


The role of the Korean Protestant church in the democratisation of technology

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The Korean Protestant church has historically demonstrated a propensity to promptly identify and adopt new technological advancements for its own purposes. Consequently, it has become a consumer and beneficiary of new technologies, and has no voice in the issues that arise as technology drives society. The purpose of this article is to philosophically and theologically explore the true role of the Protestant church in Korea in the context of a society that is heavily influenced by technology. It is a conceptual-theological study, founded upon a critical literature review within the domains of philosophy of technology and Public Theology. The philosophy of technology in the contemporary era advocates for the democratization of technology. This is defined as a process in which all members of society connected to technology participate in the determination of the direction of technology's development. It acknowledges that the Korean Protestant church is not merely a consumer of technology, but also a member responsible for deliberating and determining the trajectory of technological advancement. Public Theology provides concrete directions for how the Korean Protestant church can fulfill this responsibility. From a Public Theology perspective, it is incumbent upon the Korean Protestant church to recognize the impact of technology on contemporary society and give political and ethical voices to the changes it will bring. This is the true role of a prophetic, Protestant church that seeks the common good.

Contribution: The present study proposes a role for the Korean Protestant Church in a technology-driven Korean society, through interdisciplinary research in the philosophy of technology and Public Theology. It argues for the social responsibility of directing the development of technology through a voice grounded in Christian values that seeks the common good. It will serve as a starting point for public theological research on technology and the Korean Protestant church.

Keywords: theology of technology; philosophy of technology; democratisation of technology; Korean Protestant church; public theology; public role of the Korean Protestant church.

Introduction

The accelerated pace of contemporary technological advancement is posing a significant challenge to the prevailing worldview of individuals residing in the modern era. Klaus Schwab, who is credited with presenting the phrase 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', insists that contemporary society is undergoing a transformation into a technology-dominated society (Schwab 2017:11). This signifies that the structures and values that have historically underpinned human society are being reshaped by technology, a process that is occurring in Korean society as well. In light of the profound impact of modern technology, members of Korean society must address the challenges posed by technology. It is essential to interpret technology from a multifaceted perspective, encompassing political, social, cultural and religious dimensions.

The Korean Protestant church, as a constituent element of Korean society, is not excused from this responsibility. Nevertheless, a review of published studies, pastor-oriented seminars and Protestant denominational position papers reveals minimal reference to this duty (Hwang 2024:95–96). A significant proportion of theological discourse and ecclesiastical voices have concentrated on the utilisation of new technologies within the church as they emerge. This observation highlights the limitations of the Korean Protestant church's perspective on technology as a mere instrument of convenience and underscores the absence of profound theological and pastoral contemplation on the societal implications of technology. Moreover, it appears to be a barely possible challenge for the Korean Protestant church to engage in discourse surrounding

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technological advancements and the societal transformations they engender. The legitimacy of the church's involvement in the technological discourse remains unestablished, both within and without the institution. There is a paucity of discourse within the church itself regarding the potential topics for the technological discussion.

The objective of this study is threefold: firstly, to diagnose the prevailing context; secondly, to refine the church's perspective on technology; and thirdly, to propose a role for the Protestant church in a technology-driven Korean society. This study commences with an examination of the social and cultural context in which the Korean Protestant church has developed its current attitude towards technology. This is followed by an exposition of the limitations of its current perspective, which emphasises the usefulness of technology. The subsequent development of a philosophical and theological discourse serves to refine this perspective. It focuses in particular on the concept of technological democratisation, as proposed by philosophers of technology, with a view to controlling the dominance of technology. It also explores what this concept demands of the Korean Protestant church as a member of society. This study then progresses to a consideration of the perspective that the Korean Protestant church should adopt in order to respond to that demand. This article's argument is rooted in the concept of the common good from the perspective of public theology. It insists that the pursuit of a political and ethical voice for technology should be identified as a core mission of the Korean Protestant church.

This article centres on a critical review of the literature in the fields of philosophy of technology and public theology. This is an effective research method for examining the Korean Protestant church's current perspective on technology and proposing an improved perspective. It is evident that, given the nature of the literature review, it does not comprise an empirical study. Consequently, it may be limited by the absence of case studies or specific directions for implementation. Nevertheless, the contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, it introduces an enhanced perspective on technology to the Korean Protestant church. Secondly, it establishes the foundation for conceptualising specific future practices based on this perspective. Therefore, if future theological studies attempt various practical approaches to technology based on the perspective proposed in this article, the Korean Protestant church will be better able to fulfil its prophetic and public role in the technology-driven Korean society.

