

# **COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND MORAL QUANDARIES: A CHRISTIAN ETHICAL REFLECTION**

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## **Abstract**

Technology, including digital information and communication technologies (DICT), is not morally neutral. It is built on a rejection of God and divine providence. Hence, it has no regard for theistic perspective; neither does it consider the bigger picture that classical philosophy and religion consider. Yet, DICT has demonstrated the potential to be a powerful driver of revolution and social change. Besides, the virtual reality created by DICT has somewhat helped to cushion the negative effects of loneliness and emotional instability caused by necessary physical separation. Nonetheless, the human community cannot be blind to DICT's moral quandaries. How is DICT changing the understanding of common traditional notions like 'selfhood', 'community', 'friends', 'truth', and 'fidelity'? Do we use these technologies to celebrate the height of human nobility, or we use them to descend into the abyss of immorality? At what point can we say 'enough!'? Can we say 'enough!' again, or we are condemned to the technological imperative? These questions inspire this article's reflection, from a Christian theological ethics perspective.

**Keywords:** Apple Inc., Ashley Madison, Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT), Right to Privacy, Semiocarcy, Technophile

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## 1. Introduction

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century Communication means moved in rapid succession from primitive orality to digital information and communication technologies (DICT). DICT, like any technological innovation, is ambiguous. As actions of moral agents, DICT is within the domain of ethical appraisal. I shall contextualise this reflection with three real life moral dilemmas that present the sort of moral ambiguities DICT users face. Some of these ambiguities concern the question of selfhood. How can a self be present in absence? What are the limits of action of a self present in his/her absence? To what extent should one expect rights to privacy in DICT especially in the social media? Are rights to privacy absolute regardless of the threats and needs? Can we do evil for good to come? How is DICT changing the understanding of common traditional notions like 'community', 'friends', 'truth', and 'fidelity'? Assuredly, Christian ethics has a contribution to make for two reasons, in my opinion.

First, most ardent technophiles, and those who drive technological innovations honestly acknowledge that they do not have any criteria users may use to weigh the goodness or badness of technological innovations, even if they insist that we must embrace their new products.<sup>1</sup> Second, Christian ethicists are challenged to take particular interest in DICT because its developments and nuances brought into some of Christianity's traditional notions mentioned earlier have implications for the future of the Church and its adherents.

## 2. The Point of Departure: Three Real Life Moral Morass

The first moral quandary involves a young man who is 'madly in love' with his 'dream woman.' She is so romantic; so real. In fact, she is everything he wants in a woman. She has taught him so many things and opened up worlds of possibilities to him. He is seriously considering marrying her. However, they have never really met in person. They 'met' in a chat room from an online dating site. They kept things as such so that they reduce the temptation of premarital sex. The second morass concerns Ashley Madison, a Canada-based online dating site that serves married people who crave extramarital affairs without jeopardising their marriage and family life. On July 15 2015, a group of hackers called 'The Impact Team' broke through the company's famed impregnable firewall, and dumped online 30m confidential data.

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Schmidt and Scott Marrato, *The End of Ethics in a Technological Society*, Montreal & Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008, xii.

The third ethical catch-22 relates to Apple Inc. On February 17, 2016, Tim Cook, Apple's CEO wrote an open letter to all its customers alerting them that a United States court, at the instance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, asked the company to produce a software that can bypass iPhone's impenetrable security in order to access the iPhone of one of the terrorists that killed several Americans at San Bernadino in late 2015. Cook said the company objected to the order because it was asking them to intentionally build a software that would make iPhone's impenetrability vulnerable. This will risk the security of iPhone users and breach their right to privacy.

Before we return to these moral quandaries and how they relate to key issues surrounding DICT, we should first consider the background to DICT and the ideology underpinning it.

