

Information Technology: In the Service of God's People. Really?

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I. Introduction

It is wise for a student of Information Technology to learn from the legacy of Enlightenment. This Enlightenment period spawned the era of modernization, which led to global exploration, and eventually caused the Information Revolution. In a sense, the Age of Enlightenment gave birth to Information Technology (IT).

This historical trace will focus on the kind of outlook of the Age of Enlightenment and Rationalism. One important aspect was the drive of this era for scientific discoveries that showed the way for exploration of the non-European world. I will also expose how the concept of Enlightenment gave birth to colonialism. It is my conviction that colonialism is a close kin to capitalism that in turn encouraged technological progress. Since colonialism is seen as a form of exploitation in the eyes of the Filipino, I will later on connect on how it began the concept of free trade, which is not very far from the kind of e-commerce that the IT culture is cultivating.

One aspect of the Enlightenment era that should not be overlooked is on how it ended isolation, since the proponents of this age relentlessly tried to discover new worlds apart from theirs. This is one of the fundamental

concepts that IT is trying to inculcate in the minds of the people - that no one could be out of reach and we all belong to one global village. One keyword of the Enlightenment is *progress*. The kind of progress that I will deal with here is that which means underdevelopment in the “discovered” country which has a great resemblance in what the IT culture is brewing, that of dependence from the West when it comes to hardwares and softwares.

Another desire of the Enlightenment and that of Capitalism is expansionism. We are made to believe by the IT culture that we are inside a borderless world. That we must surrender our boundaries, after all, we belong to one global village. One characteristic of capitalism that can be seen in the IT culture is that we are being encouraged to have a ‘buy stateside’ mentality. This habit of consumption is being propagated in the internet, televisions, and other telecommunications.

An additional impact by Capitalism that can also be seen in the IT culture, which is also as damaging as the others, is the medium of language used. Making English as the standard medium of instruction in education and in the IT world makes the Capitalist’s objective much easier. Language is being made a tool for rapid economic penetration. And when we talk about the economy, it is best to note that the concept of Capitalism, the mother of modernization, is to make our economy an “export oriented, import dependent” type of economy. It is interesting to see why the major actors of IT are investing much in Third World countries like ours. We are made to believe that we are part of the major players in the world of IT but the underlying factor here is the fact that they can find cheap labor and then market it for a much higher profit. Another factor that must be noted is on how we rely heavily to the Operating Systems that can make our computers and other gadgets run. While it is true that we are making softwares, it is equally true that these softwares cannot run by themselves without the Operating Systems that are in the hands of the capitalists.

Our discussion will get more interesting when we come to the part of another IT culture that is Globalization. Globalization is just but a new name for Imperialism. We will see how our economy is on the mercy of the giants that are called the G7, OPEC, World Bank, IMF and WTO. They are in the guise of helping develop our country. Progress is still their main word in trying to entice us, but what that really means is progress on their side and regress on our side. Part of the discussion of the IT culture is also on why the West is always trying to intervene in the national affairs of other countries, and why they are projecting the image that they are the police of the world. This for me is just protecting their own vested interests in the backyards of other people.

The issue that I am trying to bring about in the IT culture is the issue that IT is just but a new tool for subjugation and exploitation. The old colonial pattern is still there, but it is very subtle that our church has not responded to it; for she is slowly being gobbled up by the system she is vowed to fight. The IT culture is on the verge of being very well placed that it seems we cannot get out from it. The only alternative solution that the Filipino people have is to negotiate our place in that global village, and become capitalists ourselves, thus becoming another monster eating up others. The result of that fantasy is a tilt in the current balance, and those who are above the seesaw will try to find means to oppose it. What is left for us to consider is how to surf the wave of IT smoothly and try our best to replace the system of relational structure from that of exploitation to that of interdependence. The latter part of this paper is a theological reflection of our situation in this new phenomenon that gives the impression of having endless possibilities, but at the same time great disadvantages to those who do not know how to deal with it. I will also pitch in my first hand experience as a Webmaster of CPU. A possible stand of the church will also be suggested as a response to either a new demon or a new messiah.

1. Age of Rationalism and Enlightenment

During the 15th - 18th century a new spirit conquered Europe. This new wave of thinking is called the Age of Enlightenment, since the writers of this period were convinced that they were coming out from centuries of darkness and ignorance into a new age enlightened by reason and science.

“Modern society owes much to the Enlightenment. It was an indispensable step in the evolution of a progressive human outlook. As the last of the great movements in Western thought, it overcame the medieval forms of life and thought which still gripped humanity and made possible the development of modern society.”¹

The motto of this period as Immanuel Kant phrased it was, “dare to know.” The fundamental and widely held conviction of this period was the unshakable faith in the power of human reason. One should not also forget that during this age came the birth of the Gutenberg press. The printing machine that Gutenberg invented helped shape this era since it was through this invention that volumes of printed materials were distributed including the Bible. It is also during this era that the Reformation began in the history of the Christian church.