The technological discourse of the Korean Protestant church

It is inevitable that a religion's attitude towards other social entities outside the religion is affected by the historical, social and cultural context of any given era (Tanner 1997:63). Consequently, in order to comprehend the Korean Protestant church's stance on contemporary technology, it is essential to investigate the social milieu in which it has been established. This article examines the context in which the Korean

Protestant church has developed its current pragmatic attitude towards technology and discusses its implications and limitations.

Korean Protestant church and technology

With the arrival of Western Protestant missionaries in Korea at the end of the 19th century, a new era of cultural exchange commenced. Alongside the dissemination of Protestantism, these missionaries introduced a plethora of Western cultural elements, thereby influencing the socio-cultural landscape of Korea. For Koreans, who were largely unacquainted with Western civilisation, the Western science, medicine and industry introduced by the missionaries represented a significant departure from their existing knowledge and experience. Western missionaries employed the Western civilisation they introduced with great zeal in their efforts to propagate Protestantism and effectuate societal transformation in Korea (Jang 2021:51–52).

It is noteworthy that the technologies introduced by the missionaries were modern Western technologies that had been developed since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. The introduction of these novel technologies, such as medical technology based on Western medicine, new farming techniques and scientific technology derived from chemistry and physics, had a profound impact on the Korean people, who were largely unfamiliar with Western culture. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the technologies introduced at that time laid the foundation for the modernisation of Korean society (Son 2023:547–548). Consequently, the historical experience of early Korean Protestantism represents a significant factor in the stance adopted by the Korean Protestant church with regard to technology. In other words, from its inception, Korean Protestantism espoused a discourse aiming to improve its social impact through the acceptance and dissemination of novel and beneficial technologies.

At the vanguard of modernisation through the adoption of new Western technologies, the Korean Protestant church experienced remarkable growth and augmented its social influence during the industrialisation of Korean society. After the 1960s, the socio-economic landscape of Korea underwent a transformation marked by accelerated industrialisation and a period of robust economic expansion. During this period, Protestant churches in Korea established a significant presence in the social fabric by disseminating a message that emphasised economic prosperity and providing assistance to those who were marginalised and disadvantaged by the rapid economic growth. Consequently, the Korean Protestant church underwent a period of rapid quantitative growth (Jang 2018:72–74). As the number of members grew exponentially, the Korean Protestant church concentrated its efforts on becoming a culturally sophisticated religious organisation. This cultural capital was founded on the rapid adoption and utilisation of technology. The Korean Protestant church was quick to adopt a variety of technological elements that contributed to its visibility and cultural sophistication.

Despite a decline in growth since the late 20th century, the Protestant church in Korea has remained at the forefront of technological adoption (Kim 2006:325). The notion that a proactive embrace of novel technologies is a means of reversing the church's declining growth trajectory has reinforced the technological discourse within the Korean Protestant church. In particular, the digital technologies that emerged during this period exerted a significant influence, creating a society unlike any that had preceded it. As one of the most technologically advanced countries, Korea was focused on the commoditisation and dissemination of digital technologies. In these circumstances, the Korean Protestant church prioritised the adoption of digital technologies, resulting in an unprecedented transformation of the church into a technologically dominated space. Theatrical worship centres, professional-quality sound systems, video equipment and large screens for broadcasting, and various social media and video platforms were installed in churches prior to any substantial theological consideration being given to them. The extent to which this has enhanced the influence of the Korean Protestant church has yet to be studied.

However, one clear result is that it has hardened the church's attitude towards new technologies. As an early adopter of new technology, the Korean Protestant church appears to regard the unboxing of new technology as its religious mission (Lee 2022:120–121). This attitude persists to the present day, with the church engaged in discussions regarding the potential adoption of new 21st-century technologies, including online video conferencing, virtual reality and generative artificial intelligence, even before they have been subjected to expert scrutiny. This is demonstrated by the fact that Korean Protestant media outlets have been quick to publish follow-up stories on the topic of the use of virtual reality technology in worship (Son 2023:558).