### 3. DICT and Underlying Ideological Assumptions

Originally, DICT emerged during the Cold War era to make the possibility of nuclear attack complex by "the decentralisation of nodes and to avoid combat damage by compromising the entire network."<sup>2</sup> However, having proven its usefulness, research institutions embraced DICT. By the 1990s, DICT had become a huge commerce because it contributed to reducing transaction costs of goods and services.<sup>3</sup> Hence, one can hypothesise that social interaction is beyond DICT's original intention. Nevertheless, social media has become a major feature of the digital age.<sup>4</sup> DICT has certain features, with 'network' the key feature. 'Network' refers to several means of connecting with users through various information technology devices.

For us to understand DICT's promises and ethical ambiguities, it is important to consider the ideology underpinning DICT. Modern Technology traces its roots to the Enlightenment project, but found its apogee in Nietzsche's nihilism. Beginning with the Renaissance up to Enlightenment God got decentred; hence, God was replaced by technology as the one that gives sense to the world. With God displaced and natural law jettisoned, anything that was technologically possible became an imperative. This is what is called

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<sup>2</sup>Peter Fleissner, "On the Ambivalence of Information and Communication Technologies," *International Review of Information Ethics* 7 (September 2009) 1-9, at 2, <http://www.i-r-i-e.net/inhalt/007/15-fleissner.pdf> (accessed 17.02.2006).

<sup>3</sup>Fleissner, "On the Ambivalence of Information and Communication Technologies," 2.

<sup>4</sup>Anita L. Cloete, "Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 71, 2 (2015) 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.2073> (accessed 17.02.2016).

the technological imperative (TP). Everything in the world became malleable. There was no longer any metaphysical grounding that could hold down human ingenuity. With the loss of the sense of transcendence and metaphysics, and the attendant natural law ethic, everything became possible provided it was useful. Hence, technological imperative fast-tracked the rise of utilitarianism; it hastened the end of virtue, moral sense, and prudence.

With its rejection of traditional foundations, offered by classical philosophy and Christianity, TP saw every domain of life as open to the possibilities of human intervention, driven by its imperative: "it is always ethically acceptable to experiment and find out whether we can do something, and if we can, we ought to."<sup>5</sup> With this, the traditional division between *telos* and means broke down.

#### 4. Promises of DICT

Let us begin by considering the most popular of DICT, i.e. the social media. Social media refers to various forms of human activities that integrate communication with advanced internet technology. These activities include voice, audio, images, and video. Social media is characterised by the art of listening, viewing and sharing. They bridge the gap between time and space.<sup>6</sup> 'Social network' is just a part of 'social media'. 'Social network' is the compound term for facilities we use in real time online communication. Popular examples are Facebook, Myspace, and Flickr. Social networks can also include the 'micromedia' (e.g. twitter, Instagram) or 'lifestream' (e.g. BBM). A social network gives us the opportunity to share information or emotions concurrently. Social media assures us that we shall get the other's responses immediately if s/he is online. Unlike e-mails and instant messaging (e.g. Yahoo messenger) that might take time, social media offers us real-time virtual interaction. This development has given rise to a rhetorical question showing the irreversibility of the social media revolution: 'Why wait till tomorrow to get yesterday's news when I can get today's news as it happens?'

We have seen how the social media can be a powerful driver of revolution and social change. The Arab Spring that swept through Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Syria in 2011-2012 was aided tremendously by the social media. There was instantaneous sharing

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<sup>5</sup>Schmidt and Marrato, *End of Ethics*, 10.

