COMMUNICATION ON THE HORIZON OF TECHNOLOGY. PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Dn. Gheorghe-Cristian POPA, PhD(c).

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest, Romania
popagheorghecristian@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Communication on the Horizon of Technology. Philosophical and Theological Perspectives.

This study proposes an assessment of how technology influences interpersonal communication and human thinking. In this respect, the contributions of some authors who have asserted themselves as philosophers of technology will be underscored, their reflections being essential to the understanding of communication media, and especially to understanding how they work on different levels of human communication (with self, with other people, with the world, with divinity).

Keywords: *philosophy, technology, communication, social thinking, medium, message, technological society, technological system, theology.*

The impact of technology on human communication is an issue that has been seriously addressed in the philosophical environment. However, in contrast to the enthusiastic attitude that technology stimulates in our consumerist society, in the philosophical space it is looked upon with a lot more concern. Approaches of contemporary thinkers on this subject have merged into a common view that *technology is not neutral in itself but has profound implications in human life*. According to this interpretation, it is not man who controls technology, but it is the technology that tends to lead the individual and eventually to subdue him. It is indeed a grim scenario that brings great discomfort to contemporary man, which is why most admirers of technological progress reject this model of interpretation with disdainful irony. To the followers of the instrumentalist model of interpretation, seeing technology as an autonomous force constitutes an intellectual delin-

quency fined with infantilism and retrograde thinking labels. Yet these are labels worn in the recent past by personalities of sociology and philosophy such as Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, Martin Heidegger, José Ortega y Gasset, or Neil Postman, who maintained that *technology deeply influences human existence*. The basic idea supported by each of the abovementioned authors is that any technological invention produces a change in social thinking and in the way society is organized.

1. Marshall McLuhan: "The medium is the message"

Marshall McLuhan sees any medium or technology as an extension of the human body, yet not an inert one, but one that affects the human sense it extends and the relationship between that particular sense and the other senses: "A new extension establishes a new balance between all senses and capabilities, leading to a 'new' prospect - new attitudes and preferences in several areas."[1] He sees technology as an extension of the human nervous system (clothing is an extension of the skin, the car is an extension of the foot, a home extends the regulation of a body's temperature, etc.) and launches early on the idea that technological changes produce new sensory media which gradually alter a person's perceptions. In another paper, McLuhan resumes this idea and states that "it is impossible for man to create any form of technology that is not proportionate to his senses."[2]

In terms of impact on interpersonal communication and human thinking, McLuhan became famous for the phrase "the medium is the message," suggesting that *there is no mediated technology communication that remains neutral because the medium changes the content of communication*. In his book *Understanding Media*, he cites a passage from General David Sarnoff's speech at the time of receiving an honorary degree from the University of Notre Dame: "We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used

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1   Marshall McLuhan, *Să înțelegem media. Extensiile omului* [Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man], Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2011, p. 175.
2   Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light. Reflections on Religion*, edited by Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek, WIPF & STOCK Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1999, pp. 38–39.

that determines their value."[3] The prevalent attitude of today's approach to technology is captured very well by Sarnoff's words, which McLuhan amends with lucidity and a bit of humor as well:

> "That is the voice of the current somnambulism. Suppose we were to say: (…) 'Firearms are in themselves neither good nor bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value.' That is, if the slugs reach the right people firearms are good. I am not being perverse. There is simply nothing in the Sarnoff statement that will bear scrutiny, for it ignores the nature of the medium, of any and all media, in the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form."[4]

The phrase "the medium is the message" synthesizes McLuhan's belief that what we ordinarily consider to be "content" or "information" transmitted through a medium is, in fact, a medium in itself. In this respect, he brings the example of the telegraph, which contains the printed word, which in turn contains the writing, which in turn contains speech (understood as a technology that gives expression to thought). What is essential to understanding why he gives so much importance to this relationship between the medium and content is that, in his view, *the individual concentrates without being aware especially on the medium, while feeling that he is paying full attention to the content.* It is some sort of illusion that the Canadian author denounces. He believes that there is a need for a trained discernment in this respect because each technology has the power to change what we think about the world, what we do in the world, and what we become in the world. How we interact with technology has concrete effects on one's own personhood and on a social level.