Limitations of the Korean Protestant church's pragmatic understanding of technology

The Korean Protestant church's perceptions and attitudes towards technology, as they have evolved within the context of its socio-cultural environment, can be regarded as a response to the prevailing circumstances. However, it is important to note the limitations of this response. The initial issue is that the Korean Protestant church's approach to technology is unduly hasty. In his paper on the metaverse technology craze in the Korean Protestant church, Son Wha Chul, a Korean philosopher of technology, offers a critique of the attempt to introduce a technology that is still in the process of development and has yet to be perfected into the church. He notes that none of the Korean Protestant churches have provided a satisfactory rationale for the introduction of metaverse technology within their institutions. Such justifications, like the assertion that 'children are familiar with the metaverse', are devoid of empirical evidence and represent unsubstantiated claims about a technology that has yet to be utilised (Son 2023:559). Ultimately, the stance of the Korean Protestant church can be seen as reflecting the logic of a corporation attempting to gain a competitive advantage in adopting new technology.

As a result, the Korean Protestant church's proclivity for hastily adopting new technologies can be attributed to a perceived lack of validation regarding their effectiveness. The impact of technology is not inherently positive, particularly in the context of novel technologies that have not been subjected to prolonged testing. Nonetheless, the outlook of the Korean Protestant church towards innovative technologies remains decidedly optimistic. Indeed, a considerable number of articles about the potential applications of contemporary digital technologies within the context of Korean Protestant ministry tend to portray their efficacy in a largely positive light. However, the formulation of optimistic assumptions regarding the efficacy of technologies that have not been widespread is only an abstract and hypothetical proposition. The findings of these studies diverge from the conventional conceptualisations of technology that have been put forth by philosophers of technology. They were overwhelmed by the pace of technological progress, which led them to adopt a pessimistic view of the impact of technology on human society. The majority of these scholars predicted a future in which technology would become dominant over humans (Nordmann 2021:172). This perspective should have been included in the Korean Protestant church's serious assessment of new technologies. Had a more balanced approach been taken, incorporating both optimistic and pessimistic perspectives, the Korean Protestant church's current positive stance on new technologies may have been tempered.

Ultimately, the technological discourse of the Korean Protestant church reflects a deficient theological foundation. A logical methodology for integrating technology into the church entails a theological interpretation of the technology, an evaluation of the potential introduction of the technology within the context of the church and an additional theological discourse concerning the utilisation of the technology (Son 2023:561–562). However, the Korean Protestant church has been hasty in its adoption of technology without a thorough theological justification for this phenomenon. Consequently, as evidenced, the Korean Protestant church has become consistent in its unquestioning acceptance of new technologies and indifferent to their inherent issues.

It is also noteworthy that the Korean Protestant church has yet to offer any commentary on the societal implications of the ongoing technological revolution. The transformation of human life by technology gives rise to a number of existential questions. Religion has a social responsibility to address these questions. It should also provide a platform for discussing the issues of marginalisation and inequality created by new technologies. Ultimately, it should identify the limitations of new technologies that negatively impact human life and offer guidance for future developments in the right direction (Lee 2022:128). The Korean Protestant church, as one of the religions that make up Korean society, is not exempt from this responsibility. Nevertheless, the Korean Protestant church's current discourse on technology is inadequate in fulfilling this responsibility.

Jacques Ellul, a philosopher and theologian of technology, has been an outspoken critic of the uncritical acceptance of modern technology. Ellul posited that in a modern world seduced by the logic of utility, technological advances are met with unceasing gratification, which in turn gives rise to disruptions in human society (Ellul 2013:20–21). It would be prudent for the Korean Protestant church to give due consideration to the points raised by Ellul. It would be beneficial for them to consider that their current approach may not be conducive to a healthy role in a technology-driven society. It is not sufficient for the Korean Protestant church to merely adorn its buildings with technology in order to attract people; rather, it must engage with the wider public debate about the trajectory of modern technology and ensure the stability of the technological society. In order to engage in meaningful discourse, the Korean Protestant church must possess a robust theological understanding of technology and recognise its civic responsibilities as a member of society.

Philosophical foundations for democratising technology

The Korean Protestant church's pragmatic approach to technology cannot be regarded as an internal matter; rather, it should be considered in relation to its responsibility towards Korean society. Nevertheless, there persists a tendency to perceive technology and the church as discrete entities. This tendency may provide a foundation for the Korean Protestant church's acceptance of the prevailing view of technology. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the impact of technology as a subject for Korean society in its entirety and to recognise it as the responsibility of all Korean citizens to intervene in it. This will serve to effect a change in the Korean Protestant church's view of technology and empower the Korean Protestant church to participate in the discussion on technology as a constituent of Korean society. This article will explore the possibility of a public forum on technology in which the church can participate by examining the views of philosophers of technology on the democratisation of technology.