Rene Descartes deemed to be the founder of rationalism said, “I think therefore I am.” His statement made a great impact to man who evolved to what is called the modern man. This modern man has a frame of thought that had produced seven cardinal convictions. According to David Bosch these convictions are: First, its emphasis on *reason* suggested that the human mind is the point of departure for all knowing. Second, it divided all of reality into thinking subjects and *objects* that could be analyzed

¹ A. Franzen and J. Dolan, *A History of the Church* (Herder: Palm Publishers, 1965), p. 349.

and exploited. Third, it dropped all reference to purpose and viewed every process only in terms of cause and effect. Fourth, it put a high premium on *progress*, on *expansion*, *advance* and *modernization*. Fifth, it proceeded from the assumption that all true knowledge was factual, *value free* and neutral. Sixth, it proceeded from the assumption that *all problems were in principle solvable*. And last, it regarded people as *emancipated, autonomous individuals*, no longer under the tutelage of others.¹

The modern man believed that he could measure anything, value anything and know everything. This drove him to explore the world apart from his world, which at that time was the European world. The exploration that he undertook made him realize that he will not only try to discover things unknown to him but command and conquer those that he can find. This was not only a frame of thought but evolved into an attitude, a hunger to explore and know everything that finally led to colonialism.

2. Colonialism/Capitalism/Imperialism/Globalization

With colonialism came capitalism. According to Vladimir Lenin, the motivation of having colonies is to be attributed in the dynamics of capitalism. The European world had a need for raw materials and outlets for its surplus capital. Capitalism spread in all areas of the colonized world and remained unchallenged as the dominant economic and social system. It also “spurred technological progress which revolutionized navigation thus making possible the era of discoveries”² and expansion of new territories.

I will now go to the issues I cited during my introduction. Let me first start with the principle of free trade. Free

¹ D. Bosch, *Believing in the Future*, (Valley Forge: Trinity Press Int'l., 1995), p. 5.

² R. Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, (Quezon City: Tala Publishing, 1975), p. 14.

Trade means “the interchange of commodities across political frontiers without restrictions such as tariffs, quotas, or exchange controls.”¹ This is a good concept but during the said Age of Enlightenment the emergence of capitalist nations brought about a new form of policy that is called mercantilism. Supporters of this policy were very nationalistic and their sole motive was to increase the strength of their nation through acquiring wealth from their colonies. Free trade meant the unlimited entry of the colonizers’ goods into their colonies and the restricted entry of the colonies’ products to their colonizers. The connection of this to the IT culture is the fact that the trade policies of the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trades and the World Trade Organization are very unfair, since it requires Third World countries to import goods to satisfy the quotas which in turn spell disaster to the local market. Proponents of this free trade are the European Union, which adopts a single market program and the Euro currency; the North American Free Trade Agreement of the US, Canada and Mexico; and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation in which, not surprisingly, US is still a part of. The primary aim is to open up the economies of many nations thus resulting to less power from national governments, and the real power is being transferred to the global market which can control economic events and dictate economic circumstances. The major players of IT are very protective of their own and by doing so they still hold the upper hand on what type of IT hardwares and softwares should be made. This is the main motive of e-commerce, to flood the market with electronic gadgets with their own specifications thus resulting to loyal followers, who will be waiting for the next generation of their gadgets.

The next issue is about the end of isolation and the onslaught of expansionism. True to their frame of mind as enlightened men, the European world became adventur-

¹ “Free Trade,” *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* 2000.

ers seeking the “unknown” world. They began to expand their territories and explore new possibilities in their new-found colonies. The colonies were made to believe that they were “discovered” by the colonizers and we must show them our gratitude by surrendering our lands to become an extension of their country.¹ With exploration came the inculcating of a new set of cultures and traditions. The big issue in this new global culture is the fact that we have no borders left. National boundaries are fast becoming invisible. We are being bombarded by ideas that we belong to one global community and that no one should remain isolated. If we may ask: “If we really belong to one global village then who is the chieftain governing our village connected with wires and satellites?” The quick answer would be that the chieftains are of course the major proponents of IT, which are Europe and the U.S. The Third World can be characterized as a group of people living in a small *nipa* hut being bullied by another group of people living in a much bigger concrete hut. We are surrendering our national identity by becoming citizens of IT in which we have a say but definitely not the last say.

With the influence of the buzzword “think globally,” we now come to the promised interesting part of our discussion, globalization. At the outset, I mentioned that globalization is just a new name for imperialism. Our discussions about free trade, colonialism and capitalism are all part of this bigger picture. Imperialism is defined as “the practice by which powerful nations or peoples seek to extend and maintain control or influence over weaker nations or peoples.”² After the World War II, when formal empires were dissolved, came another modern economic imperialism. US and Europe continued to this day the ex-

¹ For example, Philippine history books tell us that March 17, 1521 is the date when the Philippines was “discovered” by Ferdinand Magellan.

² “Imperialism,” *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* 2000.

ercise of neocolonialism, the exercise of sovereignty without the formality of colonial rule, through the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. This modern day imperialism is called globalization. They still have the same motives, which are economic, political and ideological. Economic motive was already discussed earlier in the area of capitalism, and the same also with political motive in connection with colonialism. The ideological motive can be described as religious in nature because the Whites believe that it is their “manifest destiny” or the “White man’s burden” to civilize the “backward people” or to do “missionary activities.”

Bishop Camba, Dean of the School of Divinity, Silliman University, has this to say about our hope and struggle to free ourselves from foreign domination, “There is a new religion in our midst now. Its name is Globalization. The gods of this religion are the members of the G7. Their prophets are the economists and their temples are the mega malls.”¹ “Globalization is a strategy of international capital to create more markets for itself and to restructure the relationships of production,”² said Phambili ka Ntloko of the Church of God and Saints in Christ, South Africa, whose ministry is with industrial workers. Pastor Acosta defined it this way, “Globalization is a condition where most countries of the world are made to align themselves with the economic and political systems of the powerful nations of the world.”³

The relationship of IT and globalization is said best by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. He said and at the same time warned,

“The new communications technologies are the driving force of globalization. They are bringing people

¹ NCCP Lecture, Dumaguete City, October 2000.