In order to highlight the effects of each new technology at personal and community levels, McLuhan brings back into discussion the example of speech, which upon being transformed into writing, gained a prominent visual aspect, and this mutation has produced effects in the cultural and social organization lasting to this day. Although this affirmation could be interpreted as positive, McLuhan sees it as a loss because writing separated

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3   Marshall McLuhan, *Să înțelegem media. Extensiile omului...* [Understanding Media. The extensions of Man], p. 37.

4   Marshall McLuhan, *Să înțelegem media. Extensiile omului...* [Understanding Media. The extensions of Man], p. 37.

speech from the physical senses. A second loss occurred when the radio became an extension of speech, ultimately reducing it to hearing only (because it leaves the impression of speech, but in reality, it is just listening). Thus, from this example, the general idea is that every technology that extends a human sense separates that sense from the other senses, and the way we use our senses to know the world is, in essence, how we communicate with it.

Here McLuhan reveals prophetically another worrying reality: *the medium does not only change the content of communication, but it also changes those who communicate*. Every technology extends a sense of the human body which it then atrophies or even amputates. By amputation, he means the reflex of the nervous system to protect itself from the overstimulation arrived through its own extensions through a state of narcosis, numbness that prevents self-recognition: "Self-amputation prevents self-recognition."[5] From the point of view of interpersonal communication, this aspect is relevant because any acceptance of technology mediation in this process equates, in the logic of McLuhan's argument, with the acceptance of a certain "dislocation of perception" or a subliminal numbness. In other words, a technology-mediated communication implies a loss from the start. That is why McLuhan insists greatly on the importance of awareness or at least a constant concern for understanding the technologies we use:

> "Today, in the electronic era of instant communication, I believe that our survival - or, in the best case, at least our peace and happiness-depends on the understanding of the new medium's nature because unlike previous environmental changes, electrical means cause a total and almost instantaneous transformation of culture, values, and attitudes. This overturning generates great suffering and a loss of identity that can only be improved through awareness of process dynamics. If we understand the revolutionary transformations caused by the new means, we can anticipate them and control them; but if we persist in our induced subliminal trance, we will become their slaves."[6]

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5   Marshall McLuhan, *Să înțelegem media. Extensiile omului…*, [Understanding Media. The extensions of Man], p. 76.
6   Marshall McLuhan, *Galaxia Gutenberg. Scrieri esențiale* [The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man], translated by Mihai Moroiu, ed. a III-a, Editura Nemira, București, 2015, pp. 368–369.

2. Neil Postman: "The medium is the metaphor"

McLuhan's disciple, Neil Postman, goes further and expands on McLuhan's reasoning about the effects of the technological system on human culture. From this perspective, he completes his master by saying that "the environment is the metaphor." He considers this amendment, or rather, this nuance of the term to be necessary because the message denotes a concrete, specific statement about the world, which is not the case with the newer media which "are rather like metaphors, working through discrete but powerful implications to support their own definitions of reality."[7] As a figure of speech, the metaphor is a word or phrase that is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Postman believes that by the power of this suggestion, the metaphor etches a conception in our mind, so that we can no longer imagine one thing without the other. That is why this term seems more appropriate to describe how new media or technologies affect how we think and understand the world, noting that, unlike the metaphors to which we are accustomed, media metaphors work much more discreetly and with greater complexity that it takes a lot more effort to reach them, to grasp the ideas they contain. Postman says that "this effort gets easier if we start with the assumption that in every tool we create, an idea is embedded that goes beyond the function of the thing itself."[8]

To be specific, he gives the example of the eyeglasses whose invention in the twelfth century not only made it possible to improve vision but suggested the idea that human beings need not accept as final either the endowments by nature, or the ravages of time. The eyeglasses contested the belief that anatomy is destiny, advancing the idea that our bodies and our minds are improvable. When putting on his eyeglasses, man began to believe or trust in the power he had over his own body, and subsequent and recent inventions and experiments in the fields of medicine and genetics have confirmed this apparent change of perspective on the self. Another example, even more relevant, that Postman offers, is typography. Although typography has brought many benefits to human culture, it also brought a few minuses to the humanity's way of being:

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7   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară, Discursul public în epoca televizorului* [Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business], Editura Anacronic, Domnești, 2016, p. 26.