<sup>6</sup>Joshua Isaac Kumwenda, "Social Media, Ethics and Development in the Postmodernist Malawian Society," *Journal of Development and Communication Studies* 3, 1 (January-June, 2014) 17-23, at 20.

of information, countering of information, live videos, pictures, and uploaded videos on YouTube. During Nigeria's fuel subsidy strike in January 2012, Nigerian youths maximally used the social media to deconstruct President Goodluck Jonathan administration's false propaganda. There were various unveiling of the beneficiaries of the corruption that characterised the fuel subsidy regime. Traditional communication media would not have been able to do this. I agree with what Kumwenda states regarding his Malawian context: "...social media is a necessary evil to the socio-political development of the contemporary Malawian society."<sup>7</sup>

At the institutional level, DICT bridges the distance and gap that previously caused delays in service deliveries. With these technologies, several institutions are able to carry on their activities without all participants under the same roof. For instance, video conferencing has come handy these days of rapid mobility. Even if members are thousands of kilometres away they can still stay in touch and get things done. Still on the promises of DICT, a lot of people are able to upgrade themselves educationally while still working. With the advent of DICT, several educational institutions have online programmes which have helped bridge the knowledge gap for those who probably do not have the time and means to enrol for fulltime studies. This development has helped a lot of people even in the South to increase their competitiveness in the labour market.

At the micro informal level, DICT, especially mobile telephony technology, has contributed to bridging communication gap which distance and rapid mobility characterising today's world had imposed on several relationships. With the mobility that characterises globalisation of goods and services, it is becoming a luxury to think that family members will always live together under the same roof, and will always be physically present to one another within a matter of minutes or hours as it was the case about three decades ago. The virtual reality created by DICT has somewhat helped to cushion the negative effects of loneliness and emotional instability caused by necessary physical separation.

## **5. A Theological Appraisal of Communication Technology**

Modern technology and its innovations are not morally neutral. As stated earlier, they are built on a rejection of God and divine providence. Hence, they have no regard for theistic perspective,

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<sup>7</sup>Kumwenda, "Social Media, Ethics and Development in the Postmodernist Malawian Society," 18.

neither do they consider the bigger picture that classical philosophy does. European rationalist school rejected the doctrine of divine providence and its linear understanding of time. Salvation for humans, according to the doctrine of divine providence, will come at the end of time, when God shall come in glory to free the world. In the meantime, humans trusting in divine providence, rationally cooperate with God in maintaining this world. God providentially made the job easier for humans by creating a moral order in the world which human reason can apprehend. This is the natural moral law. Beginning with Renaissance thinkers, this theistic worldview and natural law ethic were rejected because they were deemed to hold back human ingenuity and capacity to understand the world.<sup>8</sup> Fundamentally, the doctrine of divine providence denied humans of the right to make history, by creating a world of perfect utopia spurred by optimism in the fundamental goodness of human beings. Freed of the doctrine of original sin, at least the Augustinian version that had a pessimistic view of human beings, human beings in the scientific and technological age could make progress that shall rid the world of all evils tormenting humans. They did not have to wait for salvation at the end of time to enjoy freedom from evil and forces that threaten their lives and right to happiness. Technology, in the name of its self-serving and history making project, has reduced the dignity of the human person to merely utility-calculating creature without the bigger picture. Uprooted from her/his metaphysical grounding, the human person in the technological age has nothing to hope for. All s/he has is all s/he is.

The technophile, who is a step from becoming a '*technomaniac*', spends her/his time and fortune accumulating and patronising all kinds of 'branded' technological gadgets as soon as they are released in the market. One sees how otherwise normal and decent human beings rush to several stores, once a new communication product is released. Some even pass the night in front of the store so that they can 'make' history as the first buyer of the 'branded' product. What a banalisation of the history-making desire in humans! The technophile/*maniac*, many of whom are Christians, unconsciously embrace the banalisation of utopia, because they keep going after these branded products in order to fill the ontological vacuum in them which scientists, technicians and business moguls<sup>9</sup> deny. The

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<sup>8</sup>Schmidt and Marrato, *End of Ethics*, 12-13.

<sup>9</sup>Jean-Francois Lyotard points out that scientists, technicians, and scientific instruments are not interested in apprehending the truth; they are interested in

trio of scientists, technicians and business managers, from their knowledge of human psychology, know this ontological vacuum exists. Hence, true to their utilitarian philosophy, they seek to maximise the commercialisation of human desire. Accordingly, with the help of an advertiser, another technological expert, they seek to manipulate the techomaniac's ontological vacuum. I shall rely on the critique of Jean Baudrillard on the manipulative function of advertisement to substantiate my claim.

