actual point of reference within space-time mobilizes empathy, compassion or the aversion to violence in contrast to its virtual reference. In the case of network communication, the body does not feel the pain when it is suffering morally or physically. Additionally, the body gives -thanks to its slow response- the possibility of second thoughts, which is not the case in the immediacy of virtual interaction. In conclusion, the body preserves the boundary of human dignity since every action and speech is addressed to a person and not to a role, avatar or cyber-existence<sup>27</sup>.

The virtual self, which is usually a fake persona, creates a new identity for the user, turning him or her into an anonymous individual in the chaotic cyberspace. Through the endless representations and transmissions of images, the faceless individual is often unable to distinguish between fantasy and truth, reality and simulation<sup>28</sup>. For this

26. Chr. Andras, «Παραβατικότητα και έθισμός στο διαδίκτυο», in: *Νέες Τεχνολογίες & Οικογένεια*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

27. Chr. Tsironis, «Η αντινομία της οικειότητας: Έπικοινωνία και αποξένωση στο διαδίκτυο», *op.cit.*, pp. 268-269.

28. K. Zorbas – M. Tsikritsis, «Η νέα φιλοσοφία του Facebook και του Blog...», *op.cit.*,



reason, many delinquent and criminal behaviors that start in the digital world are often transferred to real world. The unlimited transmission of information acts as a trap for people who do not possess critical thinking and cannot filter truth from lies. The Internet becomes the means for correct information on various issues, but also –unfortunately so– for brainwashing and turning free persons into individual pawns of a faceless society, projecting false standards, ideologies and attitudes.

It has been generally accepted that technological achievements have changed our everyday life, as they make it easier for us to better organize our lives and time. For this reason, the demonization of technology should be avoided. According to orthodox theology, everything is a gift from God, so man must manage it properly in the common interest. As with every new form of technology that enters our lives, so too in the digital age there is a need for the moderate use of things. The solution to the problem of the anonymity of the faceless individual in the modern age lies in the transition from technology to the ontology of orthodox Christian teaching. The acceptance of material culture and the human body have taken place at the crack of history, when the Creator Word of God was incarnated on earth<sup>29</sup>.

The reality of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ enshrines the transformation of matter, having been assumed and sanctified by God Himself<sup>30</sup>. The theology of the person, as expressed in the orthodox patristic doctrinal teaching, is opposed to the impersonal disembodied world and aims at building a well-ordered society<sup>31</sup>. Each person is equally valuable

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pp. 93-94.

29. *John 1, 14*: «Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν».

30. It is a fact, though, that, in recent years, many theologians are increasingly talking about the “culture of the incarnation”, referring to the incarnation of Christ in creation and in history. See, for example Chr. Stamoulis, *Ἔρως καὶ Θάνατος. Δοκιμὴ γιὰ ἕναν πολιτισμὸ τῆς σάρκωσης*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2009.

31. St. S. Fotiou, «Πνευματικότητα καὶ βιωσιμότητα ἐν μέσῳ κοινωνικῶν προκλήσεων», *Ἐκκλησιαστικός Κήρυκας/Ekklesiastikos Kerykas* 24 (2018), p. 193: “The believer meets a God who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, to reveal the truth in the flesh. In Christ’s person, teachings and work, the real life is revealed, that overcomes all forms of death – spiritual, social, biological. The Christian does not need to escape from this life in order to move to platonic heavens but, here and now, in this space and time, he can commune with God and experience the sweetness of existence”.

with the other; he or she is a special and unique person, infinitely valuable, and therefore deserves respect and love<sup>32</sup>. The Church with its sacraments and services blesses and sanctifies matter, since matter is an essential element for their performance. Without bread and wine, the Eucharist cannot be celebrated, without water Baptism, without perfumes the Myrrh, without oil the Holy Unction, without water the sanctification and so much more. Also, with the Christian feasts and the veneration of the holy relics, an embodied culture is brought out, aiming at the transition from in the image to in the likeness.

