

Holistic Dualism and Shared Self: Doing Theological Anthropology in the Age of AI and VR

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Introduction

The paper argues for the need for a sound theological anthropology in today's digital culture, defining digitality as the age of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR, including Augmented Reality and Extended Reality). Most of the world's population is now online. Through collaboration, Meltwater and We Are Social report that 5.30 billion people out of 8.06 billion world population are using the internet as of October 2023—65.7% of the total world population.¹ **(73.2% or 6.04 billion out of 8.25 billion as of October 2025)**. Simply, the internet has connected everyone, blurring the dichotomy between offline and online. Digital theologians like Heidi Campbell, Stephen Garner, and Teresa Berger—even theologians John Dyer and Darrell Bock with philosopher Jonathan Armstrong, and journalist Tony Reinke—say that offline life and online life intertwine and are evident today in workplaces: **using email and software systems; in schools: learning management systems, grading software, and eBooks for research resources; at home: digital alarm clocks, automated coffee makers, and usage of GPS for navigation; and even in churches: bible studies via Zoom meetings, live broadcast of worship services, and live stream of church ordinances (e.g. virtual baptism and communion).**²

Indeed, like a fish in the water, today's society is swimming in the vast ocean of digital technology.³ However—continuing the aquatic metaphor—this ocean of digitality is not pure, clean, or sanitary; it contains deadly spiritual malware and trojan horses that corrupt the nature of humanity—or at least the understanding of self—in today's digital culture. These are presented here as the 'seven deadly digital sins' known as pornography (lust), fake news (lies, pride), selective posting (pride, envy), online hoarding or compulsive e-shopping (greed, gluttony), video games and media addiction (idolatry, sloth), piracy (stealing, greed), and cyberbully or keyboard warriors (anger, hatred) that the researcher shares in this work.

¹ Simon Kemp, "Digital 2023 October Global Statshot Report," *We Are Social*, October 19, 2023, <https://wearesocial.com/us/blog/2023/10/digital-2023-october-global-statshot-report/>. Cf. "Digital 2023: October Global Statshot Report," *Meltwater*, <https://www.meltwater.com/en/resources/digital-2023-october-global-statshot-report>. While Internet users are 65.7%, the percentage of unique mobile phone users is 69.4%, which is 5.60 billion out of 8.06 billion people.

² Heidi Campbell and Wendi Bellar, *Digital Religion: The Basics* (NY: Routledge, 2023), 53. Cf. Christopher Helland, "Ritual," *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practices in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25; John Paul Arceno, "Is Virtual Baptism a 'Real' Baptism?" *Technology and Theology* ed. William Anderson (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2020), 149-167; Teresa Berger, *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (NY: Routledge, 2018); Darrell Bock and Jonathan Armstrong, *Virtual Reality Church: Pitfalls and Possibilities* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2021); John Dyer, *From Garden to the City: The Place of Technology in the Story of God*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2022); Tony Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).

³ Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 4-8.

Hence, this paper argues that it is only necessary to offer theological anthropological understanding in this digital technological world. A weak theological anthropology is the root cause of the flourishing of deadly digital sins nowadays. The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, the paper investigates the expansive **digital cultural reality** with a brief survey of technology in church history and terms such as digital self, digital religion, and digital theology, drawing on explorations by contemporary digital theologians and media, technology, and culture experts. Moreover, the cultural reality section explores current understandings and perspectives on digital theological anthropology, or at least on human personhood in light of digitality.

The second part examines the **digitality and humanity through the lens of biblical metanarrative**. This view offers: 1) in Creation, humanity as the image of God as co-creator utilizes technology as part of ‘creating’; 2) in Fall, humanity as a corrupted image creates and spreads malice even through technological development (e.g., Tower of Babel); 3) in Redemption, God in Christ restores his people including their function to channel divine wisdom and creativity for human flourishing; in Eschatology, Christians are the eschatological companions of God. Recovering and engaging human personhood, embodiment, spirituality, and dignity advances the hope for an objective view of theological anthropology in the digital realm. The paper proposes that what is needed is not more technological understanding but more theological understanding of humanity in the age of AI and VR. Hence, by understanding humanity’s 1) divine image, 2) holistic dualism, 3) deadly fallenness, 4) unconditional dignity, and 5) redemptive destiny, all applied in today’s digital cultural age, there is hope for redeeming the digital theological anthropology. **Additionally, throughout the paper, issues about pornography, cyberbullying, online human trafficking, cancel culture, ecclesial challenges on online worship, virtual reality churches, and Gnostic accusations on digital church engagement are part of the discussion.**

I. Digital Cultural Reality

Faith-seeking understanding matters in determining a theological anthropology. Thus, theology becomes vital. In today’s techno-cultural reality, the intersections of religion, faith, theology, and technology are now integrated and necessary to understand. Digital religion, defined by Heidi Campbell and Wendi Bellar, is a “religion that is practiced through both online platforms and offline spaces, which are seen as interconnected to one another.”⁴ For Peter Phillips of Spurgeon’s College in London, Digital theology “is the intentional, sustained and reflexive theologically-resourced engagement with digitality/digital culture.”⁵ Indeed, offline and online are integrated. Moreover, every generation remakes its language, whereas today’s cultural language is digitality.⁶ Nowadays, Gen X people are digital immigrants who see digital tech as progress. While Millennials see digitality as normative and essential, the Gen Zs—digital

⁴ Heidi A. Campbell and Wendi Bellar, *Digital Religion: The Basics* (NY: Routledge, 2023), 7. The paper does not elaborate on these traits.

⁵ Peter Phillips, “Defining Digital Theology,” *Cursor_ Zeitschrift Für Explorative Theologie*, November 6, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.21428/fb61f6aa.07b246a7>.

