

Metaverse Socialization Based on Contextual Theology in Indonesia Bethel Church (GBI) of Avia Setia Budi Medan

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ABSTRACT

Metaverse is an expression of technological culture that has a global impact. These impacts will occur through knowledge, social, and geo-spatial. Artificial intelligence (AI) will connect all entities on Earth via the internet, resulting in layered information and experiences in the Metaverse, a three-dimensional virtual world. This Metaverse has four characteristics: First, Augmented Reality (AR), which is a technology that can be used by humans to unite two-dimensional (2D) and or three-dimensional (3D) objects into the virtual world. Second, Life Logging is an augmentative technology that records and reports the activities of objects and users. Third, Mirror Worlds, which is a reflection of the physical world into the virtual world. Fourth, Virtual Reality, where people are depicted as individuals who are similar to the original through 3D avatars. From a Christian perspective, the Metaverse in this study will be studied with a contextual theological approach through a combination of contextualization and the integrity of posthuman aspects and mysticism. This study focuses on evolutionary wholeness as identified by Teilhard through Delio's work. Meanwhile, the contextualization model refers to Bevans' view.

Keywords: metaverse, contextual theology, spirituality.

ABSTRAK

Metaverse merupakan ekspresi budaya teknologi yang berdampak global. Dampak tersebut akan terjadi melalui pengetahuan, sosial, dan geo-spasial. Kecerdasan buatan (AI) akan menghubungkan semua entitas di bumi melalui internet, yang akan menghasilkan informasi dan pengalaman berlapis di Metaverse, dunia virtual tiga dimensi. Metaverse ini memiliki empat ciri: Pertama, Augmented Reality (AR), yaitu teknologi yang dapat digunakan oleh manusia untuk menyatukan objek dua dimensi (2D) dan atau tiga dimensi (3D) ke dalam dunia maya. Kedua, Life Logging adalah teknologi augmentatif yang mencatat dan melaporkan aktivitas objek dan pengguna. Ketiga, Mirror Worlds, yang merupakan refleksi dari dunia fisik ke dunia virtual. Keempat, Virtual Reality, di mana manusia digambarkan sebagai individu yang mirip dengan aslinya melalui avatar 3D. Dari perspektif Kekristenan, Metaverse dalam kegiatan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat (PKM) di GBI Avia Setia Budi Medan, akan dikaji dan disosialisasikan dengan pendekatan teologis kontekstual melalui kombinasi kontekstualisasi dan integritas aspek pascamanusia (posthuman) dan mistisisme. Studi ini berfokus pada keutuhan evolusioner yang diidentifikasi oleh Teilhard melalui karya Delio. Sedangkan model kontekstualisasi mengacu pada pandangan Bevans.

Kata kunci: Pengabdian kepada masyarakat, metaverse, teologi kontekstual, spiritualitas.

INTRODUCTION

The Metaverse is a technological development and has a global impact (Hermann and Browning 2021). From the perspective of Christian cultural engagement, contextual theology has not yet been developed for the study of the Metaverse. Therefore, in this study, the researcher will use a contextual theological approach initiated by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to analyze the Metaverse. According to Smart et al. (2008:28), the Metaverse is a three-dimensional transparent space that encompasses the entire Earth. Humans will be active all the time, such as answering various kinds of questions, doing business, playing, holding meetings with friends, and doing other activities (Ball, 2020).

In the Metaverse, everyday life between virtual reality and physical reality will be well connected. Contextualization unites past cultural experiences, such as biblical traditions as they have been lived in the scriptures throughout history, with contemporary cultural experiences (Bevans 2018:2). Contextualization or inculturation of local theology or contextual theology places these two experiences in the shutter of dialogue. This dialogue is how the Christian faith has renewed itself in repeated new expressions of culture throughout history.