The philosophical approach to the politics of technology

A certain group of the philosophers of technology argues that a philosophy of technology should be grounded in empirical, scientific research on the development and evolution of individual technologies. In particular, the philosophical approach to technology is to be characterised by a close examination of technology's fragmentation, with the objective of analysing the social and cultural factors that underpin such issues and investigating their impact on technological development. This approach results in the establishment of a nexus between technology and politics. It manifests as two interrelated phenomena: firstly, the recognition that technology possesses political ramifications; and secondly, the discernment that technology is inherently devised within a political context. Furthermore, the philosophy of technology, which places significant emphasis

on the connection between technology and politics, suggests the possibility that technological developments can be controlled and manipulated through effective coordination.

Herbert Marcuse is among the first scholars to contextualise technology within a political and social framework. He advances the notion that technology is not inherently neutral within a socio-political framework. Technology, in this view, is not merely an objective entity but also a manifestation of the prevailing socio-political interests. Its character and purpose are contingent on the context in which it is situated and the design ethos that guides its development (Marcuse 2009:281–282). Consequently, Marcuse argues for the necessity of appropriate political intervention to guide the trajectory of technological advancement. This intervention, orchestrated by the people of a society, would shift the role of technology from one of control to one of emancipation, liberating humans from the shackles of labour (Marcuse 2009:310). Marcuse does not adopt a pessimistic perspective regarding technological society. Rather, he advances an optimistic conception of technology that could be guided through political coordination. Nevertheless, he neglects to delineate the specific nature of an ideal political intervention in technology, which leads to criticisms of his proposals as impractical. Notwithstanding these limitations, he is acknowledged for his seminal contributions to the philosophy of technology, particularly for his pioneering emphasis on the political dimensions of technology.

In *Technics and Civilization*, the American historian Lewis Mumford takes a holistic look at the social, cultural, economic and political implications of technology. Rather than organising the technologies developed throughout human history by era, he divides them into two categories: authoritarian and democratic technologies (Mumford 2013:2–3). Authoritarian technologies, he explains, are large-scale, system-centred technologies with considerable power, while democratic technologies are small-scale, human-centred technologies with less power but that allow for human autonomy. Mumford's argument posits that the contemporary technological landscape is characterised by the predominance of authoritarian technologies, which are expanding at the expense of democratic technologies, leading to the adoption of efficient management systems that dehumanise in favour of vigorous productive forces. While these systems may have the potential to enrich human life, they ultimately impose a structure that compels individuals to rely exclusively on technology for their needs (Mumford 2013:142–145). The crux of Mumford's argument does not pertain to the inherent qualities of technology itself. Instead, he concerns the political structures that serve particular interests and that perpetuate the dominance of technology. Consequently, he endeavours to overcome the prevailing political structures that engender authoritarian technologies by re-establishing democratic technologies. Despite the absence of such a transformation in reality, Mumford's perspective remains noteworthy for its employment of the term 'democratic' in the context of technology, advocating for

the establishment of a political environment conducive to the formation of a technological society that prioritises human autonomy, creativity and agency.

Thus, the discourse of Marcuse and Mumford initiates the consideration of a particular aspect of technology: its political essence. The works of Marcuse and Mumford are noteworthy for marking a shift towards a more nuanced understanding of human–technology relations (Kapp 2021:187). It is indisputable that these erudite endeavours contributed substantially to the development of practical and down-to-earth reflections on the societal challenges engendered by modern technology. They thus lay the foundation for the conceptualisation of philosophy of technology as a distinct discipline that offers practical alternatives.

Democracy and technology

Since the establishment of the connection between technology and politics by philosophers of technology, the field of philosophy of technology has centred on identifying solutions to the challenges posed by technology within a democratic framework. Langdon Winner, Richard Sclove and Andrew Feenberg are prominent philosophers of technology who have proposed the concept of democratic technology or the democratisation of technology. Despite their divergent approaches to the politics of technology, those scholars ultimately seek to identify methodologies that would empower democratic consensus and control over technology. This section will explore the theories of these scholars concerning the intersection of technology and democracy, with a focus on how they can contribute to resolving the challenges associated with the politics of technology. The objective of democratising technology is to empower members of society to influence the trajectory of technological development. Achieving this objective necessitates the establishment of a public forum that serves as a platform for dialogue among technology developers and its users. For the Korean Protestant church, the establishment of such a forum is of particular significance, as it could serve as a platform for engagement, enabling the church to fulfil its public responsibilities.