⁶ Roberta Katz, Sarah Ogilvie, Jane Shaw, and Linda Woodhead, *Gen Z, Explained: The Art of Living in a Digital Age* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 13, the authors say that postmillennials are profoundly shaped by the world of digitality, internet, and cyberspaces and affect how Gen Zers *do* life. Cf. Steve Taylor, “Lockdown Ecclesiologies,” *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, eds., Heidi Campbell and John Dyer (Golden Lane, London: SCM Press, 2021), 109. James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age*, says that the Internet is an epistemological habitat because it transforms the meaning of language, 58.

natives—see it as language. Millennials and Generation Z, also known as postmillennials, are digital natives, while those before them are digital immigrants. Here, digitality is more than a tool or a social construct. It is today’s cultural language. Equally, Steve Taylor affirms that “language is remade every generation.”⁷ Beginning from Millennials onwards, digitality is their embedded language. **The distinctions need to be understood to close the techno-cultural gap.**

Anyone with a social media account or an email address has a *digital self*. It does not divide the physical or in-real-life (IRL) embodied souls and digital parts, but it recreates a self for specific audiences: online audiences. In this paper, the digital self represents the IRL self in the internet world. It spans from having a social media account to buying online products, sending an email for work, having a dating app profile, navigating via GPS, attending Zoom meetings, transacting cryptocurrencies, and playing virtual reality massively multiplayer online role-playing games (VRMMORPG). **In a more profound sense, these shape an anthropological understanding of identity, realization, entitlement, objectives, constraint, and protection.**⁸ For brevity, the authors of *Gen Z, Explained*—consisting of an anthropologist from Stanford University, a linguist and a historian from the University of Oxford, and a sociologist from Lancaster University—present a comprehensive work of how the to live in the digital age and how this generation is self-reliant, invested in communal identities, and values authenticity, belongingness, and hybrid life.⁹

Nowadays, the relationships among faith, religion, culture, and digital technology are engaging with one another. Has it been like this before? Does technology play a part in the kingdom of God? The next part surveys a historical and biblical snapshot of these developments.

A Snapshot of Technological Developments

One of the most significant technological influences on the Christian world was the invention of the printing press by German innovator Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440s. The first book produced by Gutenberg’s Press was a Bible—known as the Gutenberg Bible. This printing press was the means by which the Reformation Age of Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers was crystallized through the publication of pamphlets, books, church letters, and sermons. Further, Neil Postman traced another technological development in the Benedictine monasteries’ mechanical clock between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Postman said, “The bells of the monastery were to be rung to signal the canonical hours; the mechanical clock was the technology that could provide precision to these rituals.”¹⁰

The use of technology can also be found in the Apostolic days. Apostle John, one of the disciples of Christ, used “paper and ink,” which was something advanced during their times (2 John 12). This instance was repeated in 3 John 13 when John wrote to Elder Gaius, “I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink” (NIV 2011). Paul used “books and

⁷ Steve Taylor, “Lockdown Ecclesiologies,” *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church*, 109.

⁸ Andrew Hill, “Your Digital Self,” *Medium*, June 11, 2018, <https://medium.com/textileio/your-digital-self-why-you-should-keep-every-byte-you-create-3a73bf0b3eb1>. Cf. Mark Campbell and Mladan Jovanovic, “Digital Self: The Next Evolution of the Digital Human” in *Computer*, vol. 55, 04 (2022):82-86.

⁹ Katz, et al., *Gen Z, Explained*, 189-204. Read Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today’s Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 73-89.

¹⁰ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. NY: Vintage Books, 1992), 14.

parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13).¹¹ Moreover, airwaves were used to proclaim the gospel of Christ.¹² Today, radio ministries still call for taking back the airwaves for Jesus.

Lastly, during Apostle Paul’s missionary journey, he utilized the Roman road during the Pax Romana period. This road was an advanced technology made by the Roman Empire to connect its central city to the outskirts and neighboring towns. The military mainly used this road. However, Paul used this to advance the gospel of Christ, as seen in Acts 28. In this regard, the roads the Romans built to move their legions were traveled by Christian missionaries of the first century. Now the network—the internet—built by the US Department of Defense can be traveled by Christian missionaries of the twenty-first century at virtually no cost.¹³

Evidently, utilizing, developing, and engaging technologies has been playing a part in the world of Christianity for missions, evangelism, communication, publications, and spiritual discipline. Nevertheless, how does this technology affect the concept of human personhood? It is here that the paper continues.

Current Digital Theological Anthropologies

Behind every avatar and social media account is a *real* human person.¹⁴ But how does the world understand what it means to be human in the digital space? This section explores related literature and offers a glimpse of current perspectives on digital theological anthropology **from selected digital theologians, cognitive scientists, philosophers of the mind, ethicists, and Christian theologians.**

Image AI: Anthropomorphic Metaphor

Catholic digital theologian and associate professor of theology and religious studies at Molloy University, Katherine Schmidt, carefully navigates the anthropomorphic technologies of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and their metaphors. Schmidt argues that insisting on using Edenic theological terms in discussions of AI or other advanced digital technologies only exacerbates confusion. These terms are: learns, remembers, and acts.¹⁵ **She applies her Catholic theology to the digital theology of AI anthropomorphic metaphors on the image of God.**

She argues that this insistence on using Edenic terms is part of humanity’s fallen state. Humans think creating an image of God is achievable, but when they fail, they resort to an *image AI*. Throughout her work, she debunks, compares, and finds differences between the Edenic

¹¹ Michael Haykin recounts how complex and costly a scroll is made from papyrus, *The Weekly Historian: 52 Reflections on Church History* (Peterborough, Ontario: H&E Publishing, 2021), 18-20.

¹² Read Michael E. Pohlman, *Broadcasting the Faith: Protestant Religious Radio and Theology in America, 1920-50* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021). Many Christians disagree with the radio ministry’s use of the airwaves; because of Ephesians 2:2 interpretation that the ruler of the kingdom of ‘air’ is the devil.

¹³ Bock and Armstrong, *Virtual Reality Church*, 29.

¹⁴ This thought extends to the AI bots creating fake social media accounts using AI-generated images as profile pictures. Read Shannon Thaler, “Scientists found over 1000 AI bots on X stealing selfies to create fake accounts,” *New York Post*, August 24, 2023, <https://nypost.com/2023/08/24/scientists-found-1140-ai-bots-on-x-creating-fake-profiles>. With this sample, the need to present sound theological anthropology becomes greater.