8   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară ...* [Amusing Ourselves to Death…], p. 31.

"Typography fostered the modern idea of individuality, but it destroyed the medieval sense of community and integration. Typography created prose but turned poetry into a form of exotic and elitist expression. Typography made modern science possible but transformed religious sensitivity into a mere superstition. Typography helped to develop the nation-state but made patriotism a sordid, if not lethal, emotion."[9]

What Postman purports to say is that *the means of communication and the technologies available to a culture have a dominant influence on the formation of the intellectual and social preoccupations of that culture*. Culture is recreated by every new tool, and this directs what we will see or know, without our noticing its role: "The changes made by technology are subtle, if not even mysterious; we might even say that are wildly unpredictable. Among the most unpredictable are those that could be called ideological."[10] Here, Postman seems to suggest somewhat timidly that technologies can be a means of ideological promotion. In another place, however, he states it succinctly, clearly, and disconcertingly courageously: *technology is ideology*[11] because it imposes a lifestyle and a set of relationships between people and ideas, issues on which there has never been any consensus, any debate, or any opposition. In his view, any technology has an inherent predisposition: "Only those who do not know anything about the history of technology believe that technology is completely neutral (...). Each technology has its own agenda. Every technology is a metaphor ready to unfold."[12]

3. Lewis Mumford's clock

The American historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford is one of the technology philosophers who have shown that any technological invention changes society and people. He is convinced that the role technique has played in human development cannot be understood without a deep look into the history of human nature.[13] That is why he takes his analysis to the

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9   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară* ... [Amusing Ourselves to Death…], p. 52.
10   Neil Postman, *Technopoly. The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Vintage Books, New York, 1993, p. 12.
11   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară* ... [Amusing Ourselves to Death…], p. 216.
12   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară* ... [Amusing Ourselves to Death…], p. 123.
13   Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine. Technics and Human Development*,

early tools of man, trying to capture how they have dictated to some extent man's subsequent becoming.

In his work *Technics and Civilization*, his preoccupation was focused specifically on the invention of the mechanical clock, which he considered *the key invention of the Industrial Revolution*.[14] He subtly points out the paradox accompanying the historical attestation of this invention, noting that the mechanical clock appeared nowhere else than in a monastery, precisely where a preoccupation for measuring time is antithetic to the monks' preparation for eternity. The invention is attributed to Monk Gerbert d'Aurillac (946–1003) who later became Pope Silvester II. The seven hours of prayer set by Saint Benedict began to be announced by the bells according to pre-established schedules, which changed the rhythm of monastic life and, as Mumford asserts, the nature of the monastery. Soon, the use of the clock spread out of the monastery and evolved within human settlements in such a way that it got to create a new rhythm in the lives of workers and merchants:

> "The clock from the tower almost defined urban existence. Strict observance of time soon became time saving, time accounting, and time reasoning. At this point, eternity gradually ceased to serve as a measure and center of human activity."[15]

Neil Postman quotes and completes Mumford's statement, saying that the inexorable ticking of the clock might have weakened God's supremacy more than all the treatises produced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. He points out that this way of approaching time expressed in the metaphor "moment to moment" is not God's or nature's conception, but it is only man conversing with himself about and through a machine he created, a machine that has transformed us into time-keepers, and then into time-savers, and now into time-servers.[16]

To Mumford, the mechanical clock was the paradigm by which he was able to explain how a technology can cause profound changes in man's thinking at a given time:

Hardcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, p. 3.