Langdon Winner's argument on the political nature of technology offers a compelling framework for understanding the impact of technology on human society. According to Winner, the term 'political' in the context of technology refers to its ability to influence and shape the lives of individuals and communities within a society. When discussing the political nature of technology, the focus typically shifts to the political intentions behind its development, such as whether it was designed to benefit a specific social group or whether it carries unintended political implications that result in benefits or disadvantages for another social group, independent of the intentions of its creators (Winner 2010:36–37). While Winner also addresses these points, he insists that the political nature of contemporary technologies is more clearly demonstrated by the political structures within which they operate. To illustrate this perspective, he cites the example of nuclear power plants, which are widely

regarded as being under the control of a very limited set of decision-makers because of the potentially catastrophic consequences of using raw materials that could be detrimental to human well-being. In essence, Winner's argument posits that the political nature of nuclear technology is characterised by centralised and power-driven dynamics (Winner 2010:46–48). Technologies such as nuclear power plants do not directly involve ordinary citizens in their development or evolution; nevertheless, they have a tremendous impact on changing the direction of their lives. Consequently, these technologies can be regarded as politically undemocratic, given their capacity to influence the lives of individuals within society.

In light of this understanding, Winner puts forth a case for the advancement of democratic technologies that facilitate the voluntary engagement of citizens in technological utilisation, as opposed to undemocratic technologies where control is concentrated in a select few. Drawing upon Mumford's distinction between democratic and authoritarian technologies, Winner conceptualises the evolution of authoritarian technologies into democratic ones as a form of political empowerment that can ultimately elevate the status of citizens, placing them beyond the dominion of technology. This is because of the fact that as democratic technologies become more prevalent, citizens are increasingly able to exercise control over them through political engagement (Winner 2000:446–447).

Richard Sclove's proposal of criteria for the design of democratic technologies is a significant contribution to the field. Building on the arguments of Winner, Sclove's criteria aim to guide future technological development. They are intended to protect human beings from the negative effects of technology and to serve as a yardstick for demonstrating the proven stability of technologies developed in response (Sclove 1995:154). Sclove's criteria exclude authoritarian technologies, that is, those that undermine human autonomy or promote biased ideologies, and emphasise the development of communitarian and cooperative technologies. They further presuppose that individuals and groups within a society engage in the development and advancement of technology and that the technologies they pursue should ultimately contribute to the perfection of the political, economic and social life of all human beings (Sclove 1995:157–158). This approach, when implemented, can foster the development of democratic societies that strengthen political control over technologies with the potential to cause environmental problems, social harm, inequality and discrimination. Furthermore, it can assist citizens in achieving economic independence and pursuing ecological sustainability through technology.

In this manner, the democratisation of technology through the development of democratic technologies proposed by Winner and Sclove appears to be highly reasonable. However, as Sclove characterises his proposed criteria as 'tentative', there is a considerable amount of discourse necessary to

determine the practical implementation of these criteria in the development of democratic technologies and the dismantling of authoritarian technologies (Sclove 1995:157). Of primary concern is the question of who is entitled to categorise a technology's political orientation as democratic or authoritarian. This is because of the potential establishment of an additional hierarchical structure related to technology.

The aforementioned discussion indicates a significant gap in the extant scholarship concerning the democratisation of technology, a gap that is addressed by Andrew Feenberg's theory of the democratisation of technology. Feenberg's approach to technology is informed by the tenets of Western constructivism. The social construction of technology means that technological changes are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including the social context in which it is embedded and the social groups with which it is associated. According to this perspective, technological development is not a linear process determined solely by the actions of technology developers. Instead, it is a dynamic process influenced by social choices, historical contexts and contingent factors. This variability affords human beings a considerable degree of influence over the direction of technological development. Consequently, Feenberg proposes that if technology is socially constructed, society can determine technology's development. Furthermore, if this determination is achieved through public debate, society can exercise influence over technology democratically (Feenberg 2017:45).