¹⁵ Katherine Schmidt, “Learn, Remember, Act: Theological Anthropology and AI Metaphor,” *Theology and Artificial Intelligence*, Vol. 1: Alexa, How Do You Feel About Religion? Theological Approaches to Technology and Artificial Intelligence, eds. Anna Puzio, Nicole Kunkel, and Hendrik Klinge (Berlin, Germany: WBG Academic, 2023), 46.

metaphor applied to AI and humanity. Schmidt concludes, “By examining the precise differences between ourselves and our creations, we are better able to manage our expectations and fears of what we create.”¹⁶ In summary, using Edenic creation terms like learns, remembers, and acts for AI or any digital technology is not as beneficial as one might think.

Virtual Realism and Naturalistic Materialism

It is conventional to perceive virtual reality (VR) as metaphysically unreal. However, ‘virtual’ was not always perceived negatively as less real or inauthentic. The term ‘virtual’ comes from the root word *virtus*, which has the same etymology as virtue. Richard Muller defines ‘virtus’ as signifying strength, power, courage, and likeness of the essence.¹⁷ Applying the virtue of *virtus* to digital technologies and spaces, the cyber world seems physical. However, if viewed correctly, VR, AI, and other forms of digital space, the internet, and even software fall under naturalistic materialism or metaphysically *physical*.

David Chalmers’ central thesis is that VR is a genuine reality with the potential for genuine living.¹⁸ This philosophy applies to the digital self. A person represented or extended by the digital self is perceived as *real*. From a physicalism point of view, all nodes, data, wires, and even the concept of computing in a computer are *material*. Chalmers explains this view with John Wheeler’s theory of ‘it-from-bit.’ Wheeler said, “Every physical reality, every it, derives its ultimate significance from bits, binary yes-or-no indications, a conclusion which we epitomize in the phrase, *if from bit*.”¹⁹ Against Gnostic partialism, digital technologies, VR, the binary 1-0/ yes-no/ true-false, and the digital self are material, physical, and metaphysically existent. It is part of humanity’s embodied and incarnational experience.²⁰

Partial Gnosticism or Neo-Gnosticism

The contrast between physicalism and naturalistic materialism is Gnosticism. In many ways, being in digital spaces seems neo-Gnostic to many. However, digital theologians Heidi Campbell from Texas A&M and John Dyer from Dallas Theological Seminary note, “To deny the body in digital religion [or spaces] is to engage in the very Gnosticism its detractors often claim happens online.”²¹ Embodiment is significant both online and offline.

¹⁶ Schmidt, “Learn, Remember, Act,” 53. Cf. Katherine G. Schmidt, *Virtual Communion: Theology of the Internet and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020).

¹⁷ Richard A. Muller, “virtus,” in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 392-4.

¹⁸ David J. Chalmers, *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy* (NY: W. W. Norton & Co, 2022). Chalmers is a philosopher of mind and cognitive scientist. There are many views that the researcher disagrees with him, especially Chalmers’ acceptance of the possibility of simulated reality. Cf. Jonathan Strand, “Will Androids Need Salvation? A Dialogue with Chalmers’ Philosophy of Mind,” *Technology and Theology*, ed. William H. U. Anderson (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2020), 217-41.

¹⁹ John Archibald Wheeler, “Information, Physics, Quantum: The Search for Links,” *Proceeding of the 3rd International Symposium on the Foundation of Quantum Mechanics* (Tokyo, 1989), 354-368. Cf. Chalmers, *Reality+*, 148-151.

²⁰ Cf. Katherine Schmidt, “Incarnational Theology and the Materiality of Digital Technology,” *Global Network for Digital Theology*, GoNeDigital 2022 Conference: How Theology and Faith Practices Shape Digital Culture, July 7-9, 2022, https://youtu.be/yrPde5X1o5o?si=_ug1PtARHwrxjpG0.

²¹ Campbell and Dyer, *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church*, 170.

Many internet users, VR avatars, and social media accounts utilize digital technologies to escape physical reality and live in a self-created digital world. That physical is inferior to what is inside the human body—the soul or spirit. This ideology promotes the fluidity of human identity, especially in digital spaces.²² Ben C. Mitchell notes that excarnation (or discarnation) “allows a person to live as many secret lives, under a pseudonym, as he is able to manage.”²³ What matters most is what is internal over anything else.

A Gnostic-partialism argument dictates that bodies are morally neutral, and the only thing spiritual is what is inside of us, “not what we do with our bodies.” Regarding sexual activity and online pornography, today’s norm pretends that the body does not matter. It denies the importance of the body; it “regarded the body as ephemeral and unimportant.”²⁴ Another form of disincarnation is ‘idealization.’ It “separates the inner person from its original “unacceptable” bodies.”²⁵ The digital self becomes avatars to be crushed, easily canceled, dehumanized, and objectified online.²⁶ Kopic states, “Our flesh is not an insignificant, disposable container carrying an internal spirit, although we are sometimes tempted to see the body as unimportant and only the soul as valuable. A truly Christian spirituality must always be a body-affirming spirituality.”²⁷

Expressive Individualism

The digital self is grounded in a cultural philosophy of expressive individualism. Carl R. Trueman observes that the root of this crisis is expressive individualism. Trueman defines it as “The modern self is one where authenticity is achieved by acting outwardly in accordance with one’s inward feelings.”²⁸ He relates this to the use of digital technology.

In *Digital Liturgies*, Samuel James, a communication specialist, perceives a selfie generation parades expressive individualism—a “look in” approach to knowing the purpose of life and discovering the truest calling in life.²⁹ A person recreates one’s identity or portraits of life and lives in a utopic ideal world. Trevin Wax states, “The primary myth your phone tells you every day is that you are the center of the universe.”³⁰ Darling also notes, “My phone gives me

²² Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family, and the Digital World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 97-102.

²³ C. Ben Mitchell, *How Do We Live in a Digital World?* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 45. Kelly Kopic notes that we pretend the body does not matter. Kopic says, “Our flesh is not an insignificant, disposable container carrying an internal spirit, although we are sometimes tempted to see the body as unimportant and only the soul as valuable,” *You’re Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God’s Design and Why That’s Good News* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 51.