Within a contextual framework, it is wise to rely on the commonalities of views between two dialogue partners while noting differences honestly. Therefore, in this study, which Christian tradition is closest to examining the Metaverse culture? To answer this question, the researchers will use evolutionary instruments built by the Christian tradition, namely through the thoughts of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as described in the work of Ilia Delio. Delio's work is in this particular example of dialogue, which is happening these days. This pioneered the flow of the Christian tradition that paid attention to evolution, technology, post-humanity, and spirituality. All of these main instruments are used to study the Metaverse. When this study is approached with the sensitivity of posthuman mystics and evolutionary contextual methods. It needs to be socialized to the Indonesian Bethel Church (GBI) congregation, who are mostly millennials, to benefit from the use of the metaverse in the local church.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The community service team applied two methods; 1) the community education method and 2) the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method. The community education method provides the congregation with an understanding of the benefits of the metaverse in the local church. The

FGD method discusses current problems and finds solutions for the church. It involved the entire congregation of Indonesia Bethel Church (GBI) Avia Setia Budi Medan, consisting of pastors, workers, and musicians, totaling thirty-five (35) people. It took place on Sunday, October 9, 2022, and began at 3.30 PM to 7.30 PM, following the 5M health protocol.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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In front of the GBI congregation, Avia Setia Budi Padriadi Wiharjokusumo explained that the term "metaverse" came from a novel entitled Snowcrash (Stephenson 1992). In the novel, Metaverse is the development of the internet that provides a three-dimensional (3D) space, namely a universe in a virtual concept where users have access to digital avatars that allow them to live, do activities, and interact with each other as in their daily lives inside the digital world. In 2007, the Foundation for Accelerated Studies facilitated cross-disciplinary scientists and industry leaders.



Figure 1: The Community Service Team, Padriadi Wiharjokusumo and Novita Romauli Saragih elaborated on four aspects of the Metaverse.

They developed a 28-page document on the future of the internet, which they call the Metaverse, which consists of four aspects of the Metaverse (Smart et al. 2008, p. 1-28).

- Augmented Reality;
- Lifelogging;
- Mirror Worlds, and
- Virtual Reality.

1. Augmented Reality (AR)

Augmented reality is an aspect of the Metaverse that gives new eyes the ability to see the material world in a completely different way. This is similar to lifelogging, which seeks to add an additional perceptual layer to the current experience of reality and is similar to a mirror world that is constantly communicating with sensors in the surrounding environment and facing the outside world.

Augmented reality occurs when a person or individuals receive an enhanced view of the physical world through the use of AR-enabled devices such as phones, headsets, or glasses. This enhancement most often consists of information or virtual items appearing on top of what is seen as physical reality. In addition, this layer of information can be communicated via voice, and if some of these entities are part of the Internet, they can be addressed via voice.

Augmented reality seeks to bring humans closer to the world surrounding them (Fink 2019, p. 31). "A magnified reality..." has its historical antecedent to the tool. Humans are researching to search for instruments to make people stronger, faster, and more intelligent. AR reality is the ultimate expression of the human quest for mastery. It is a tool, like a club (Fink 2018, Loc 328). " AR has three components: (1) it is evident and has virtual components; (2) virtual components can be interacted with; and (3) virtual items are connected to a three-dimensional (3D) world (Fink 2019, p. 27).

2. Lifelogging

As with Augmented Reality (AR), lifelogging has also been augmented, meaning technology is being used to improve current reality practices. Tools are provided to build on current experiences in everyday life. In addition, lifelogging is similar to AR in that it uses a wearable as an unobtrusive recording device to capture what is happening in people's lives (Kelly 2016, p. 278–79), whereas augmented reality is externally focused. Lifelogging is

personal and intimate (Smart et al. 2008:14). When people record their lives for their friends and family networks, they post how they want their lives to be seen by the world (Kim 2021, p. 11).

This "document" is not meant to be a fair and accurate rendering of their lives, but social media gives them a way to add another point of view to reality concerning their personal lives. Therefore, lifelogging is not a simulation but an actual representation of human life. Since lifelogging is subjective, it is more of an internal view of each other's lives than an external one, as in AR. With VR, lifelogging is personalized. However, lifelogging coincides with one's identity in the real world, whereas agency in VR is mediated through otherworldly avatars.

3. Mirror Worlds

Mirror Worlds are part of the Metaverse that creates a digital twin of Earth for an immersive experience. The mirror world is similar to the virtual world in that it models the world as accurately as possible, to experience in three dimensions. The only difference is that the mirror world models Earth, and VR models an alternate world. What they have in common is that they are both immersive simulation worlds. In VR, the individual avatars don't represent their version of the real world, but in the mirror worlds, the avatars each represent their real-world selves.



Figure 2: The congregation was listening to the speakers of the Community Service Team.