14   Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1934. p. 14.

15   Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1934. p. 14.

16   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară ...* [Amusing Ourselves to Death…], p. 28.

"The clock is a power machine whose *product* is seconds and minutes; it has the effect of disassociating time from human events and thus nourishes the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences: the special world of science."[17]

4. Martin Heidegger:
"The essence of technology is not technological"

Martin Heidegger is one of the philosophers of technology whose voice was heard more than those of the previously mentioned authors, but his message was not a convenient one to the mentality that dominated his age. Although the enthusiasm for technological advancement in the mid-twentieth century was significant, he assumed the uncomfortable position of affirming and warning that technology is responsible for the intellectual and moral decline of that time by restricting human experience to things as they were. Moreover, nature and people were seen as raw material for technical operations. He noted that modern civilization, both in the communist East and the democratic West, was enslaved by the power of technology and, like Marshall McLuhan, he believed that this bondage cannot be escaped by rejecting technology but by perceiving the danger that it presupposes through awareness.

His reference work on this subject is "The Question Concerning Technology," published in 1954, although his concerns on this issue can be found in several of his essays and writings. From the beginning of his argumentation, Heidegger calls for a serious questioning concerning the essence of technology, and at the same time indicates the greatest obstacle to the efforts to reach it. He says that we remain technology-chained, whether we affirm it or deny it, "but we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to pay homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology."[18]

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17   Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1934. p. 15.
18   Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated and with an introduction by William Lovitt, Garland Publishing, New York and London, 1977, p. 4.

The two common definitions of technology, "a means to an end" and "human activity," the instrumental definition and the anthropological definition, respectively, although correct-Heidegger says-are not true. This specification is particularly important to him because he is convinced that only the truth brings us into a free relationship with that which concerns us from its essence. As such, the instrumental definition of technology does not show us the essence of technology. That is why he says it clearly:

> "Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, that is, of truth."[19]

So long as it remains concealed, the essence of technology can be manipulated. That is why Heidegger sees revealing the essence as the solution to the technology issue by rediscovering *techne* in its ancient relationship with *poiesis*.[20] Because the essence of technology has nothing technological in it, he posits that the essential reflection on technology and the decisive confrontation with it must take place in a realm that is both technology-related and fundamentally different from it. Heidegger suggests that such a realm might be art.[21]

5. Jacques Ellul. Technological society or technological system?

Jacques Ellul formulates a comprehensive and powerful social philosophy of technological civilization. His work, *The Technological Society*, published in 1964, is his response to a paradox that he found in the social context of his time: although the technique is the most important reality of the modern world, it is also the least understood. Thus, he examines the role of technique in the modern society with a rare lucidity and critical attitude, and puts forth a system of thought that can help to understand the force behind the development of technological civilization. In the preface of the American edition, he states that in the modern world, the most dangerous form of determinism is the technological phenomenon, and the first step

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19   Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology...*, p. 12.
20   To the ancient Greeks, *techne* meant craftsmanship, but this term was also used for *poiesis*, which designates activities in the sphere of fine arts.
21   Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology...*, p. 35.

to overcome this problem is an act of freedom, that of becoming cognizant of what technology is in depth and the way it works on us.

By "technique" Ellul means more than a technological machine. He prefers this term because the word "technology" may give the impression that it is an isolated fact in society, which would be totally false if we consider its concrete, easily observable effects on social relations, on political structures, and on economic phenomena. For Ellul, technique is configured *as a set of standardized means in order to achieve predetermined results*; technique is *the totality of rationalized methods to have absolute efficiency in every field of human activity*. Although without machinery the world of technique would not exist, its being both origin and center, still in the current sense, technique became completely independent of the machine; moreover, it is the machine that is technology-dependent, becoming only a small part of it.