²⁴ Timothy Tennent, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 120, 127.

²⁵ Tennent, *For the Body*, 125.

²⁶ Daniel Darling, *The Dignity Revolution: Reclaiming God’s Rich Vision for Humanity* (Epsom, EK: The Good Book, 2018), 176.

²⁷ Kopic, *You’re Only Human*, 51-4.

²⁸ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 23.

²⁹ James, *Digital Liturgies*, 6. Cf. Trevin Wax, *Rethink Yourself: The Power of Looking Up Before Looking In* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020), 11.

³⁰ Trevin Wax, *This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in the Light of the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2017), 20.

the illusion that I am king of the world.”³¹ Timothy Tennent notes, “The autonomy of the ‘inner’ or ‘true’ self over the physical body is one of the classic motifs in [a] recycled Gnosticism.”³² Somehow, it roots back to Trueman’s expressive individualism that what matters is what a person’s “inner” feels, and the “outer” is just a by-product of neurological or emotional causes or a utilitarianistic view of the body as a property.

Practical and Theological Criticisms

AI anthropomorphic metaphor, naturalistic materialism, partial Gnosticism, and expressive individualism are inadequate to define human personhood in digital spaces. However, it contributes to why digital sins permeate today’s culture. For example, why pornography and online sexual exploitation of children are spreading and increasing in these spaces?³³ First, perceived as an Edenic metaphor supplied with expressive individualistic ideology, one can quickly insist that what happens online does not affect IRL human experience. However, the trauma, pain, and suffering of those who were sexually abused and sextorted are IRL cases that cannot be brought back by refreshing one’s screen or even shutting down a computer. Second, a stand-alone view of human physicalism does not suffice as well. It perceives that as long as no physical touch is happening, any means of virtual pleasures are acceptable. Finally, since the purity of the soul or heart matters, the body is reduced to an object being lusted without shame in this neo-gnostic view.

Another anthropological issue is AI in transhumanism, which is not dealt with in this paper for brevity.³⁴ Jacob Shatzer calls AI ‘fake humans’ and transhumanism ‘future humans.’ Both of which he argues against adequacy to bear the full marks of human personhood and cannot express a covenantal relationship with God.³⁵ Further, this transhuman hope to flourish is a false hope. These weak theological anthropologies applied in the digital world are critical and unhelpful. Hence, there is a need for a sound theological anthropology applied in the digital world. Is developing a fresh, innovative, and creative understanding of humanity necessary? This

³¹ Darling, *The Dignity Revolution*, 173.

³² Tennent, *For the Body*, 20.

³³ Statistically, We Are Social reports from Semrush’s ranking of the most visited websites as of August 2023, disregarding social media websites and search engines; among the top 15, four are pornographic sites, Kemp, “Digital 2023 October Global Statshot Report,” slide 53; In 2016, Barna Research reported that 71% of adults and 85% of teens and young adults have viewed pornography. John Fesko notes that before age 18, 9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls have exposure to sexually explicit materials online, David Kinnaman, “The Porn Phenomenon,” Barna, <https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon>; Frequently done through “sexting,” a form of sending nude photos or sexually explicit images. Sadly, 50% of professing Christian men and 20% of women are addicted to porn and primarily view it on Sundays, John Fesko, *The Christian and Technology* (Darlington, Co Durham: EP Books, 2020), 78-79. Cf. Morgan Lee, “Here’s How 770 Pastors Describe Their Struggle with Porn,” *Christianity Today*, 2016, www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/january/how-pastors-struggle-porn-phenomenon-josh-mcdowell-barna.html. Cf. “OSAEC: A Modern Face of Human Trafficking,” *World Hope International*, October 15, 2020, <https://worldhope.org/ossec-a-modern-face-of-human-trafficking>. Cf. Kevin Austin, “Human Trafficking Is Not A Problem,” *Seedbed*, April 8, 2016, <https://seedbed.com/human-trafficking-is-not-a-problem-2>; Heike Vowinkel, “Abuse by order thousands of miles away,” *Zeit Online*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2021-04/sexueller-kindesmissbrauch-livestream-internet-kinderpornographie-chat-philippinen/seite-3>.

³⁴ For more about transhumanism, AI, and AR/VR anthropological challenges, read Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God*. Cf. Jacob Shatzer, “Artificial Intelligence, Transhumanism, and the Question of the Person,” in *Created in the Image of God: Applications and Implications for Our Cultural Confusion*, eds. David S. Dockery with Lauren McAfee (Nashville, TN: Forefront Books, 2023), 159-180.

³⁵ Shatzer, “AI, Transhumanism, and the Question of the Person,” 160, 180.

research argues to go back to the Scriptures and view digital theology in the biblical metanarrative.

(Meta)Story: Biblical Theological Narrative

David Murray notes, “Sound digital theology is the answer to digital technology; the oldest truths are the best rebuttal to the newest challenges.”³⁶ Applying Murray’s point in this paper’s argument is that the solution to the progress of digital technology and how to understand humanity in the context of the digital culture is more theology, specifically, more sound theological anthropology. Even though understanding current digital theological anthropologies helps one’s thoughts and hopes, it is, in many ways, insufficient. Hence, going back to the Scriptures, a framework for understanding humanity is applied in today’s digital context. **This framework: Creation, Fall, and Redemption, parallels Bock and Armstrong’s view on digital theology, specifically virtual reality, digital media, and the church.**³⁷

In the book of Genesis, the biblical grounding of God as the Creator (Genesis 1) also extends to humanity as *imago Dei*. Humanity, as the image of God, bears the calling to create, rule over, multiply, and subdue all creatures on earth (1:26-28). The framework begins with the idea that human beings, in the image of God, are called to be co-creators in this world. Part of this co-creating is the creative development of digital technology for society, including the church. Next, with humanity’s corruption (3:1-7), the cyber world is also vulnerable to spiritual malware, digital Trojan horses, worms, and cyber viruses. The “digital fall” reveals the grave wickedness of sin that extends and manifests in digital spaces and the use of digital technology. Finally, despite the misery of sin in this virtual world, there is still hope (3:15). Indeed, the digital space can be redeemed. The redemption of the digital world is only found in Christ—the perfect humanity. By redemption, the need to present a biblical-theological anthropology.