In detail, Feenberg argues that the democratisation of technology can be achieved through 'deep democratisation' and is defined as the democratisation of technology in its entirety, including its underlying principles, applications and users (Feenberg 1999:147). This process entails the democratic transformation of 'technical code' through the active involvement and consensus of the public who utilise the technology. To comprehend Feenberg's concept, it is imperative to first grasp the concept of technical code. Technical code, as defined by Feenberg, refers to the manner in which technology is delineated, including its design, function and social implications (Feenberg 1999:88). Feenberg's argument posits that the democratisation of technology is inherently impeded by the biased nature of technical codes, which, he contends, are designed to serve the interests of the ruling class. Consequently, he advocates for democratic intervention by technology users to modify technical codes, which he terms 'the expression of technological bureaucracy'. Feenberg conceptualises the imposition of novel values on the technical code as a form of citizen resistance (Feenberg 1999:128). This resistance necessitates the involvement of all individuals associated with technology, that is, all citizens affected by technology. Consequently, this can be regarded as a novel form of politics that democratises technology.

Feenberg's perspective underscores the necessary conditions for achieving genuine democratisation of technology. The democratisation of technology must begin with the

dissolution of the prevailing notion that technology is developed by experts and utilised by the public. As Feenberg contends, each technology is comprised of code that prioritises the interests or desires of the ruling class, which he identifies as the experts. The public's utilisation of technology signifies that the technology, or the logic of the experts who developed it, exerts control over the public. This dynamic engenders a crisis of democracy, which is predicated on the principle that the sovereignty of all human beings is of the utmost importance. Consequently, democratic oversight of technology is tantamount to redirecting its trajectory towards all humanity, as opposed to privileging a select class. Feenberg's argument posits that the exercise of control necessitates the active involvement of all citizens. They should demand rationality, not efficiency, and insist on freedom of choice in the acceptance of technology. This assertion encapsulates the fundamental essence of technology and politics, as well as the democratisation of technology.

A discourse on technology in the Korean Protestant church, with a focus on public theology

The concept of democratisation of technology, as proposed by philosophers of technology, insists that the authority over technology should reside with the public, as opposed to a select group of experts. This authority is accompanied by a responsibility to comprehend the rationale and logic underpinning each technology, to monitor its impact and to direct it in a manner that is conducive to the public good. In what ways might the Korean Protestant church, which has played a role in the democratisation of technology, contribute to the development of technology in an ethical and responsible manner? This chapter employs the theoretical framework of public theology to propose a political and ethical discourse for the Korean Presbyterian church in the context of its involvement in the democratisation of technology.

Public theology and the technological discourse

By drawing upon the framework proposed by William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott for a theology of social engagement, it is possible to propose three points that could inform the discourse of the Korean Protestant church on technology (Scott & Cavanaugh 2004:3–4). Firstly, the church must examine the relationship between social issues related to technology and the values of the kingdom of God. The prevailing discourse on modern technology is often influenced by political power structures, resulting in an undemocratic nature that fails to reflect the opinions of the majority. In this context, the Korean Protestant church can provide an alternative discourse on technology that places significant emphasis on the sovereignty and autonomy of all human beings from the perspective of public theology.

Secondly, the Korean Protestant church can identify the deficiencies in the prevailing technology discourse of

the church and advocate for an approach that can actualise social justice. This article contends that the Korean Protestant churches have placed excessive emphasis on the pastoral utilisation of technology, thereby neglecting their duty to advocate against the social inequalities engendered by modern technology. A critical reflection by the Korean Protestant church on its past attitudes is imperative to address its shortcomings in fulfilling its responsibility to pursue the common good and engage in meaningful discussions about technology.

A final recommendation is for the Korean Protestant church to engage in a public debate on the democratisation of technology, demonstrating the capacity of a public theological perspective to contribute to the development of modern society. Christian values espoused by the kingdom of God advocate for radical justice and equality. While the realisation of these values in the contemporary technological landscape may be challenging, the Korean Protestant church's contribution to public discourse holds the potential to challenge the prevailing authoritarian attitudes within technological discourse and foster the development of more democratic technological practices.

In this vein, public theology, with its emphasis on the public nature of the Christian faith and the sociopolitical responsibility of the church, has the potential to provide a theoretical foundation for the Korean Protestant church in engaging meaningfully in technological discourse, thereby contributing to the democratisation of technology. Public theology is predicated on the notion that the kingdom of God permeates the public sphere. The concept of the kingdom of God, as it is understood within the framework of Christianity, signifies the divine sovereignty that permeates all facets of existence. It is not, however, a political system in the human sense of the word, but rather a reality in which the values that reveal the nature of God, such as love, justice, peace and life, are proclaimed and realised. Public theology also insists that the kingdom of God is the mission of Christians. All Christians bear the responsibility and obligation to actualise the kingdom of God on earth. The scope of this kingdom transcends the confines of the ecclesiastical realm, encompassing the entirety of God's created universe (Forrester 1997:9–10). In essence, the fundamental premise of public theology asserts that Christians should engage with diverse social contexts with the objective of actualising the values of the kingdom of God, thereby fostering the common good on a global scale.