Jean Baudrillard, regarded as the "high priest" of postmodernism, critically appraised the technological society, concluding like Lyotard that producers/inventors, manufacturers, and capitalists are active participants in "a political economy of the sign."<sup>10</sup> Semiocracy, according to him, is a crucial way of understanding contemporary technological society. He means that things are not just produced. They are produced and presented to be understood in a particular way.<sup>11</sup> Since products are presented not as they are but as signs of something that is not there or obvious to the consumer, the technological society is characterised by simulation, implosion, and hyperreality. Simulation refers to the phenomenon of presenting a product in a way that is more real than the real thing. Implosion means the collapse of reality with the simulated model such that the consumer cannot even separate the real from the model. Hyperreality refers to the sense within the consumer when s/he can no longer differentiate the reality from the objects representing the reality. In its extreme form, the consumer is left only with the simulacrum because that is the only thing s/he can identify with.<sup>12</sup>

For Baudrillard, advertising is one field that the three features of postmodernnity's technological age are best displayed as those who hold the economic power seek to manipulate the naive consumer's desire. The best way is through the advertisement of branded products (iphone, Samsung galaxy curve, etc). This advertisement model sidesteps ethics. Branding is a clever tool that serves the semiotic function of manipulation of desires for differentiation (of particular products). Branding works with deliberately created psychological needs such that the branded material is associated with

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consolidating their power. I have added business moguls to Lyotard's list in the light of their role in globalization today. Cf. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), 46, cited in Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, Manchester; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1999, 21.

<sup>10</sup>Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, 25.

<sup>11</sup>Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, 25.

<sup>12</sup>Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, 26-27.

satisfaction of desire itching to be satisfied. So, Branding is crucial to profit making because the techophile/maniac buys brands (simulacrum) not products (reality). This is because, in the face of the loss of sense of human *telos* (beatific vision as ultimate human happiness), the technophile/maniac has to look for what responds to that existential question, 'What can bring us happiness?' S/he concludes that living a branded life will bring her/him happiness. Accordingly, owning brands becomes a way of life. It offers her/him status and identity.

## **6. DICT, Semiocrcacy and Inequality**

As stated in the previous section, technological products like DICT have symbolic values but mostly these are transient. In other words, products like DICT do not stay relevant in the market for long. Specific products lose their semiotic meaning and are replaced repeatedly by new objects. This is the reason those hooked on DICT are never at ease with any specific product. Once a new version appears they must trade the old one in even if it is less than a year old because the new version confers on them a status and identity of a 'digital age', upwardly mobile person, which the product that came out the previous year no long confers. One remains restless until one has possessed the new product, falsely believing that it is the key to having a sense of stability and security in the uncertain world. Of course, this egocentric feeling never lasts. It must constantly acquire more to fill the void. Hence, many get caught up in spiralling debts and credits just to remain an active participant in various kinds of communication technologies available.

Unfortunately, DICT is producing or widening social inequality. For instance, not all can share in the semiotic value assigned to iphone, Samsung Galaxy A-series, or Microsoft lumia. What this means is that these products now become the yardstick to evaluate those to relate with and who to exclude. Those who do not have those products that have the same semiotic value as one are regarded as 'below' one's class. There is now a reversal of values. Human persons are reified, while technological products are divinised. It is no longer the real person that matters. It is the kind of product they have with them that matters. If their communication gadgets cannot link with mine or perform what mine can do, then such persons are not fit to belong to my network of relationships.

Consequently, social relations become objects of manipulation. We are manipulated to relate mostly with those who share the same semiotically valued objects with us. This has grave ramification for



Christians because unconsciously we have embraced DICT's logic that makes it more difficult to relate with every person as a bearer of divine dignity. Instead of viewing every person from the perspective of *imago Dei* regardless of what they have or lack, we size people up even in religious environment based on semiotically valued objects which they possess. If theirs do not have the same as ours, we unconsciously bracket them out of our circle of 'community' in the house of God.