What Ellul really means to signal is that this confusion between technique and machine prevents our correctly understanding the implications of the technological system in our lives. Like the aforementioned authors, he emphasizes the need to be aware of the reality of technology but suggests that this is not possible without accepting and understanding the difference between machinery and technique:

> "As long as the technique was represented exclusively by the car, we could talk about 'the man *and* the car.' The machine remained an external object, and man (though significantly influenced by it in his professional, private, and psychological life) remained independent. It was then that he would have been able to consider himself outside the car; he would have been able to take a position on this. But when the technique penetrates the deepest recesses of the human being, it ceases to be outside the human being and becomes his very essence. It is no longer face to face with man but is integrated in him and absorbs him progressively. In this sense, the technique is radically different from the machine. This transformation, so obvious in modern society, is the result of the technique's becoming autonomous."[22]

In Ellul's vision, technique is not only autonomous. In his work, he distinguishes six fundamental features of modern technology and devotes

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22   Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, translated by John Wilkinson with an introduction by Robert K. Merton, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1964, p. 6.

to them an entire chapter:[23] rationality, artificiality, automatism of techni-cal choice, self-augmentation, monism, universalism, and autonomy. Sim-ply listing them reveals that technology is not and cannot be neutral. Ellul's vision not only goes beyond the instrumentalist approach to technology that man is controlled by it but reverses the logic of this approach, present-ing technology as a force with its own manifestations that analyzes man and regulates how he functions in the structured society as a mechanism of maximum efficiency. Analyzing more carefully what the human-machine society has become, Ellul concludes that this term does not adequately ex-press the reality re-engineered by technique and proposes another phrase, "the technological system," a syntagm that in 1980 became the title of the author's second reference work on the subject.

In *The Technological System*, Jacques Ellul shows that technology is no longer satisfied with being the leading or determinant factor in the world, and so it has become a system. There are two defining features of a system that Ellul identifies in the way technology is manifested: on the one hand, there is the interrelation between the main and most important elements of the whole; on the other hand, there is technology's organic re-lationship with the outside world.[24] The technological system is described by the author as an open system with its own logic that tends to embed and substitute non-technological elements from real systems such as nature or society. That is why he compares the technological system with a cancer that invades a living organism and evolves through the connections created between the metastases, to the stage where it substitutes and irreversibly takes control over the organism.[25]

Within the technological system, man encounters an exhausting logic of efficiency, in which he is just an object that must necessarily pro-duce immediate, measurable, superior results within an impersonal mech-anism. The individual himself is fascinated by the results, by the immedi-ate outcomes of maneuvering standardized devices. Above all, the person engages in the endless pursuit of the best way to achieve any intended goal. The system of internal organization and working of today's multinational

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23   Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society...*, p. 79.
24   Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, translated by Joachim Neugroschel, The Continuum Publishing Corporation, New York, 1980, p. 78.
25   Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System...*, pp. 80-81.

corporations confirms that Ellul's vision was a prophecy. He also makes a portrait of the technologized man, which is worryingly akin to that of the contemporary man. In Ellulian optics, the technological man leads a dual existence. On the one hand, he is very competent in his field, and he knows and clearly sees that he has to deal with an increasing efficiency in his business sector. On the other hand, he is on the same level as anyone else: he knows the world and political and economic issues only from partial and biased information; has only a half-understanding of the issues, a quarter of knowledge of facts, and competence in his field is useless in helping him understand or know the general phenomenon on which ultimately everything depends. Ellul assigns this "handicap" of the technological man to the fact that *the technological system has its own adjusting agents*:

> "Advertising, entertainment, media, political propaganda, public relations, all these things, with some superficial differences, have one function: to adapt man to technology and to provide him with the psychological satisfaction and motivation that can make him live and work efficiently in this universe. The entire mental panorama in which man is located is produced by technicians and shapes him for the technological universe, the only one that reflects in him through anything is represented to him. Not only does he live spontaneously in the technology medium, but the advertising and entertainment also offer the image, reflection, or hypostasis of that medium."[26]