Biblicity of Co-creating

The Bible begins with the Creation narrative and ends with the New Creation. God commanded Adam to give or ‘create’ names for the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). God created covenantal bonds for redemption, starting with Adam and Eve (3:15), also known as the *protoevangelium*. Next, God asked Noah to build or ‘create’ an ark to preserve life (6:14-18). Moreover, through Abraham (12:2-3), God will ‘create’ a nation—descendants of Abraham (15:18). Likewise, God ‘created’ the laws to regulate the Israelite’s relationship with Him (Exodus 20). He commanded the Israelites to build or ‘create’ the Tabernacle in the time of Moses (25:9). Even during the times of David, the King desired to build or ‘create’ a temple completed during Solomon’s time (2 Samuel 7). However, this temple was destroyed, and the Israelites were exiled. Nevertheless, the prophets called the Israelites to rebuild or ‘recreate’ the temple during the nation’s restoration. The call to create permeates the Old Testament narrative.

Additionally, the New Testament is full of ‘creating’ narratives. Jesus Christ created the church as the new covenant family (Matthew 16:18). The Holy Spirit creates ‘new hearts’ (Ezekiel 36:26-27) in the believer’s body and creates a ‘new temple’ as the indwelling place of

³⁶ David Murray, “Digital Theology,” *Tabletalk Magazine*, The Sixteenth Century, October 2016, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2016/10/digital-theology>. Murray is an Old Testament and Practical Theology professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

³⁷ Bock and Armstrong, “God, Creation, and New Creation,” 149-174. Cf. Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture, and Computer Technology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023).

God (Rom 8:9-11). Finally, fast-forward to the future. On the day of the Lord, we await the New Creation (Rev. 21:1-2). To create is intrinsic to the image of God.

Imago Dei as Co-Creators

Humanity, as the image of God, bears the calling to create, rule over, multiply, and subdue all creatures on earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Artist and theologian Makoto Fujimura said, “The Bible is full of Making activities.... The God of the Bible is fundamentally and exclusively THE Creator.”³⁸ Then humans are the image of God the Creator. Likewise, Reinke asserts, “God is the genesis of human innovation...Before there are makers, makers are made by God.”³⁹ God, being the Creator of all things, created humanity. The first humans—Adam and Eve—were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Following the logic of the image of God and God as Creator, then humans are the image of God, the Creator. Humans bear the “creating” factor as the bearer of the Creator’s image. They are created co-creators *with* God in his creation. Co-creator does not mean humans are equal to God. Instead, they depend on the gracious offer of God to be part of this creation. In Christ through the Spirit, Christians have the invitation to become co-heirs and co-creators of the eschatological kingdom of God. Mitchell notes, Creativity is one of those attributes that God shares with his human creatures. And create we must.” In the Genesis story, it is called “the cultural mandate.”⁴⁰

Dorothy Sayers noted, “The characteristic common to God and man is apparently... the desire and the ability to make things.”⁴¹ Indeed, to be human is to create, to be creative. Again, Fujimura notes, “We are Imago Dei, created to be creative, and we are by nature creative makers.”⁴² When we make or create, we participate in the kingdom of God. Further, “God is creating through us a garden, an abundant city of God’s Kingdom. What we build, design, and depicted on this side of eternity matters, because, in some mysterious way, those will become part of the future city of God.”⁴³ This participation is being eschatological companions of bringing heaven on earth as to how Christ taught the disciples when praying (Luke 6:10).⁴⁴

Understandably, it compels Christians to go beyond mere consumers of digital technology to creators, developers, and innovators. Like in educational philosophy, specifically in learning development, the highest form of comprehension about a certain subject is through the application or being able to teach and explain in one’s own words. The deepest realm of knowledge is to create, and the deepest realm of making is *knowing*.

Purposeful Co-creation

The act of creating is the antidote to our current malaise, to the collapse of communication that has resulted in “a rapid, dirty river of information coursing through us all day,” resulting in

³⁸ Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2020), 7.

³⁹ Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life*, 48. Kindle.

⁴⁰ Mitchell, *How Do We Live in a Digital World*, 28.

⁴¹ Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1968), 22.

⁴² Fujimura, *A Theology of Making*, 14.

⁴³ Fujimura, *A Theology of Making*, 12.

⁴⁴ Stephen Garner, “Eschatological Companions: Christian Hope in Virtual Worlds,” *Theology and Sexuality*, Theological Re-imaginings of Human Relationships in Cyberspace 26, 2-3(2020):140-157, doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2020.1803721. In Christ through the Spirit, Christians have the invitation to become co-heirs and co-creators of the eschatological kingdom of God. Stephen Garner (2020) calls these created co-creators as eschatological companions.

the need for “an internet cleanse.”⁴⁵ **Going back to digital reality, 44% of online Americans use the internet for religious purposes. A more recent study showed that 45% of Americans access the internet for religious and spiritual content. In 2014, 9 out of 10 pastors believed that it is “theologically acceptable for a church to provide faith assistance or religious experiences to people through the Internet.”⁴⁶**

While others argue that technology is amoral, this paper aligns with So-Young Sang, who argued for the technological design intent.⁴⁷ Meaning that technology was created with a specific purpose. The creator embedded this purposeful act. However, despite this meaningful act, the fall of humanity, sin to be specific, corrupts and manifests in and through these created digital technologies. The fall of the digital realm is real; malware and Trojan worms marred cyberspace.

Digital Fall: Spiritual Malware

God’s creation was marred by sin. The beginning of this corruption is known as the Fall in the creation narrative. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God; they rebelled. As a result, the sinful nature creeps into each human being today. This corrupted character—like a computer virus—manifests in humanity’s actions. Note that each digital technology has a purposeful design. However, due to the sin of a human creator, it can be a tool creating wretched havoc in the digital world, which this paper calls ‘Digital Fall.’

To list some, the ‘digital fall’ is evidently seen and known through these ‘Seven Deadly Digital Sins.’ Namely, 1) fake news [lies, pride], 2) pornography [lust], 3) selective posting [pride, envy], 4) online hoarding or compulsive e-shopping [greed, gluttony], 5) media addiction [idolatry, sloth], 6) piracy [stealing, greed], and 7) cyberbullying as keyboard warriors [anger].