This brings us to the issue of power, and how this affects the poorest of the poor. DICT and their branded products are only targeted towards those with purchasing power. This creates a significant untoward effect. Promoters of DICT vote less money for research and development (R&D) in the communication industry for products needed for survival in Low Development Countries (LDCs) because they have low purchasing power. For instance, several mobile communication companies in the global North do not invest in affordable phones which can be lifelines for several poor farmers in the South who need to stay in touch with agricultural field workers who need to contact them when there are improved seeds available or any other essential products and services (like weather forecast). This was the case in Nigeria for instance till about six years ago when some non-branded phones were developed and brought into the market from China.

DICT as promoted in the West is increasing the digital divide between the haves and have-nots (nations, individuals), thus contributing to the global economy of exclusion whereby the wealth of a few is growing exponentially while the bottom billion economically stagnate.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, those in the South who are struggling to make ends meet but have become victims of advertising's semicratic logic unwittingly contribute to widening the economic divide as long as they are kept on the leash to be running after every kind of mobile communication products these mobile conglomerates produce.

While these products might improve their symbolic values, they really do not contribute to their economic growth. On the contrary, they are depleting their savings, even contributing to some delinquencies. In order to belong to the digital club, some convert

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<sup>13</sup>Deborah Hardoon, Sophia Ayele and Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva, *An Economy for the 1%: How Privilege and Power in the Economy Drive Extreme Inequality and How This Can Be Stopped*, Cowley, Oxford: Oxfam International, January 18, 2016, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-1> (19.01.2016).

money for essential services like tuitions, health insurance, and feeding to buy these outrageously expensive communication gadgets. Some even go as far as stealing or take to armed robbery or pseudo-prostitution to fund DICT-compliant lifestyle. Without being alerted and helped to be freed from the clutches of 'semiocratic logic', many of today's youths in the South are descending into a morass of immorality. The issue is not if we should embrace technology or not. On the contrary, technology has now become our 'home'; we cannot do without it; we cannot do without DICT. The issue, however, is how we use technology, especially DICT.

## **7. DICT, Three Catch-22, and Ethical Considerations**

Let me preface the following with a claim that DICT is an ambiguous necessity in several post-colonial settings and transitional societies as they struggle to create institutions and legacy of egalitarian solidarity and sense of common good. Nonetheless, we must attend to DICT's

### **7.1. The First Moral Morass: On Online Dating, Internet Marriage Proposal and Cybersex**

As stated earlier DICT's virtual reality has mitigated the effects of loneliness and emotional instability because of separation. However, our first moral quandary demonstrates how DICT's relational promise and 'blessing' can be pushed further. Many now use it to engage in internet chat, cyber grooming, cyber flirt, cybersex, online rape, and gender swapping. With the exception of the last two, the other activities are present in the first quandary. However, regardless of the parties' intention — to avoid premarital sex — there is a fundamental ethical problem prior to this intention. The ethical problem concerns truth and lying. Communication technologies offer opportunities for posting and viewing not just decent client exposure but nude or semi-nude pictures and even pop ups, emoticons and emojis that are lewd, meant to arouse sensual feelings regardless of the marital status of the user. The two parties in the first case are engaged in these. Both parties appear oblivious of the reality of lying and manipulation.