Of course, public theology should not simply be conceptualised as an instrument for the reconstruction of Christendom; rather, it ought to be regarded as a framework proposing the public practice of the kingdom of God. This objective can be realised through the affirmation of reciprocal relationships with various social, political, cultural and even religious institutions (Burity 2006:141). That is to say, public theology is a praxis of solidarity and participation for the common good with systems external to Christianity, within the context of civil society and the public sphere. To this end, public theology is defined as the process of articulating a

Christian discourse in a manner that is accessible and comprehensible to the general public (Breitenberg 2010:4). It facilitates open dialogue and mutual critique with members of society, shaping the discourse on the common good and allowing it to be reflected on various issues in society. Ultimately, public theology seeks to transform church and society by promoting the development of social discourse in ways that serve the common good rather than the interests of individuals or groups (Gruchy 2007:39–40).

Public theology, as such, is a theological imagination that rejects the Christian idea of a division between the world and the church. This division limits the subject matter of theological study to spiritual questions of personal salvation or internal church matters. Instead, it transcends this dichotomy to explore the implications of Christian values in relation to broader social, economic and political issues and to act in the public interest and promote the common good by articulating the voice of the church (Tanner 1996:79). In this sense, a technology discourse based on public theology can assist the Protestant church in Korea in influencing the social issues raised by technology, the institutions related to technology and citizens' interactions with technology. Furthermore, it can provide political and ethical themes that shape citizens' behaviour towards technology.

The political and ethical stance of the Korean Protestant church towards technology

From the perspective of public theology, the outcomes of theological enquiry anchored in the kingdom of God extend beyond the internal operations of the church. It is incumbent upon the church to engage with public issues within society and to speak out as a member of that society (Forrester 2001:72–73). For the Korean Protestant church, therefore, engaging in the public discourse surrounding modern technology necessitates a comprehension of its role within society from a public theology standpoint, coupled with a capacity to respond to the challenges that modern technology presents. Miroslav Volf posits that the prophetic role of the Christian community is to transform the world, to seek human flourishing and to engage the world for the common good. This objective is pursued by means of the transformation of social institutions, the pursuit and fortification of the positive aspects of all facets of society, and the articulation of these values through words and actions that are derived from a Christian identity (Volf 2014:142–143). This assertion suggests that the Korean Protestant church, in its modern context characterised by technological advancement, must similarly fulfil its prophetic role within a political and ethical framework.

First of all, the Korean Protestant church's capacity to fulfil any public role in society is contingent upon an understanding of the political nature of its social discourse. The church's perception of social issues holds the potential for transformative influence. The church's discourse can serve as a foundation for novel frameworks that advance social justice and organise political space for social movements (Keller 2005:135). In particular, the technological

discourse of the Korean Protestant church has the potential to propose a political orientation that focuses on rejecting the ideology of efficiency as the sole driver of human social development and restructuring the hegemony of the ruling class that has benefited from it. This commitment is manifested through the implementation of a public theological perspective that prioritises the experiences and needs of the working class over those of the ruling class.

The discourse further advocates for the autonomous participation of civil society in the process of technological development, thereby politically empowering the perspectives of those who have been excluded from technological society. This approach presents a significant opportunity for political and social transformation, as it provides a means of addressing the injustices, labour exploitation and marginalisation that are often associated with technological development driven by the pursuit of efficiency (Rifkin 2011:35–36). The political ramifications of public theology, situated at the nexus of Christianity and technology, empower citizens from diverse backgrounds who have been marginalised by the prevailing logic of technological domination. This empowerment enables them to engage in democratic relationships on an equal footing and advocate for their own positions. Consequently, it is incumbent upon the Korean Protestant church to establish a novel technological discourse that accentuates this facet.

Moreover, from the vantage point of public theology, the Korean Protestant church has the potential to pose ethical enquiries concerning human accountability in an epoch characterised by the pre-eminence of technology. Contemporary technology has placed significant emphasis on human empowerment, thereby diminishing the significance of a morality that respects and enhances the community of life (Schweiker 2000:57). This has resulted in a diminution of the rights not only of one's own life but also of others and all life in the world. Recognising that the exploitation of the vulnerable and the degradation of the natural environment are inherent aspects of technological development, it becomes evident that this constitutes an ethical concern that necessitates deliberation in the contemporary age of technological civilisation.