In the face of the anonymous person of the digital age, Orthodox theology promotes the name of the human person, which is enabled through interpersonal relations<sup>33</sup>. Besides, several social anthropologists emphasize relations rather than the subject, wanting to stress that social relations with fellow human beings create a sense of responsibility towards difference<sup>34</sup>. We are therefore called upon today to practice and safeguard the principles of the individual in order to support the modern man. With these principles man will be able to: a) cultivate his thinking regarding the meaning of life; b) allow for reflection; c) develop critical approaches; d) contribute to the wise use of personal data while strengthening his judgement, and thus his freedom; and e) defend himself against the degeneration of democracy<sup>35</sup>.

In the face of the challenges of modern times, the time is ripe for Orthodox theology to stand up and proclaim its truth in order to save man and the whole world<sup>36</sup>. The virtual bodyless reality leads to modern

32. Io. Petrou, *Κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη*, Paratiritis Publications, Thessaloniki <sup>2</sup>1992, p. 58.

33. N. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και συμβολική Θεολογία Γ'.* *Ανακεφαλαίωση και αγαθοτοπία.* Έκθεση του οίκουμενικού χαρακτήρα της χριστιανικής διδασκαλίας, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 1997, pp. 350-351.

34. K. Zorbas – M. Tsikritsis, «Η νέα φιλοσοφία του Facebook και του Blog...», *op.cit.*, p. 90.

35. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός ανθρωπισμός...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-18.

36. Io. Petrou, *Θρησκεία & Κοινωνία. Κοινωνιολογική ανάλυση των σχέσεων θρησκείας και κοινωνίας στη σύγχρονη πραγματικότητα*, Barbounakis Publications, Thessaloniki 2012, p. 79: "They can [the religions], of course, under certain conditions contribute to the cultivation of moral values in dealing with problems by offering auxiliary work. Obviously, 'addressing' the problems of society is not the same with 'helping to address them'". G. Kounnousiis, *Άνθρωπος και κοινωνία στο έργο του Gregory of Nyssa*, (PhD

idolatry, since the digital image transforms individuals into idols, depicting a depersonalized subject seeking to be worshiped and deified<sup>37</sup>. The change of senses in digital modernity –the transition from embodied tactility to bodyless vision–, has deprived modern man of basic interpersonal relations skills: empathy, forgiveness, honesty, trust, reliability and love, which were learned and experienced through emotions, i.e. through the body and its senses, and helped in interpersonal communication through encounter and dialogue, have nowadays been weakened<sup>38</sup>.

According to Orthodox theology's most dynamic point of view, human beings are perceived as persons who are free to respond to God's love. This freedom implies at the same time the assumption of responsibility for any successes or failures of choices on the part of human beings<sup>39</sup>. Liquid modern society<sup>40</sup> urgently calls for the practical application of fundamental moral norms –freedom, respect for the personality of others and social justice– as they have been globally expressed in social ethics, for a sustainable society to be achieved on equal terms for all people<sup>41</sup>. Next to these are the principles of acceptance of human dignity, moral responsibility, social witness and solidarity<sup>42</sup>.

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Thesis), Kypropaedia Publications, Nicosia 2015, pp. 99-119.

37. Th. Tasis, *Πολιτικές του βίου II: Η επιμέλεια éαυτοῦ στήν εἰκονιστική κοινωνία*, *op.cit.*, pp. 314-315: "Yet, in the digital reality, the virtual subject simultaneously experiences intertwined lives. Thus, its image in the social media or in a game is different from his image in the relations of physical reality. For example, the Facebook profile corresponds to how he wants to be seen by others and not necessarily to what he wants to be or become [...]. Facebook is a meeting place for idolaters".

38. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός άνθρωπισμός...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-39.

39. Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός άνθρωπισμός...*, *op.cit.*, p. 47: "Men are not impersonal and interchangeable members of a totality, but unique personalities responsible for their own lives".

40. Bauman speaks of for a permanent and unabated regime of uncertainty under which modern man lives the future prospects. See Z. Bauman, *Η μετανεωτερικότητα καὶ τὰ δεινά της*, G. Lykiardopoulos (ed.), transl. G.-I. Babasakis, Psychogios Publications, Athens 2002, p. 52. In a another of his books, he speaks of the feeling of constant and fearful uncertainty in a Liquid Modernity: *Ρευστός Φόβος*, transl. G. Karabelas, Polytropon Publications, Athens 2007, pp. 173-213.