² World Council of Churches, in, <http://www.wcc-coe.org>.

³ R. Acosta, “Christian Identity and Global Awareness,” in, N. Bunda, ed., *A Moving Faith*, (Iloilo City: College of Theology, 2000), p. 261.

together and giving decision-makers unprecedented new tools for development. At the same time however, there is a real danger that the world's poor will be excluded from the emerging knowledge-based global economy."¹

In a knowledge-based global economy, information is power. This statement goes without saying that he who has the information has the power. The question for us is: who are these people who have the large bulk of information that can possibly influence the outcome of world events? Are they the transnational companies, which in their hands lay the vast amount of intelligence gathered by agencies like the British MI 5 or the US CIA? These people may not only influence the outcome of events, but most probably will have complete control on whatever outcome they help influenced in the first place.

It must be noted that imperialism is a broader term than colonialism. Imperialist motives found their expression in the establishment of colonies. If globalization is the new name for imperialism then we are part of the neo-colonies in which the colonizers are the virtual owners of IT.

3. Information Revolution

Information Revolution is defined as:

"Fundamental changes in the production and use of information, occurring in the late 20th century. Human societies throughout history have had 'information specialists'; and they have had 'information technologies'; but two interrelated developments, social and technological, underpin the diagnosis that an information revolution is now occurring."²

¹ February 3, 2001 issue of the Philippine Star, p. 28.

² "Information Revolution," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* 2000.

Information revolution has indeed brought about social and technological developments. Let me now briefly discuss these two aspects of advancement and later on expound them in my analysis. First, there have been social and organizational changes. Information processing is the forefront player of the economic, political, and social life of the people. At the beginning, I already mentioned about knowledge-based economies and its effects. These information-based companies are certainly shaping our lifestyle, education and perception of reality. At the same time it has adverse effects in our culture and religiosity. Secondly, there have been technological changes. Computing and telecommunications have now converged. What catapulted their convergence is now what we call Internet or simply Net. The invention of the microprocessor has brought speedy changes in the world of technology. It has become a commonplace in homes and offices, present not only in computers, but also in various devices such as telephones and televisions.

Most people thought that this was already adequate: a little help doing budget planning and a nice word processor for writing letters. Some visionaries talked about computers as information appliances: you could use your home or office computer to connect to the national news services, get stock reports, do library researches, even read professionals journals or literary classics but at that time, these were far reaching ideas. Time has passed since computers first moved from behind the "glass wall" into our offices and homes. In those dozen or so years, another revolution, arguably more important than the first, has taken place. And that revolution was computer networking. Personal computers are great, but computers become something special when they are connected to each other.

With the Internet, networking has come of age. The information resources that visionaries talked about in the early 80's are not just research topics that a few advanced thinkers can play within a lab. They are real life

realities that you can tap into your home. Once you are connected to the Internet, you have instant access to an almost indescribable wealth of information.

I share in the perception of others that the outcome of Information Revolution is as great as the shift from the then agricultural to industrial society as to what happened in the Industrial Revolution. But the essential change is just a change from one form of industrial society into another.

II. Internet¹ and Telecommunications

In the summer of 1969, not everyone was at Woodstock. In the laboratories on either side of the continent, a small group of computer scientists was quietly changing the future of communications. Their goal: to build a computer that would enable researchers around the United States to share ideas. The network became the foundation of the Internet, the vast international computer network that today has become one part buzzword, one part obsession. But its birth required a leap of the imagination. Instead of seeing computer as a giant, plodding number crunchers, they had to be viewed as nimble tools that could talk to each other. After that paradigm shift, the rest was just doing the calculations. The project was called ARPANET, after the agency that paid for it - ARPA, the U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Project Agency. This project is a measure to preserve communication integrity in case of worldwide catastrophe such as a nuclear confrontation.

There was no standard computer operating system; machines generally could not communicate with each other. Even with machines that were compatible, the best way to get data from one to another was to physically carry magnetic tapes or punch cards and insert them

¹ F.N. Jalando-on, *A Feasibility Study on the Installation of an ISP in the City of Iloilo* (Iloilo City: CPU, 1997), 3.

into the other machines. In 1968, J.C.R. Licklider and Robert Taylor published prophetic paper suggesting that computers could serve as communication devices. They pushed for an experimental network, one that would create new communities of scientists separated by geography but united by technology. The initial plan was to link four sites: UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), University of California, Sta. Barbara, and the Stanford Research Institute and the University of Utah.

The first node, as the network sites are called, was at UCLA. Three years later, there were 62, and by 1981, more than 200. By the early 1980s, other countries wanted to join in. They developed a set of technical standards, called protocols that multiple networks could use. That paved the way for the Internet.

Over the next decade, dozens of new networks were born including the Usenet newsgroups, an electronic forum now used by millions of people around the world to discuss everything from practical physics to nude people. As personal computers became cheaper and easier to use in the late 1980s, anyone with a modem could get online. By that time NSFNET, a network established by the National Science Foundation, served as the technical backbone of the Internet in the United States.

In 1983 the Internet was born as we know it today.

1. Analysis

“The Internet is a new and very, very exciting medium. I think it’ll change the world as much as the Gutenberg press did.”¹ Information Technology is without a doubt changing the way we live, and how we look at life. I hope that by making an analysis we can come up with a picture of its benefits and then probably come up with alternative solutions on the adverse consequences that come with it.

