

The relationship between technology and religion

[Technology](#)



Scholars have often debated the relationship between technology and religion. Recently, however, a paper written by Genevieve Bell, titled *No More SMS from Jesus: Become, religion and techno-spiritual practices*, criticized the research in this area. In it, Bell gives an informative analysis regarding the interaction between technology and religion, as well as a compelling argument regarding how ubiquitous computing (and technological design in general) does not account for the common religious and cultural needs, and thus, will have to begin incorporating it into its design (Bell 2006).

In this paper, I will formulate my own opinion regarding Bell's Information as well as his conclusions regarding the relationship between technology and religion. I generally agree with Bell's conclusions, however, my thesis stresses a more encompassing relationship between the two, that is, that change in technology and religion go hand in hand.

However, religion is observed to be a core and resilient element in society, and as a result, more demand must be placed on technological design to account for religious contexts, otherwise technology will shortchange itself. I will do this by analyzing different empirical observations and inferring the above pattern of relationship. We will begin by synthesizing the ideas presented in Bell's work, and then proceed to contributing our perspective regarding it.

Bell notes in the beginning of his work, in regards to ubiquitous technology, that the " design deployment for spiritual practice remains notably absent" (2006, 145). Furthermore, " technologies rapidly scaled only at the point that

they were invested with spiritual significance. " (Bell 2006, 145). These two initial points are vital, for it builds off a ground research, and stresses the implication that the relationship between technology and religion leans more heavily towards religion, being the prime controller of the dynamics between the two.

Bell's empirical research shows this relationship more clearly, claiming that 64% of Americans use the internet for religious and spiritual reasons, as well as the important fact that technologies (such as cell phones) are being naturalized or used exclusively for religious reasons, such as cell phone blessings, prayers/confessions, and religious notifications and features as well as online religious institutions.

These observations weave the fabric of this relationship quite well, and show that it isn't a matter of religion adapting to technological advances, but religious beliefs and systems imposing its norms and logic upon technology. However, other examples of religious logic imposing itself upon technology, is simply the rejection of technology by religion in the first place. Bell shows that often time, religious factors primarily influence the acceptance or rejection of technology (Bell 2006).

Thus, it is clear that, in the light of the above observations, that the relationship between technology and religion (or cultural logic), is more heavily determined by the religious logic present, and thus technology must take this into account by re-appropriating design. " Nature of certain kinds of religious practice and expression suggest that always-on connectivity and

constant updating might not be desirable features of a computing system. " says Bell (2006, 154).

The modern implications of technological design almost imply the lack of existence of a spiritual life, and constant bombardment of connectivity, and thus, in light of the revises observances, that is, that religion is a core part of the interpretation and functioning of technology in society, repositioning of technological design is key. It is key to understand that the relationship between technology and religion is cyclical, though leaning heavier towards influence from religion due to the above observances.

Due to that " the need to account for the diversities of daily life starts to impose itself into the debate. In no small part, paying attention to religion and religious practices forces us to move beyond efficiency as a useful metric for measuring technology success. (Bell 2006, 154). The other side of the argument states reliable observances as well. It shows clearly that often time, religion functions as any other part of human life, and simply adapts and " updates" itself to technological advances.

In a thesis prepared by Susan Which, it is noted that church technology mirrors that of technological changes, as well as the fact that CIT technology development influences that letting go of traditional practices (Which 2010). All of this implies that religion is yet another human norm that simply adapts according to the technological advancements of the day. The implications of this understanding is that there is no real reason why technology should readjust itself for religion, as religion would function just like any other human component, and readopt to the changes of technology.

However, this side is not only invoking examples in which religions had to readjust/dilute into modern technological contexts, it also relies on the fact that there are examples that show that even when religion interacts with technology, it simply uses it, and does not necessarily change anything within the technological structure. For example, in a paper written by Joseph Babble (Technology vs. Religion), he writes " how new technological contexts have been used as new tools of faith propagation" (Babble 2013, 257), which shows how technology has imposed itself upon religious activity.

Further examples include how Ghanaian immigrants simply use technology to connect to religious activities back home (Which, 2010). Also, in another paper by Which (Broadening Bishop's vision), she writes " Religious scholars argue that modernity has rationalized the world and that a profound loss of awe and reverence pervades pinion that religion is merely a follower of technology, in the relationship between the two, and that no special technological designs must account for this human facet.

However, we will now show the arguments from the other side of the spectrum weighing more heavily towards religious influence. Despite the above evidence, other outweighing evidence shows that " By examining radically different users and understudied contexts, insights into the diversity and difference that shape CIT appropriation can be accounted for and lead to a vision of the future that is more inclusive than the current one. (Which 2009, 9) The case for the affirmation of the centrality of religious influence is not hard to make.

The above evidence is merely a part of the holistic picture of the dynamics between religion and technology. Extensive research shows several empirical observations. In Whey's first paper, a study of religious institutions is carried out. Of the findings include the observation that nuns developed their own "prayer companion", a small LED device connected to the internet. Furthermore, it is observed that in mega-churches, CIT technology is widely accepted, integrated and remodeled to serve religious activity, such as presentations, sermons, etc. (Which 2010).

However, it is also worth noting the churches that were on a smaller scale showed tendencies in rejecting certain forms of technology (Which 2010). Relevance vs. reverence was an integral factor to this issue, with members and preachers displaying a desire to walk a fine line between a wholehearted embracement of technology (relevance), and the rigid isolation of traditional religious habits (reverence) (Which 2010). Thus, it is clear that religious influence on technology does not simply include the reformation of technology, but also its rejection.

In relation to this Which notes "religious uses of CIT are set apart from secular ones, or are 'made sacred.' Thus, technology designers should understand and acknowledge that religious uses of technology are distinctive from secular uses" (2010, 37). This is crucial, as phenomena such as online spirituality and "Mortal churches" show a clear distinction from the molding of religion with the secular space, on the contrary, a clear distinction from it. Babble notes (regarding the catholic church) "Tradition is here, connections are there, but innovation could be a factor that causes fear. (2013, 258). Thus it is crucial to redesign technology accordingly. It is for these reasons <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-technology-and-religion/>

that Which states " Our findings demonstrate how " extreme" and non-rational beliefs frame aspects of users' CIT experiences. We argue if Become is to be global and ubiquitous, accounting for alternative value systems is necessary. " (2009, 2). Thus in light of the above evidence, it is clear that the relationship between religion and technology go hand-in-hand, with one supplementing the other. However, religion is much more resilient and influential in this relationship.

Due to this, and in light of the fact that modern technological design favors a secular outlook which overlooks these crucial human elements, technological design must take religion into account, if it is to flourish and be truly ubiquitous. We have expressed the opinion that modern technological design must undergo major re-pronunciation of design. This is due to the clear simultaneous relationship influence. Bell notes that " Religion proves a useful vantage point from which to explore how much social and cultural institutions and practices are occasioned in and through technology.

The re-purposing of Sits for religious practices challenges some basic assumptions about what makes good technology', and " if we ignore them, we shortchange both our own experiences of the technology itself, as well as our understandings of what it could be for others.