Social Media Fake News (Lies, Pride)

Filipino Digital Theologian Rei Crizaldo says, “Social media morphed into a toxic wasteland flooded with fake news, causing its inhabitants to suffer both online fatigue and trauma, and seeing friendships built over a long period of time ripped apart in an instant.”⁴⁸ Journalist Peter Guest contextually noted that fake news is rampant in the Philippines and can even get you killed. There is now the democracy to self-publish on social media, content creation, blog sites, and personal sites equips humanity to upload credible and informative news and counterfeit data information for trolling innocent, incredibly uninformed people.⁴⁹

Another form of social media sin is the so-called Twitter Alters. In a Philippine investigation, Paul John Caña distinguished between Alter accounts and catfishing. Caña said, “Alters, meanwhile, generally retain much of their own personalities but choose to remain anonymous by not posting any pictures of their faces or anything that might easily identify them

⁴⁵ Fujimura, *A Theology of Making*, 24.

⁴⁶ A recent report from Asia Evangelical Alliance Newsletter November 2021 shows how digital technology impacts ministerial practice, faith, and spiritual growth in today’s culture.

⁴⁷ So-Young Sang, “Digital Christianity: ‘The Future Church - A Theological Response,’” General Assembly of the Asia Theological Association (ATA), 2019, in Singapore.

⁴⁸ Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, “Truth & Grace in the Digital Space,” *InterVarsityCF*, Truth-telling and Peace-keeping in Social Media, www.xgenesisrei.tumblr.com/post/663089318637846528/truth-grace-in-the-digital-space.

⁴⁹ Peter Guest, “In the Philippines, fake news can get you killed,” *Rest of the World*, Available Online: <https://restofworld.org/2020/in-the-philippines-fake-news-can-get-you-killed/>.

and their true selves.” As opposed to catfishing, which is for fraudulent and deceptive purposes, alters are to “serve one purpose—to generate, offer, or solicit sexual content and services.”⁵⁰

Pornography (Lust)

Statistically, We Are Social reports from Semrush’s ranking of the most visited websites as of August 2023, disregarding social media websites and search engines; among the top 15, four are pornographic sites.⁵¹ The top porn site has 10.5 billion total visits with 1.48 billion unique visitors on a monthly average. In 2016, Barna Research reported that 71% of adults and 85% of teens and young adults had viewed pornography. John Fesko notes that before age 18, 9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls have exposure to sexually explicit materials online.⁵² Frequently done through “sexting,” a form of sending nude photos or sexually explicit images. Sadly, 50% of professing Christian men and 20% of women are addicted to porn and primarily view it on Sundays.⁵³ Lastly, 55% of pastors use porn and are afraid to be discovered, and 64% of youth pastors struggle with porn. Two major cultural perspectives inform today’s digital culture and sexuality landscapes.

In the Philippine context, April Baldo conducted a thesis study of selected children, ages 11 to 17, in the Northern Philippine Conference of the Free Methodist Churches. Baldo concluded that there were advantages and disadvantages of using the internet. While there are positive outcomes, she said, “[The Internet] exposed them to hurtful online behavior such as cyberbullying and sexual grooming, sexual risks such as seeing and receiving explicit images and videos, and negatively affected their well-being through bad eating habits (forgetting to eat) and by being addicted (high screen time) in using social media apps and online games.”⁵⁴ Sadly, the average age of exposure to digital sexual content or pornography is 11 years old.

Selective Posting #Selfie (Pride, Envy)

Informed by expressive individualism, Instagram has ample evidence of selective posting. People tend to curate and judge each other’s lifestyles based on each other’s posted pictures.⁵⁵ Frequently, we take twenty photos and choose the best one to post online. The other extreme to this dilemma is to become an online social climber. People build their ideal selves so that others see who they want them to know, not as the real you but as the ideal you.

Filters are there to put on one’s digital cosmetics. People feel insecure or envious whenever they see their friends’ social media posts about their holiday vacations, new dresses, up-to-date gadgets, and more. People tend to post the best version of themselves on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc., to amplify the portrait of their ideal self. Why? Of course, the feeling of being validated through those ‘Likes, Shares, and Reactions’ that a person receives. This

⁵⁰ Paul John Caña, “Sexual Bookings, Hookups, and Collabs: Inside The Secret World of Online Alters,” *Esquire*, 2020, Available Online: <https://www.esquiremag.ph/long-reads/features/the-secret-world-of-twitter-alters-a00289-20200309-lfrm3>.

⁵¹ Kemp, “Digital 2023 October Global Statshot Report,” slide 53.

⁵² David Kinnaman, “The Porn Phenomenon,” *Barna*, <https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>

⁵³ Fesko, *The Christian and Technology*, 78-79. Cf. Morgan Lee, “Here’s How 770 Pastors Describe Their Struggle with Porn,” *Christianity Today*, 2016, www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/january/how-pastors-struggle-porn-phenomenon-josh-mcdowell-barna.html

⁵⁴ April Kenneth A. Baldo, “The Experience of the Selected Children in the Northern Philippine Conference of Free Methodist Churches in the Light of Their Social Media Apps Usage” (MA in Christian Communication Thesis, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines, 2021), 129-130.

⁵⁵ Read Mighty Raising, *Get A Life Online* (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature).

thought of getting away from self-loathing, shame, and the embarrassment at the reality of one's life can sow a seed of pride that can outgrow one's heart. It leads to corruption, misery, and guilt. At the very least, each selected post shouts, "I am having a great life!" even if it is unreal.