¹ M. Syjuco, *Net Gains*, in, <http://www.localvibe.com>

1.1. Effects in society, culture, education and religiosity

Pastor Acosta outlined the following charges hurled by the detractors of the IT culture¹: First, destruction of our environment. Second, Food insecurity. Third, More poverty. Fourth, Unemployment; and lastly, breakdown in family values.

Most of us know that there are satellites hovering above us in the space, but what we do not perceive is the fact that these satellites are also garbage and wastes already polluting our space, and at the same time objects that will hurl down towards us unknowingly. Soon there will be low orbiting satellites that can be visible to the naked eye that will be just a little lower than the air space of airplanes. Almost all electronic equipments have chemicals that are pollutants and contribute to the depletion of our ozone layer.

Filipino farmers are forced to resort to cash crops (asparagus, cut flowers, bananas, pineapples) for export, rather than planting staple crops (corn, rice) for our consumption.² This is the reason why there is food shortage in our country. The supply to fill this shortage comes from other countries.

Former President Ramos said, "left to its own logic, globalization widens the gap between winners and losers at the national level as well as the international level."³ Lee Kwan Yew in the same article said, "the financial crisis was made worse by the ability of investors to withdraw their funds at the push of a button. IT, the computerized linkages that drive the process of globalization left Asian countries no time to prepare for the sudden loss of their money. The IT connected fund managers brought

¹ R. Acosta, in, N. Bunda, ed., p. 209.

² For instance, thousands of hectares in Mindanao are planted with pineapples.

³ B. Stanley, *Asians wary of globalization in wake of recent financial crisis*, Philippine Star, January 29, 2001.

about a collapse.”¹ The IT culture leads to unemployment due to the fact that our local companies cannot compete with foreign companies; they are then forced to shut down. The fact also that machines together with new technologies can be handled by just a few people thus leading to downsizing.

The IT culture is forcing universities and colleges to reassess their philosophy of education. The Journal of Information Technology Impact states that there are four reasons, which are primarily market driven that higher education institutions are investing in new technologies.

“First, there is the vague fear that unless they invest in technology they will be left behind. Students expect the university to be up to date with the latest technological tools. Second, faculty expects the university to provide the latest information technologies for their research and teaching. Third, universities are looking for ways to reach out beyond their campuses through distance education, and the new technologies enable that outreach to occur. Fourth, current employment trends indicate the need for a more educated workforce, especially in high-technology fields such as computer science, computer information systems, and engineering.”²

Because of these reasons and also to be globally competitive, Central Philippine University as a learning institution built a Web Site, established a Cyber Library, connected all the departments to the Net and offered IT related courses, such as, BS Computer Science, BS Computer Engineering, BS Software Engineering, BS Information Technology, and BS Information Management.

Lee Kwan Yew also said in a recent forum “all Asians face an erosion of cultural values. Confucian prin-

¹ Yew is referring to the 1997 economic collapse of Asia.

² M. Dumestre, *The Impact of Technology on Higher Education* (Louisiana: Loyala University, 1999), p. 64.

ciples underpinning many societies have now been modified or even abandoned as younger Asians fall under the spell of seductive Western lifestyles.” Yes, our traditional values are being eroded as well as our local theology as affirmed by Dr. Everett Mendoza in his lecture. He said, “the entire decade of the 1990s finds Filipino theology in a moribund state. For the church in the Philippines the millennium ends with this sad note.”¹

The goal of religion is to address the holistic growth of an individual. How can this aim be addressed by IT if we just worship in front of electronic gadgets? Religiosity of the people will also be hampered because less people will attend church services to have communion and fellowship in the flesh, since it will be replaced by a kind of fellowship in wires and satellites. Some of us are worshipping now in the comforts of our home through TV, radio and at the Net. There has been a shift from the traditional worship of feeling the warmth of each other's presence to that of coldness and being anonymous.²

1.2. IT as an instrument of colonization

Of the many reasons I pointed out that caused colonization, two are worth mentioning since the IT culture espouses this pattern. First, colonies have been established as outlets for the energies of the people feeling the need to explore more land; and secondly, the colonizers wish to transplant their customs and modes of life to the world they 'discovered.'

Dr. Everett Mendoza has this to say about globalization and IT, “at the advent of globalization, national boundaries everywhere have fallen down before the relentless battering of global capital and technology. In this

¹ E. Mendoza, *The future of local theologies in the age of globalization*, an article delivered at the UCCP Theological Education Summit, Dumaguete City, July 1999.

² On a lighter side, one can just change the channel if the sermon is boring or can turn down the volume if the preacher is shouting.

new commonwealth, nations are no longer referred as such but as economies – merely producers of wealth or market or fields of investments.”¹

This type of domination is very subtle and cannot be understood by most of us, but it is very much true. Because of globalization our economy becomes an “import dependent, export oriented” type of economy. Addition to this misery is the GATT or the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade in which the main sponsor of this bill was no less than Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who was then a Senator. We opened our doors to the World Trade Organization that resulted to big disasters than gains. Just take a look at our rice and sugar industry. We are now importing rice and sugar from countries all over the world, and in order for our local goods to compete in the market, our farmers have to lower down prices to the point of losing. Another addition to the pain in our necks is the OPEC or the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries that control the number of barrels of oil pump everyday and the prices in the world market.

A. Command and Conquer principle of computer games

If one is to go inside an Internet café, he will find that not only people are browsing the Net but they also play computer games. The kinds of games that are flooding the market have the principle of command and conquer. Popular games before were Warcraft, Command and Conquer, Starcraft and lately, the famous Counterstrike. These games can be played either single handedly or as a group and the objective is to win the game by virtually erasing the race of an enemy.