It is these self-adjusting agents of the technological system that make Ellul talk about a certain *technocracy*, an exaggerated growth of the power of technicians who decide, through their legitimate system-based competence, on the natural processes and the lives of other people. At this point in the discussion, the reality of human freedom is placed under a striking question mark. In a speech with fine tragic-comic undertones, Ellul suggests that man does have the freedom to choose within this system... to choose from the options offered by the system:

> "Man is still perfectly capable of choosing, deciding, modifying, leading ... but always within the framework of technology and to the advancement of technology. Man can choose. But his choices will always have secondary elements and will never be related to the global phenomenon. His judgments will always be ultimately

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26   Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System...*, p. 313.

defined by technological criteria (even those that seem humanistic). Man can choose, but within a system of options established by the technological process. He can lead, but strictly under the conditions of a given technology."[27]

Ellul concludes his work on the technological system with the above speech about freedom formulated in a note perhaps a bit pessimistic, but with an amazing prophetic force. It can be considered a testamentary discourse that opens an understanding of the higher phenomenon, closer to reality than many other sterile theories proposed today, generated - of course - by the ... technological system.

6. Technology and theology

The criticism of technology of the above authors underscores its intrusion in all areas of human life; spiritual life is no exception. On the contrary, the soul is more affected by the pressure of technology than many other realities of everyday human life. This is less obvious because the individual under the technological spell no longer questions the existence of the soul, much less its health. In the technological universe, in which any reality that cannot be transposed into an algorithm is perceived as an error and as such, eliminated, spiritual life has less and less relevance, and it is gradually extinguished in the consciousness of man. Technology has the power to produce enough surrogates to satisfy artificially and effectively all the desires of the human nature, including the spiritual ones, through the milleniarist and messianic aura that it dons. Man no longer looks up to heaven because he already lives it here on earth in a simulated and even more comfortable form because it does not require any spiritual effort that would involve any self-limitation or asceticism. For this reason, the impact of technology on human life has become the subject of theological reflection as well. Academia and church clergy alike have begun to pay more attention to the implications of technology on spiritual life and to analyze the concrete pastoral consequences of this phenomenon.

In some points, the theological discourse presents approaches similar to those of the aforementioned authors, so that a felicitous vicinity can be found between Orthodox theology and the philosophy of technology.

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27   Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System...*, p. 325.

For example, in one of his works, Professor Georgios Mantzaridis identifies what in the philosophy of technology would be called "technological determinism":

> "Man not only directs technology but is also directed by it. He is seduced by its achievements and becomes its servant. In the name of the liberty of the progress of science and technology, he destroys his own freedom. Technology serves as a tool for man, but man serves as a tool for technology. And though he sees himself led into a situation without escape, he must forge ahead. He works like a machine "in the image and likeness" of the machines he himself builds. (…) In our age, technology and its tool, the machine, has overtaken bearable man-made measures. It has evolved, transforming itself into technocracy or, more precisely, into a mechanistic entity, and has subordinated man to a mechanistic logic. And though it may seem that man masters the world through this logic and machines, he is mastered in reality, together with the world, by machines and a mechanistic logic."[28]

On the other hand, in the thoughts of the presented authors, one can glimpse subtle theological nuances and spiritual truths reached intuitively, without their suggesting at any moment that the reflection and argumentation be theological. **Marshall McLuhan** noted that the invention of writing (or writing technology) has brought, from a certain point of view, a regression of human culture through the transition from speech to writing, from oral communication to written communication. Hundreds of years before, Saint John Chrysostom[29] had emphasized the qualitative difference between the two levels of communication, speaking and writing, showing that the Scriptures had been sent to man after he had sinfully lost the face-to-Face interaction with God. The Antiochian Saint hierarchizes these types of communication between God and man, placing communication through the Scriptures or writing on a lower position, calling it the "second path" or "second cure." Similarly, McLuhan's view that any technology changes thinking proclivities finds a very good illustration in the behavior of the Babylonians who, fascinated by their tools and engineering

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28   Georgios Mantzaridis, *Morala Creştină* [Christian Ethics], vol. 2, translated by Deacon Cornel Constantin Coman, Editura Bizantină, Bucureşti, 2006, pp. 439-441.