Compulsive E-shopping and Online Hoarding (Greed, Gluttony)

Other than Thanksgiving and Black Friday, Cyber Monday is one of the most-anticipated days of the year in the United States. As reported, "In 2020, Cyber Monday actually surpassed Black Friday in terms of spending, which could indicate the level of deal offerings on that specific day. According to Adobe Analytics, U.S. shoppers spent \$9 billion on Black Friday and \$10.8 billion on Cyber Monday."⁵⁶ Black Friday Team acknowledged that 2020 changed everything, and many people opted to shop online and use digital shipping rather than camp outside stores. Meanwhile, in an interview with Lazada—leading e-commerce in the Philippines—chief operating officer Carlos Barrera said, "E-commerce has accelerated as the pandemic forced people to spend time at home and shift online for their purchases."⁵⁷

As many love these cyber sales, the flip side is that they lead to overbuying. The extreme case is meaningless hoarding. And yes, there is also digital hoarding. These overbought and hoarded items are manifestations of sin, greed, and gluttony. Another form of digital gluttony is compulsive adding or following someone famous online. People tend to like the idea of having a connection with a particular person—most likely, a celebrity. It might be a secondhand connection, but the more we create illusions that we are "friends" with people we do not know, or that they "follow" us on social media, the more it leads us to stay in our dream world.

Digital Media and Video Games Addiction (Idolatry, Sloth)

Digital media addiction is a behavioral problem. It manifests as an uncontrollable urge to spend most of the day binge-watching on Netflix, playing video games, scrolling through social media, and other online activities. In New Zealand, playing video games ranked second as the medium for getting through the pandemic.⁵⁸ However, for Americans in 2015, the total was 8 billion times a day, with the average adult checking their phones 200 times a day. While today, 71% of Snapchat users ages 18 to 29 say they use the app daily. The pattern is similar for Instagram: 73% say they visit the site every day, with roughly half (53%) reporting they do so several times per day.⁵⁹

Moreover, Statista Research reported that in 2019, "40 percent of U.S. online users aged 18 to 22 years reported feeling addicted to social media."⁶⁰ Another study by California State University demonstrates that "individuals who visited any social media site at least 58 times per

⁵⁶ Steven Abrams, "Black Friday vs. Cyber Monday: What to Buy Each Day," *Black Friday*, 2021, <https://blackfriday.com/news/black-friday-vs-cyber-monday-what-to-buy-each-day/>

⁵⁷ Louella Desiderio, "Lazada Sees Sustained Growth as Sales, Orders Double," *The Philippine Star*, 2021, <https://www.philstar.com/business/2021/09/06/2125087/lazada-sees-sustained-growth-sales-orders-double/>

⁵⁸ Interactive Games and Entertainment Association, "Digital New Zealand 2022," *IGEA*, Available Online: <https://igea.net/2021/10/digital-new-zealand-2022-dnz22/>

⁵⁹ Brooke Auxier and Monica Andeson, "Social Media Use in 2021," *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>

⁶⁰ Statista Research, "U.S. Internet Users Addicted to Social Media 2019, by Age Group," *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1081292/social-media-addiction-by-age-usa/>

week were three times more likely to feel socially isolated and depressed compared to those who used social media fewer than nine times per week.”⁶¹

Identity Theft, Hacking, and Piracy (Stealing, Greed)

A report by Gallup found in 2018 that Americans continue to worry most about cybercrimes; 71% worry about hacking personal data, while 67% about identity theft. It climbed from the 2016 report of 67%, formerly, and 66%.⁶² Moreover, hacking, identity theft, and piracy are all forms of stealing, and greed can also drive someone to steal. Nevertheless, for many, indifference toward this cybercrime is typical. However, “70,000 jobs yearly are lost in the United States due to music piracy.”⁶³ Spajić said, “More than 80% of global online piracy is attributable to illegal streaming services.” Torrent downloads remain prominent worldwide. Indeed, there is a need for greater awareness of the effects on those negatively affected by digital piracy, hacking, and identity theft. Either piracy of music, movies, books, software cracks, or password stealing is unacceptable.

Cyberbullying (Anger)

In a short explanation, “Cyberbullying is deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all teens and is a peer-to-peer risk.”⁶⁴ Teens are the most vulnerable when it comes to this manifestation of the sin of hate, anger, and rage. Likewise, it is the teens who are most likely to be suspects. As said, “Cyberbullying is quite common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.”⁶⁵ In Baldo’s thesis, she noted that her respondents confirmed that they experienced usual cyberbullying, reading negative comments, and sometimes being too violent for their age.⁶⁶ Moreover, adults can experience these loathsome comments, especially regarding political stances. Keyboard warriors, mostly hiding behind anonymous or fake accounts, tend to aggressively attack anyone who opposes their party. Sadly, it leads to death threats and violence.

Section Summary

To conclude this section, these are just overviews of each of the seven deadly digital sins. Digital Fall is a reality that Christians ought to recognize as well. Since a human person in the digital realm is still a human person, the image of God is still present despite being marred by sin. Co-creators become consumers of the wicked things in cyberspace due to sin. Nevertheless, **the researcher posits elsewhere**, “[Christians have] the duty, through the Great Commission, to evangelize—be the salt and light—in the dark realities of the virtual world. Just as the heart of man is corrupted, and the physical world is fallen, thus the virtual world is marred with the

⁶¹ Jena Hilliard, “Social Media Addiction,” 2021, www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction/

⁶² Agnes Talalaev, “Website Hacking Statistics You Should Know in 2021,” <https://patchstack.com/website-hacking-statistics>; Cf. RJ Reinhart, “Cybercrime Tops Americans' Crime Worries,” *Gallup*, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/221270/cybercrime-tops-americans-crime-worries.aspx>

⁶³ Damjan Jugović Spajić, “Piracy Is Back: Piracy Statistics for 2021,” <https://dataprot.net/statistics/piracy-statistics>

⁶⁴ Gwenn Schurgin O’Keeffe, Kathleen Clarke-Pearson, and Council on Communications and Media, “Clinical Report—The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families,” *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* 127, no. 4 (April 2011): 800-804.

⁶⁵ S. Hinduja and J. W. Patchin, “Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Suicide” *Arch Suicide Res* 14, 3 (2010): 206-221.