In reality, the military of the West is the strongest. At the push of a button, Philippines can be wiped out from the face of the earth. Have you ever wondered why the

¹ E. Mendoza, July 1999.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces in which the majority are Americans, have strategic locations all over the world? Why is it that American troops were sent to areas where there is war and conflict? Why do we have the feeling that they are trying to police the world? These are valid questions that must have valid answers. At the beginning, I mentioned that they are just protecting their vested interests in the backyards of other people. The West does not want to tilt the balance in a system wherein they are the few ruling elite. Military installations all over the globe should be seen as a measure to counter those who threatened to break the system. Treaties like the VFA (Visiting Forces Agreement) are part of the master plan to control all countries in the world. The principle in virtual reality and in reality is indeed the same, to command and conquer.

B. Internet as a global culture that is being developed

Let me first start with some statistics to show how many will be affected by this new global culture. The online population of the Philippines according to the Central Intelligence Agency is about 7.04% of the whole population (5.96 million out of 84.61 million Filipinos). The rise of online population in the Philippines was 198% from the year 2000 to 2004, an indication that Filipino Internet users shoot up from 2 million to 5.96 million.

The number of Internet users around the world is constantly growing. The Computer Industry Almanac has reported that in the year 2002, 490 million people around the world had Internet access. Statistically, it was 79.4 internet users per 1,000 people. After two years (2004), the worldwide Internet Population went up to 934 million, and the projection for the year 2005 is 1.07 billion people out of the total world population of 6.4 billion. The top 15 countries will account for nearly 82 percent of these worldwide Internet users (including business, educational, and home Internet users). By the end of the year

2005, 66.5% of Americans (218,400,380 of 328,387,059 people) and only 7.4% of Asians (266,742,420 out of 3,612,363,165 people) are Internet users. There will also be 25 countries where over 10 percent of their population will be Internet users.¹

What is interesting here is the fact that in the total online world population, 47.6% belong to English speaking countries and 52.4% are non-English. What makes it interesting is that even though the English speaking world belongs to the minority of the online population, 80% of online transactions are being generated by them and a whopping 85% of online sites are in English.

This is the dimension that we seem not to notice. It is the fact that majority of the contents of web sites is in English language. It is common knowledge in the Internet that if one wants his information to be global, it is to be posted in English. If one doesn't know English, he must learn it so that he can use the softwares and at the same time utilize the vast information that is in the Net. Language is a very integral part of one's culture. This paper for example, must be made in English even though, I am formulating my thoughts first in Hiligaynon. The real danger here is we are fast losing our own identity as Ilonggos and at the same time as Filipinos in the onslaught of information in the Net, which is in English. There will come a time that we will be thinking in English even if we want to speak in Hiligaynon. Our second language will supplant our first tongue. This is one of the issues that best describes why the Third World countries cannot be at par with the English speaking countries. IT is developing a racist culture wherein few reign supreme and we are virtual slaves. This is the kind of culture wherein the minority rules the majority.

¹ Statistics of Online Population are from this websites:
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>
<http://www.c-i-a.com/>
<http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/>
<http://cyberatlas.internet.com>

C. The myth that no one owns the Internet

It is a make believe, if one is led to think that no one controls the Internet. Although it is true that the mother of all networks can still survive even if the whole of the Asian network will bug down, it is equally true that the Internet will be mainly paralyzed even if just one telecommunications company in the U.S. will shut down for a day.

If you go deeper to the intricacies of the wires and satellites that are behind this information highway, you will discover that the myth I am talking about makes sense. Take for example our two major Internet Service Providers (ISP) here at Iloilo City. If a user of Mozcom (formerly, Camp Internet) will connect to a website hosted by Sky Internet, he will be happy to note that in a matter of seconds he has in his screen the web page of Sky Internet. He thought all the while, that from one place here in Iloilo City he is connected via the Internet immediately to another place here in Iloilo. What he does not know is the fact, that when he tries to trace the route from his computer to the server of Sky Internet he had already traveled a lot. He thought that if he cannot get connected to his desired website in Iloilo, then maybe he can in Manila. He was wrong again. He will further know that he did not connect either in Hong Kong or in Hawaii, but his computer went all the way to mainland USA from one telephone company to another telecommunications company, that eventually led back to Philippines, and to Iloilo City. It is amazing that an average Internet user does not know anything about it.

In the picture that I presented, who do you think controls the Internet as seen from the perspective of the Filipinos? Yes, it is the major telecommunications companies that control and virtually own the Internet in terms of wires and satellites. It is to be noted that as of year 2000, the requests of ISPs here in the Philippines to establish

an Internet backbone in our country is still not heard. One may wonder why.

Let us add another dimension to this myth. One may wonder how someone who wants to have a web site can get his .com, .net, .org or .edu domain names. Behind the name of <http://www.cpu.edu.ph> is an IP number that reads 203.177.73.195. What does these domain name and IP number mean to us? It means that we are at the mercy of a regulating body called the Internet Society that virtually controls all the servers of the world. It is through this regulating body that one can be assigned a domain name and a corresponding IP number. You cannot join the Internet community if this body will say “no” to you.