In this context, the ethical stance of the Korean Protestant church, as articulated through the lens of public theology, is founded on a radical interpretation of Christian doctrine. Christianity's fundamental tenets emphasise the sanctity of life and condemn actions that are detrimental to life. It is further asserted that human beings should commit to fortifying the integrity of life through all their actions (Schweiker 2000:125). This ethical code demands that all individuals involved in technological endeavours assume responsibility not only for human social existence but also for the ecosystem in its entirety. The articulation of this ethical framework within the domain of technology and its subsequent dissemination to society assumes the nature of a moral imperative, compelling us to contemplate moral standards that transcend common sense when developing and employing technology. This stance represents the

conscientious conduct of a Christian community that acknowledges the inherent value of life and the profound implications of human finitude. It is also the articulation of the Protestant church in Korea within the context of a technology-driven Korean society.

A discourse on technology from a Christian perspective is distinct from a discussion of the technical features of a particular technology. Rather, it delves into the intricate web of structures, power dynamics and interests that permeate the technological landscape. The Christian intellectual tradition provides a framework for navigating a system of truth that is both profoundly religious and profoundly universal. These insights, being both profoundly religious and universally applicable, possess a relevance and transferability that transcends the confines of the Christian community. The Christian tradition provides insights that are relevant to the restoration of the rights of marginalised groups and the criticism of the interests of particular groups. These insights can influence the direction of technological progress. Concurrently, these insights furnish a novel foundation for optimism among contemporary individuals, thereby empowering them to articulate their perspectives within the public sphere (Moltmann 1999:10–12).

Consequently, the Protestant church in Korea is obligated to fulfil its responsibility in the modern technological society as a member of Korean society by shaping a technological discourse with a political and ethical voice that seeks the common good and proposing it to society. Despite the complexity of envisioning the nexus of technology and religion, and the prevailing scepticism regarding the church's contribution in a technology-driven society, the church's role and responsibility in society remain salient. The healthy development of a technological society is predicated on a transcendent foundation that can legitimise democratic values and ethical statements (Van Riessen 1979:305–306). The Korean Protestant church, by virtue of its understanding of its public role, is uniquely positioned to provide such a foundation. By prioritising awareness of its public role, the church is well positioned to transform the governance and ethical imagination of technology. This potential contribution of the Korean Protestant church to the development of a robust civil society and the democratisation of technology is a subject that merits further exploration.

Conclusion

Technology has gained significant influence in the modern world, profoundly impacting various aspects of human life. Philosophers of technology state that technology is a political entity that is driven by specific ideologies and hegemonies, and its advancement has resulted in the exploitation of disenfranchised societies and marginalised groups. It is evident that concerns regarding the impact of technological advancements are prevalent in Korean society as well. Many members express apprehension about the potential consequences of these developments. Whether intentionally or not, the Protestant church in Korea has adopted a pragmatic, uncritical stance towards technology, employing

it as if it were a resource for the church's internal development. This attitude has resulted in a constrained comprehension of technology and a lack of awareness regarding the issues it engenders in Korean society.

Nevertheless, as a constituent part of Korean society, the Protestant church is under an obligation to engage with the technological developments that are impacting society at large. The concept of democratisation of technology, as proposed by philosophers of technology, also allocates this responsibility to the Korean Protestant church. This discourse represents an invitation extended to the Korean Protestant church to engage in a meaningful dialogue surrounding contemporary technological developments. Upon receipt of the invitation, the Korean Protestant church is obliged to formulate a response that aligns with the principles and values of its tradition. This study identifies the material for that response in public theology, a discipline that articulates the pursuit of the common good that lies at the heart of the Christian faith and makes the church ethically and socially responsible (Kim 2011:23). Based on this, the Korean Protestant church can offer legitimate critiques of technology and proffer alternative pathways to civil society, while collaborating with diverse civil society organisations to mitigate the ramifications of technology.

The political and ethical stances that this study suggests can serve as the foundation for conceptualising the potential contributions of the Protestant church in Korea to the public good within the context of a technological society. Despite the absence of specific, practical directives within this study, the continuation of research in this field holds potential. Such continuation would entail an examination of the impact of each technology on society, an identification of points where the church can intervene and an exploration of the voice of the church. It eventually will guide the Korean Protestant church to responsibly fulfil its role in a technologically dominant society.

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