41. Chr. Tsironis, *Παγκοσμιοποίηση καὶ τοπικές κοινότητες. Συμβολή στήν κοινωνική ήθική καὶ τὸ κοινωτικό έργο*, Vanias Publications, Thessaloniki 2007, p. 14.

42. Z. Bauman, *Παράπλευρες απώλειες. Κοινωνικές ανισότητες στήν έποχή της παγκοσμιοποίησης*, Th. Padapellis (ed.), transl. Eva Papadelli, Ekdoseis tou Eikostou

Religion can provide the answers to the basic existential questions and the meaning of human life, as well as the formulation of a strong moral proposal for modern civilization. Orthodox theology promotes collectivity in the face of the individualistic culture of modern capitalism. It transmits the values of responsibility, participation, respect for norms, honesty and cooperation with individuals of different cultures<sup>43</sup>. Especially regarding the use of online applications and media, it promotes personal enrichment and the avoidance of frivolity by making the right choices, which will lead people to exhibit respect, an attitude of responsibility, and a commitment to do no harm to any person or the natural environment<sup>44</sup>.

To conclude: we ought to demythologize digital technology and consider it as a means to improve our daily lives, avoiding its promotion as an end in itself. At the same time, there is an urgent need to create the right conditions for a balanced use of the internet; its indiscriminate use carries a number of risks. In order to protect children in particular, it is considered crucial to transmit principles, values and rules for their safe development, which will help to reduce the consequences for them and society<sup>45</sup>. In this respect, the traditional social institutions that have been tested and withstood during the course of history –the school and the Church– can positively help to address the contemporary moral challenges posed by the internet’s widespread and unruly use. Both institutions function as communities that help their members internalizing their motivations,

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Protou, Athens 2012, pp. 119-120; G. Kounnousiis, «Μαρτυρία πίστεως στὴ σύγχρονη κοινωνία», in: St. S. Fotiou (ed.), *Τί σημαίνει νὰ πιστεύεις σήμερα*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2018, pp. 63-71.

43. V. Samara, «Άσφαλὴς χρῆση τοῦ διαδικτύου – ἀναγνώριση τοῦ προβλήματος, πρόληψη καὶ προστασία», in: *Νέες Τεχνολογίες & Οἰκογένεια*, op.cit., p. 117.

44. Chr. Tsironis, «Ἡ ἀντινομία τῆς οἰκειότητος: Ἐπικοινωνία καὶ ἀποξένωση στὸ διαδίκτυο», op.cit., pp. 272-273.

45. Chr. Andras, «Παραβατικότητα καὶ ἔθισμός στὸ διαδίκτυο», op.cit., pp. 74-75: “The effort to prevent possible addiction and offending behavior on the internet must have at its center a sensible culture that I would call ‘a hymn to real life and humanity’. This means that it is important to cultivate a balanced development of body and spirit. Play, sports, contact with nature are balancing factors [...]. Moreover, ‘hymn to life’ means that man is complete when he leaves his ego behind and meets the other. The joy of meeting the other, of interacting with the friend, with the stranger, is valuable and enriches our lives. Risking the relationship with a friend, the possible rejection, but also the joy of acceptance is worth our struggle”.

legitimacy and principles of social life<sup>46</sup>. They therefore play an important role in the socialization of people, as they foster searching, challenge, discovery, justification and collectivity. All these elements contribute to the construction of the future active citizen in a well-ordered and well-governed society. The Church, in particular, must contribute with its parish activities to the emergence of an embodied culture, in which modern man will coexist as a person with all others, discover new aspects of his personality and collide with his selfish self for the sake of the society's general good. In these activities, man as an active subject will rediscover the importance and the joy of the material and social space that surrounds him, while he will cultivate his senses and become aware of his physicality, by giving new meaning to his life. It is the duty of every human being, especially young people, to become actively involved in the two institutions and adopt their principles and values –not simply to indifferently follow events– in order to acquire the appropriate skills that will support them for a balanced and happy life.

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46. G. Kounnousiis, «Σχέσεις και σχάσεις στη σύγχρονη νεωτερική κοινωνία», in: St. S. Fotiou (ed.), *Χαράγματα για τὸν σύγχρονο κόσμο*, [Θεολογικά Δοκίμια 10], Kentro Meleton Hieras Monis Kykkou, Nicosia 2020, pp. 50-51.