Let us now go to another integral part that can prove my claim that the statement, “nobody owns the Internet” is a myth. Let us ask the question, who designs and manufactures the hardwares and softwares that are needed to connect to the Internet? One may say that the Third World countries, like the Philippines and India, are producing the hardwares needed and programming softwares that make it work. Yes, it is true, but my point here is not about who manufactures it per se, but who engineers the specifications. The specifications are still and may forever be Intel, AMD, Cyrix, Apple, and many others from the hardware side; and Microsoft, Unix, Linux and others from the software side. What is interesting here is the fact that majority of all hardwares of personal computers and mainframes around the world are being run by processors that are made by Intel. Like the 8086, 80286, 80386 and 80486’s of the late 1980’s and early 1990’s and the Pentium class computers nowadays. These processors are being run by an operating system in which Microsoft captures the majority of market. Before there was the DOS (Disk Operating System) and then came the GUI’s (Graphic User Interface), which are characterized by early versions of Windows and now Windows 95, 98, 2000 and XP. Coupled to this OS’s (Operating System) are the browsers that are needed to surf the

Internet. These products have a name that has been largely influenced by the Age of Enlightenment for they are called the Internet Explorer and the Netscape Navigator. It can also be observed that their accompanying logos are that of a globe being circumnavigated by a Microsoft logo and another by a captain's wheel of a ship.

1.3. Advantages and disadvantages of IT Tools

I received a text message that says, "it will be remembered in history that Erap is the first president ousted by texting." Cell Phone, as one of the gadgets of IT, became a revolutionary tool to kick out our former president. It made easier the propagation of information that led the people to march in the streets on the eve when the 11 senators blocked the opening of the second envelope. One drawback in this gadget, as well as other IT tools, is the vulnerability of being fed wrong information like what happened to the supposed death of the Pope.¹

The advantages of IT tools can be summarized as following: geographic distribution, robust architecture, speed, universal access, freedom of speech, and digital advantage.

A. Advantages

Geographic Distribution

The key feature of the Internet is that once you have connected to any part of it, you can communicate with all of it. All of the Net's technologies – web, newsgroups, email, chat – enable geographically distributed groups of people to communicate, who otherwise couldn't do so. This new, powerful communication media has interconnected our world and created a global village.

¹ This was a hoax last 2001. Sadly, the Pope died last April 3, 2005.

Robust Architecture

The Internet is the most robust network ever built, able to adapt itself almost instantaneously to damage and outages to individual parts. It can't be bought, hijacked, or monopolized. The loss of individual computers and networks does not affect its overall reliability. The Internet perfectly realizes its original intent -- it is robust, and cannot be completely deactivated without bringing down every single connection.

Speed

The Internet operates at near real-time speed. "The Internet is very fast. Digital information travels at about 2/3 of the speed of light on copper wire and on fiber optic cables, or 200 thousand kilometers a second. This is 1/3 less than full light speed, because copper and fiber optic cable are one-third thicker than a vacuum."¹ At this speed, computers have to be more than ten thousand kilometers apart, or almost half way around the world, before they experience more than a tenth of a second in communications delay.

Universal Access

The Internet provides the same powerful capabilities to everyone with access to the network. The Internet is based on a common standard, the TCP/IP network protocol, which provides all computers on the net with the same interface and capabilities. This common foundation makes all of the Internet technologies -- Email, Web, Usenet, IRC, Mailing Lists -- available universally to anyone connected to the net.

Freedom of Speech

The Internet fosters free speech on a global scale. The Internet is a common area, a public space like a vil-

¹ P. Baran, *On Distributed Communications*, Volume I, in, <http://livinginternet.com>.

lage square. Anything that anybody wants to say can be heard by anyone else in the world with access to the Net. In fact, the Internet is the largest common area that has yet existed in human existence.

It is impossible to effectively block access to Internet information, except in very limited and controlled circumstances, such as when blocking access to a specific site in a home, or when using a network firewall to block certain sites from employees in the workplace.

The Digital Advantage

Digital communications have the "D4 advantage" -- "digital data doesn't degrade."¹ The Internet, like all computer systems, is based on digital data, so that information never changes or becomes distorted over time or in transmission between sites. This is the key feature that makes it possible to construct the very complex software systems that run the net, so that a web site doesn't age and become fuzzy or garbled over time, and the characters in an email don't get transposed or mixed up when they are sent over long distances. The future of this key feature is the establishment of low orbiting satellites that are seen by the naked eye. The "Bluetooth" technology will enable any electronic equipment to be connected to the Internet that is, if they are in the vicinity of the low-orbit satellite or cell site. "What new technologies promise to offer simply means: improvement of existing lines that will afford more people to use them all at the same time with the fastest digital speed possible."²

¹ M. Kapor, *Electronic Frontier Foundation Information*, 1993, in, <http://livinginternet.com>.

² An email from PeterAne@iloilo.net with regards to new improvements in technology.

B. Disadvantages

The most critical issue surrounding the Internet is security. There are few security safeguards on the net. IP (Internet Protocol) address, email address, name, phone number, and other information to assemble a detailed profile of your opinions, surfing patterns, and buying habits can match information you leave on the Net.

Any information you leave in a public area on the Internet, including Usenet news groups, mailing lists, chat groups, web sites, and MUD's (Multiple User Dimension/Dungeon), is considered to be placed in the public domain. Anybody can access and make use of this information. Web sites can use cookies to record your surfing patterns on their site, and advertising sites can use cookies to track your surfing patterns across different web sites that they serve.