29   From *Homily I on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* and *Homily IX to the People of Antioch*.

results, began to think that they can exist and perfect themselves through themselves, entering into a logic of autonomy that took on the form of the megalomaniacal tower.[30]

Neil Postman insists in his argument that any device encases an idea that goes beyond the function of the tool itself. He suggests, in fact, that there is an invisible part of every technology that influences how man understands the world and himself. In another place he even uses the phrase "if the invisible controls the visible ...."[31] The intuitive thinking of the American professor suggests the existence of a presence not only invisible, but also unseen, beyond any seen realities. In the Orthodox faith, the conviction that *the invisible structures the visible* is fundamental. Nothing in the vastness of Eastern theology can be understood if the act of knowledge is not based on the internalization of the truth expressed by this syntagm. There are enough references in the patristic literature which show that *behind each reality is a spirit*. The question that arises in this situation is the following: What spirit is behind technology? Knowing the spirits is eminently a spiritual gift, which makes the answer to this question not only difficult, but also risky if it is formulated under the urgent pressure of the question. It could be the *spirit of vainglory*, as it was with the Babylonians; it could be the *spirit of greed* that makes man see in technology the opportunity to conquer more and more of the earth's resources; it could be the *spirit of sloth* that sustains the comfort specific to the technologized man; or there could be more spirits working simultaneously. Essential to the problem of technology is not the answer itself to the question, but the perpetual concern for finding this answer, the indefatigable awareness of the fact that beyond the appearance of a simple instrument there is an unseen spirit working on how the entire human experience is built within this technological universe.

Martin Heidegger considers essential this permanent concern to reflect on the essence of technology as well. The awareness to which he urges is not possible, however, without a serious commitment to seeking

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30   The biblical paradigm of the technological logic represented by the Tower of Babel is extensively explained in *Apologetica*, vol. 2, Adrian Lemeni (coord.), Father Răzvan Ionescu, Deacons Sorin Mihalache, Cristinel Ioja, Basilica Publishing House, București, 2014, pp. 345–346.

31   Neil Postman, *Distracția care ne omoară. Discursul public în epoca televizorului ...* [Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business], p. 32.

the truth because, in his opinion, "only the truth brings us into a free relationship with that which concerns us from its essence." And it is not just his opinion ... it is what Christ has taught and what the Church has been preaching for centuries: "The truth shall make you free!" (John 8:32). In the context of technology's assault on human freedom and dignity, seeking the Truth is the only effort that has the power to restore these two fundamental qualities of man.

The contribution of these voices from the philosophy of technology to the understanding of the general phenomenon of the technique is enormous, and this should also make Orthodox theology more accountable in its mission of helping man to rediscover his dignity, freedom, and vocation to be fulfilled in God. Father Dumitru Stăniloae, himself engaged in a profound reflection on technology, believed in this primordial duty of theology:

> "Theology is called to give back to today's man the awareness of his true superiority to technology, just as the Gospel and the Fathers once gave man the consciousness of his superiority to nature. It is called upon to release man from the feeling of being crushed by technology, just as the Gospel and the teaching of the Fathers freed him from the feeling that he is at the whim of capricious spiritual beings who use nature in an arbitrary way. (...) Man must follow his high finality even when he uses technology, because technology exists for the good of man, not man for the good of technology. Moreover, the danger of being enslaved, dehumanized, or even destroyed by technology is far more serious than the danger of being enslaved and destroyed by nature."[32]

The lucidity of thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, Lewis Mumford, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Ellul shows that the human mind has not lost its ability to rise above the rational clichés and automatisms cultivated by the technological medium. In full rise of technology, they found the power to navigate intuitively the dynamics of this phenomenon and to understand its mainsprings. Undoubtedly, their spiritual state within Christianity helped them to overcome some limitations in this endeavor.

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32   Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer, foreword by John Meyendorff, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1980, p. 225

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