To date, Google Earth, introduced in 2005, is the most significant effort to digitally map the Earth (Smart et al. 2008, p. 9). Google Maps has done most of the work related to mapping the world in two dimensions and the visual aspect of three dimensions, especially helping drivers on the road (Kim 2021, p. 104). Just like body tracking applications, geo-based applications are constantly updated and offer the latest information. Many people believe that apps like Waze18 and Google Maps keep the world up to date.

The mirror world is primarily built on a map of the Earth, so, similar to AR, the focus is on connecting to the real external world (Smart et al. 2008, p. 9). The mirror world is where the real world is mapped in such a way that three-dimensional rendering can occur. Some experts call it AR Clouds¹⁹, others call it the "digital twin", "ubiquitous computing", and "on life", and still others call it the "mirror world" (Floridi 2014, p. 43; Kelly 2019). However, the key aspect is that all global public spaces will be mapped in a three-dimensional representation, and from that, anything digital, especially AR-related, can be built on top of this layer (Cronin and Scoble 2020, p. 155).

4. Virtual Reality (VR)

Virtual reality (virtual world) is the fourth building block of the Metaverse (Smart et al. 2008, p. 6), and it is simulated and focused internally. Similar to lifelogging, it revolves around people and their internal relationships. They all work from their point of view and where one has agency. Like the Mirror World, it is an immersive simulation. The only difference is that it is a game based on an alternate world.

Virtual reality involves gameplay and storytelling in an immersive environment. Virtual reality is about deep human pursuits. It provides presence and agency in another world, in story and myth, and stretches from Plato's cave to religious rituals, theatre, dark rides, amusement parks, film, television, and video games (Fink 2018, Loc 328). A person is in the game through their avatar and has a significant impact on how the story unfolds (Smart et al. 2008, p. 6). This type of experience is reflected in MMORPG²⁰ games (such as World of Warcraft) that allow millions of people around the world to join and participate in online games. With virtual reality, that takes that dynamic even further and places one in an environment so vivid that one has an experience with their whole body. That is the game, which is a part of the story.

Contextual Response to the Metaverse in Theological Perspective

After Padriadi Wiharjokusumo finished describing the characteristics of the four aspects of the Metaverse, the elaboration was continued by Novita Romauli Saragih, who said that she would explore what a posthuman mystic might find using the entire context of the Metaverse.

Before examining the Metaverse contextually and thoroughly, Saragih said that the posthuman mystic's first action is to properly see that God resides within every human being (Delio 2020, p.183). Likewise, post-human mystics are of the view that God also lives in the Metaverse, removing the barriers of secularity and non-secularity. In AR, physical relationships are constantly observable through all reality, namely augmented life.



Figure 3: The congregation seriously paid attention to the elaboration on the Metaverse given by the community service team

It is revealed that all reality is whole, and, similarly, to those who can see, they are filled with the presence of God (Delio 2013, locit 1866). Saragih, furthermore, said that when posthuman mystics listen to the call of wholeness in AR, they will see an animated world filled with God's presence as opposed to a profane world of technology. Posthuman mystics will see that reality, both physical and enhanced, is a unified whole made up of interrelated wholes.

Through AR, the wholeness and holiness of all reality become more accessible because everything is sourced from God, connected, and filled with intrinsic value.

A posthuman mystic will come to lifelogging ready to accept the talent on offer, moving towards social media with anticipation (Kelly 2010:173). Just like someone who participates in God (Delio 2020:200) in an offline space, the posthuman mystic will realize that social media offers everyone the opportunity to serve as God's witnesses.

Given that social media unfairly strengthens some groups while weakening others, one cannot simply dismiss it as profane and godless. When we refer to Teilhard's view, He said: "There is nothing profane down here for those who know how to see (Delio 2020:183)". Posthuman mystics realize that everything is fundamentally interconnected.



Figure 4: Group photo of Indonesia Bethel Church (GBI) of Avia Setia Budi Medan after completing community service activities on Metaverse Socialization Based on Contextual Theology. All participants stayed together to take a group photo.

CONCLUSION

The elaboration above concludes that the contextual methods involve four characteristics: Metaverse: augmented reality, lifelogging, mirror worlds, and virtual reality. The pattern of the wholeness of Jesus with the evolutionary paradigm initiated by Teilhard/Delio, including involving Bevans' five modes of contextualization, so that with the work of posthuman mystics is possible. A posthuman mystic is one who, after deeply accepting God, realizes that all reality shares a common source. Posthuman mystics come contextually with messages of wholeness as they seek to find and hear wholeness in every space embedded in the Metaverse.

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