The strength and at the same time a weakness of Internet is the fact that one can remain to be anonymous. We can intimately chat with a stranger (invariably with the opposite sex) located at the other side of the world, even if we are completely nude. No one would know the difference. No one would know whether you are 18 or 80, whether you are impersonating a female, male or third sex. Bill Gates included in his book a spot cartoon showing a dog busy chatting on a computer. Says the dog to another dog kibitzing at his side: "*You know, on the Internet nobody knows that you are a dog.*"

The Internet is also vulnerable to hacking or the electronic breaking into a system. This can be done by either gaining entry in a system legally as if you are the person the system thought you are or by illegally planting viruses to weaken the defense of the security system then pounce in. In fact, we have gained worldwide notoriety for creating the love-bug. The Filipino is always ahead in advancing backward.

One can say that we can virtually find anything, because the Net opens new doors - the portals leading to

universities and their libraries, to the halls of Congress, to just about the insides of everything in the anatomical preserves of the human biology, literally speaking. In our quest for information, sometimes we stumbled upon the wrong door, that is because we hold the key, accidentally finding ourselves peeping into the most hard core of pornography, that is very far from what one can see in a Playboy magazine, or a site teaching us how to make a homemade bomb.

III. Theological Reflection¹

A question arose whether the church should take part in non-spiritual matters such as Information Technology. My answer to this is that every human work must be put under the critique of the Word of God, hence this theological reflection.

Information Technology itself is not evil. What makes it evil is, as shown in my analysis, it is being used as a tool for exploitation and subjugation. Webber said it this way,

“Neither science nor technology is evil. But they may become tools towards evil ends when they are no longer understood and practiced under God. Both science and technology can be used to enhance or destroy life. When they are used towards destructive ends, they become oppressive and demonic.”²

The context of this theological reflection is my conviction that IT is being used as a tool for neo-colonialism;

¹ Part of this theological reflection can be found in two articles that I contributed in *Steps of Faith*, CPU Devotional Guide published by the Chaplain's Office. They are entitled *Lighthouse Family* and *Exodus: Movement of the People*, December 2000 and February 2001, respectively.

² R. Webber, *The Church in the World* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), p. 176.

thus, it is tyrannical and evil. This is contrary to the mission of Jesus Christ of advancing the Kingdom of God.

Advancing the Kingdom of God based on my faith can be found in the mission statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19, which says: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (NIV). This mission statement was realized and therefore being supported by the account when the disciples of John asked him if he is the one or they should wait for another. Jesus replied: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." Matt 11:4 (NIV).

We can now see two contrasting worlds, the IT culture, which has imperialistic goals, and the church, which aims to advance the Kingdom of God. Dr. Mendoza named two cities in his Augustinian analysis, namely, the Empire, which has the logic of conquest and domination thus making it a dominion of evil; and the Church, which has the logic of love and service thus making it a dominion of righteousness.¹ The same is true with the kingdoms found in Revelation, the dragon and the beast plus their prophets, which can now be considered as the developing IT culture; and God and the lamb plus their prophets, which is the church.

How then can a citizen of the empire and a faithful member of the church act in the realities around him? If what I perceived is true, that the IT culture is here to stay, what can the church do about it? What does our faith tell us to do about it?

¹ *New Ecumenism vs Globalization*, a lecture delivered at the College of Theology, CPU, February 7, 2001.

The cry of the Israelites during the Egyptian bondage had a striking similarity to our longing nowadays. Israelites and Filipinos are in chorus groaning to God about the misery they are experiencing brought about by foreign domination. The same is true with the questions of the Israelites during the Babylonian Captivity, "Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?"¹ I believe that we are in a Babylonian captivity. The grip of the mighty and the tyrant is suffocating the Filipinos together with other Third World countries. We long for freedom from foreign domination, but we are losing hope day by day as our captivity continues.

The Lord our God answered us saying:

"Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty one of Jacob."²

This was the great hope that the Israelites held on during the Babylonian Captivity and today this is the same hope that we must hold on. One can say that we are waiting for a third party intervention to our plight. Yes, it is true, but this hope, that God is with us in history, is what will ignite the spark within ourselves to seek alternative solutions. Solutions that are true to our Biblical tradition and to our national roots.

Nowadays, we are in interesting times. We can either learn from history and make it our guiding light towards a bright future or we can come back to a scenario we seem to be accustomed to, a scenario wherein a few ruling elite is the captain of our destiny, and we are just

¹ Isaiah 49:24

² Isaiah 49:25-26.

willing victims. The Filipino feeling that 'that's the way it is' or '*anhon ta na kay amo gid na ya*' is for me not excusable anymore. I believe that the Filipino Christians are already fed up by our passive stand in a situation, and we are now ready to take part in an active role towards a real transformation and liberation.

Resistance and struggle are matters of faith. If this is so, then how can we bring about change from the current system of the global culture that continues to marginalize people from the third world countries? I believe that we need to consider two things: reformation or revolution. Reformation calls for a change of principles from within the system while revolution calls for supplanting the current system with another one.

The reformist's goal can be that of assimilation. The objective is for us to be absorbed and incorporated in the existing framework. The Filipino's dream is to have a representation in the table that decides the fate of world economics and politics together with the superpowers of the world. The primary aim here is for our participation in political rule and a better share in economic benefits. Our bargaining chip is for us to fully embrace foreign policies, accept the cultural changes that the foreigners want, and for the transformation of Philippines into a foreign controlled country provided that the plight of the marginalized people will be elevated and the wide economic gap be narrowed down.

The Philippine government is on this track, when it entered into various treaties and agreements with foreign countries. But the problem is that the provisions we are asking are not being delivered. The current Arroyo administration is talking about providing safety nets and other measures to cushion the effects of the foreign policies that we have embraced as well as the foreign culture that is degrading our traditional values.