⁶⁶ Baldo, “The Experience of the Selected Children,” 131-2.

sinfulness of humanity, which needs redemption by anchoring it in the gospel of Christ towards the ultimate restoration—the *telos* of Christianity.”⁶⁷

Redemptive Proposals: Holistic Dualism and Shared Self

Returning to the above-stated phrase about the digital self, “Behind every social media account or avatar is a real human.” This phrase conveys the reality that humans are created beings in a specific culture (the digital age) that bear a sinful, fallen nature (deadly digital sins) but have the potential to be restored and redeemed through Christ (perfect humanity). Understanding humanity’s biblical and theological aspects is redeeming the digital world. A sound theological anthropology is what the digital culture needs. This section proposes the following theological and anthropological lens—nothing innovative, but the oldest truths for the newest challenges: dualistic holism, divine image, deadly fallenness, dignified creature, and redemptive destiny.

The human constitution exists both in complexity and unity. Human beings have immaterial (soul or spirit) and material elements. At the same time, it is holistic—heart, mind, conscience, and, in a negative way, flesh or sinful nature. John Hammett and Katie McCoy call this *holistic dualism*. They state, “The material body and immaterial soul are fully integrated. The mind and body are also interdependent such that there is ‘functional unity’ between them.”⁶⁸ The emphasis is neither on physical materialism nor on embodiedness alone nor on Gnostic partialism or immaterial souls. The emphasis is on both the human embodiment and the soul holistically. By doing so, holistic dualism safeguards sound theological anthropology against the above-stated contemporary digital theological anthropologies.

In a similar sense, Fesko states, “We are ensouled bodies, or conversely, we are embodied souls, and thus any attempt to rend body and soul apart will cause harm.”⁶⁹ Further, Darling says, “When we meet another person, it is both a physical encounter and a spiritual encounter because we always present ourselves to one another as whole persons –body and spirit.”⁷⁰ The biblical worldview “sees the ‘self’ as a unity of body and spirit set within a moral and spiritual framework with purpose rooted in God’s design and redemptive plans,” Tennent offers.⁷¹

Human is the image of God. Despite the nature of sin and the ways digital spaces are shaped by human agency, the image of God remains intact but blurred. Every social media user is an image of God. To be the image of God implies having dignity. The tendency to objectify a person online (cancel culture, rant, cyberbully, or unfriend easily) is against human dignity. A person is an image of God, no matter where (or what) they are. Darling captures this in his statement, “A person’s a person, no matter how small. . . . Every human being—no matter who they are, no matter where they are, no matter what they have done or have done to them—possesses dignity, because every human being is created in the image of God.”⁷² To be the image

⁶⁷ John Paul Arceno, “Utopian Virtual Reality in Ready Player One: Responding with Real Hope and the Christian Teleos,” in *Film, Philosophy and Religion*, ed. William Anderson (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2021), 87-88.

⁶⁸ John S. Hammett and Katie J. McCoy, *Humanity* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023), 296.

⁶⁹ Fesko, *The Christian and Technology*, 70.

⁷⁰ Tennent, *For the Body*, 121.

⁷¹ Tennent, *For the Body*, 127.

⁷² Darling, *The Dignity Revolution*, 15-16.

of God is to have a destiny to conform to the likeness of the perfect humanity—Jesus Christ. A solid grasp of the redemptive invitation in the person and works of Christ can truly redeem the digital self, extending to the digital world.

For Filipinos, human dignity is present in each human being. This character is grounded in the *kapwa* cultural thought. Simply put, *kapwa* or ‘shared self’ is our obligation towards our fellow humans. It is a worldview of other-centeredness and “embracing both the insider (me) and outsider (other).” In this paper’s context, it means seeing *the self in the other*.⁷³ This supplemental view covers what is lacking in many theological anthropologies. A person who is *kapwa* sees him/herself in the other, which will help us view people differently online and offline. A rejection, or at least a reduction, of pornographic usage or any other digital sin, can be expected due to such theological anthropology. This view parallels what Adam said when he first met Eve, “This is now bone of *my* bones and flesh of *my* flesh” (Gen. 2:23, emphasis mine).

In conclusion, a human person—and extending to digital self—no matter where they are (digitally or what they are online) is *divinely* created (image of God), constitutes *holistic dualism*, affected by the *deadly* fallen nature, while keeping an intact *dignity*, and has a hopeful potential *destiny* of redemption through the perfect human—Jesus Christ. By understanding humanity’s 1) holistic dualism, 2) divine image, 3) deadly fallenness, 4) unconditional dignity, and 5) redemptive destiny, applied in today’s digital cultural age, there is hope to overcome (prevent and redeem) such global challenges of pornography and sexual exploitation of children, cyberbullying, cancel culture, digital piracy, online hoarding, media addiction, and spreading of fake news in all facets of digital platforms, virtual worlds, and cyberspaces.

Conclusion

The paper contends for a theologically and biblically sound theological anthropology for the digital world. It is already inevitable for a person to avoid digital technologies. However, the answer to these techno-cultural challenges is not more technology but more theology. After exploring today’s cultural reality and a snapshot of technological development in church history, the paper investigates the current understanding of humanity in the digital space. Although Edenic metaphors in artificial intelligence, expressive individualism, neo-gnosticism, naturalistic materialism, and virtual realism are helpful thoughts, all of these are inadequate for sound theological anthropology.

Hence, there is a need to return to the Scripture’s biblical metanarrative of creation, fall, and redemption. In creation, humanity, as God’s image, is viewed as created co-creators. However, due to the fallenness of humanity, sin marred the image of God, resulting in today’s ‘deadly digital sins’ of **cyber pornography, online hoarding, social media fake news, cyberbullying, digital piracy, selective posting, and media addiction**. With a clear understanding of humanity through the lens of the person and work of Christ, there is hope in redeeming the digital space. Humanity, as the image of God, even though marred by sin, has the potential for redemption. The holistic dualism approach of humanity perceives the significance of the holistic material and immaterial aspects of personhood. Moreover, the dignity in each image of God extends to everyone online and on any digital platform. The call to view oneself as a shared self

⁷³ Fritz Gerald M. Melodi, “Virgilio Enriquez and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Dialogue: Discerning a Theology of Solidarity in Philippine *Kapwa*-Culture,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, 3 (2021): 269-272.

is beneficial to overcoming such digital challenges. In today's newest digital challenges, the online world needs more biblical and theological groundings—a sound digital theological anthropology.