On the other hand, if we are determined to wage a revolution, we must have a clear separatist goal. This call is challenging us to walk away from the tyrannical ways

of the IT culture. This appeal is putting flame to our desire to throw off the neo-colonialism yoke.

What can bring about the goals of revolution? (or better still “transformation” to sound more theological) This call can only be staged and realized if, firstly, the awareness of people is brought into a level wherein they can see the common deprivation and oppression made possible by the IT culture. This is a great motivator, since it is a common grievance against a common enemy. What needs to be done by proponents of this call is to conduct a continuing education of the masses in order to produce a critical mass that can bring about a revolution. Filipinos as well as other nationals in Third World countries will just simply say “enough is enough,” then walk away from it. One way of reaching a critical mass needed to transform the situation is to give “hope,” which means “Help Organize People Everywhere.”

Secondly, if the level of consciousness is heightened, it must be followed by call for nationhood. This is a difficult task that should be done in order for a revolution to succeed. National identity can be brought about if we decide to revisit our past, rediscover our culture and learn from it. “History is not merely a chronology of events; it is not the story of heroes and great men. Essentially, history consists of the people’s effort to attain a better life.”¹

History can enlighten us that we once had a relational structure that is not oppressive and exploitative in nature in the form of a barangay. This type of community existed before the pre-hispanic colonization, and bears a striking resemblance to the communal living found in Acts 2:44-45, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

¹ R. Constantino, p. 6

History can also fuel our desire to continue on struggling to detach ourselves from an oppressive structure because our foreparents had done the same.¹

“Historic struggles provide the people with lessons in their upward march and give form and strength to the constantly changing society.”² Worthy of mentioning here is the act made by the Katipuneros in Pugadlawin on August 23, 1896. “As a sign that they had broken all ties with Spain and would fight her domination to the last, the Katipuneros tore their cedulas (certificates of citizenship) to pieces, shouting, “Long live the Philippines!”³ A true nationalist can say something like what Manuel L. Quezon said, “I prefer a government run like hell by Filipinos to a government run like heaven by Americans.”

Thirdly, we must strengthen our Christian identity. “Christian identity is identifying with Christ in all our concerns, in all that we think and say, in all that we are, and in all that we do.”⁴ To be identified with Christ is simply to live up with the mission he left for us to continue. The mission to have a society where all people can experience an abundant life. It was found out in my presentation that IT serves not for the end of Christ’s mission, but for the end of neo-colonialists. Theologically, IT is a

¹ A question arose on whether God was and still is with Filipino people in their continuing struggle to break free from the yoke of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This was my answer: “It is in the hope that God is interested with people and is active in history that we continue in struggling to have a better society.” The class questioned me about my notion of the sovereignty of God, whether I am trying to present an immanent God rather than a transcendent God. This was my reply: “there is a mystery of the workings of God in history.” God in history is a tension from an immanent and transcendent God. I believe that divine intervention happens not as a direct intervention of God from the heavens but through the hearts and minds of people that in turn will result to actions towards the transformation of society. (Class discussion: February 21, 2001).

² R. Constantino, p. 6.

³ R. Constantino, p. 176.

⁴ R. Acosta, in, N. Bunda, ed., p. 210.

product of God's creation through man's creativity. I believe that God's creation should serve for God's reign but we have seen that IT is being used not under God's will but under the evil ways.

We must strengthen our Christian presence in order to advance the Kingdom of God in this age of Information Technology. If we see IT as part of God's creation, then Christians must be good stewards in using it. Revolution in this sense is supplanting the principles governing the IT into Christian principles that is neither exploitative nor oppressive, since it seeks to have a society characterize by abundance of life. Churches then must use IT as a tool to bring about abundant life.

IV. Conclusion

This is an attempt to study critically the significance of IT both from the elitist, neo-imperialist perspective, and from a critical Christian point of view. In the course of the research, it was found out that IT moves into the direction of globalization in the service of neo-colonialism. Second, IT can be used taking another point of departure. This point can be directed towards the goal of the Kingdom of God, that is, IT can serve the struggle towards transformation in order to experience a meaningful life.

In such a context we are called to go back to the basic interpretation of our faith. The advancement of IT is both a challenge and a call by God for us to go back to the essential interpretation of our faith. IT is not totally a discovery of mankind; it was created mainly because of God's creative power bestowed to human beings. Therefore it is not totally wrong to assume that IT is both a product of divine and human power.

The problem presented however, tells that IT has been utilized for the purpose of serving the exploitative interest of the neo-imperial system, which was baptized by the name globalization.

Going back to the basic roots of our faith means searching for the essential truth behind IT and its utilization for the advancement of Christian aspirations. From a Christian perspective, IT can be used to advance the purposes of God through Jesus Christ, namely, to build the reign of God on earth and in heaven. This kingdom is interpreted in many different ways depending upon the situation and perspective of the subject of the kingdom. Yet the end goal is to participate in the realization of abundant life (John 10:10).

The thesis of this paper is summarized in one sentence: Given the oppressive situation and the elitist global control, IT is developed in the service of neo-imperial or global ideology. This is correct as the data presented above assert. Is there a way out? There seems to be none. However, as Christians or theologians, we cannot, shall not, and must not stop here. There is hope that justice, peace, and integrity of creation will prevail. It is therefore our Christian responsibility to respond and struggle to find meaningful methods and solutions to fight against the use of IT to serve the greedy ends of the neo-imperial mind. Theologically, it is our responsibility as theologians to realize these theological assumptions, namely, to find ways to make IT responsive in serving the interest of the Kingdom of God.