Given that social network generates virtual communication, there are lots of rooms for manipulation. The bottom line with regard to social media, especially the networks, is that it is hard to decipher truth from lies. The 'friend' whose invitation one accepts, chats with, and expresses intimate information and emotions with, might indeed

be one's spouse, parent, boss, investigator, or a predator who might want to use an ambiguous feature of communication technologies. As noted when discussing the promises of communication technologies in political settings, social media is subversive because it refuses to submit itself and its content to 'authority'. This subversion is equally dangerous. The danger in the social media is that lies and falsehood or doctored images and videos about someone can be transmitted and have them go viral before these are discovered to be patently false. Common moral sense and practical wisdom must always guide naive 'internet lovers' like the young man in the first case. How really is he sure that the person he is madly in love with is not just a virtual dream woman? How is he sure that the pictures, and even live images, are real as real?

## **7.2. Second and Third Quandaries: Privacy Right and Freedom of Expression**

When Ashley Madison's data was hacked into and those thirty million data of clients were dumped online, the company defended its clientele that they have the right to privacy. On the contrary, the hackers appear invoke the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is a justified claim, according to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to freely "hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (no. 19). Freedom of expression does not seek permission before broadcasting or discussing issues relating to one. The Arab Spring revolution and the fuel subsidy civil protests in Nigeria demonstrated this assumption.

The hackers feel justified in their actions because Ashley Madison's clients are cheating on their spouses, creating a facade of fidelity. Some are even national heroes, hailed as promoters of family values. National heroes are supposed to be transparent and people of integrity. They have no right to give their compatriots false images and impressions of themselves, while actually hurting all those connected with them. Nevertheless, the hackers' victims invoked the right to privacy and whined about their privacy being violated. On the contrary, the hackers appear to be reminding us that right to privacy is not absolute especially when public interest is at stake. Right to privacy does not cover publication of matters that concern the public. Nonetheless, part of the information dumped online was obtained through an illegal procedure, without the permission of the company holding the information in trust. This is ethically

problematic because we cannot do what is morally evil, or what we foresee will bring disproportionate evil consequences for good to come. Bl. Paul VI reminds us of this principle though in a different context: "The evil situation that exists, and it surely is evil, may not be dealt with in such a way that an even worse situation results."<sup>14</sup> Hence, in confronting evil situations, we must not lose our moral sense and prudence.

Another ethical issue with regard to the social networks is the destruction of several stable relationships. According to a research prior to the hacking of Ashley Madison's data, 20% of divorces in the USA today are blamed on Facebook. Several of those who participated in this research discovered through the social networks that their spouses engaged in inappropriate sexual exchanges bordering on extramarital cheating.<sup>15</sup> Ashley Madison's fate simply confirmed this reality, and that it is not just Facebook that is instrumental to destabilising marriages and homes. DICT on the whole is culpable.

In the light of moral sense and prudence, and agreeing with Ian Markham, violation of right to privacy is ethically reasonable if the actions and practices hidden could harm concrete persons and endanger the society.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, this applies to the case of unveiling hidden information in order to prevent harm and endangerment. One is only protected from disclosure of matters of no legitimate concern to the public. Hence, the FBI is justified to ask Apple Inc., the maker of iPhone, to create the software to bypass a particular iPhone because of the need to prevent American citizens from home-grown terrorist attack, and the particular phone has the potential to help prevent this. It is possible to decrypt the phone both legally and illegally, but FBI chose the path of legality.

Apple's CEO, Tim Cook is concerned about the slippery slope that characterises technological imperative or 'devil's doctrine'. It is paradoxical that the same doctrine which brought Apple so much success is the same doctrine Apple fears most. Perchance, Cook is

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<sup>14</sup>Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, Encyclical on the Development of Peoples, no. 33, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html) (accessed 11.02. 2016).

<sup>15</sup>"Facebook Fuelling Divorce, Research Claims," <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/6857918/Facebook-fuelling-divorce-research-claims.html> (accessed 22.02. 2016).

<sup>16</sup>Ian Markham, *Do Morals Matter? A Guide to Contemporary Religious Ethics*, Malden, MA; Oxford; Victoria: Blackwell, 2007, 112.

suddenly aware of the lack of or the difficulty of appropriate regulation in technological activities. The issue of ethics that Cook and his ilk dismissed for years in order to maximise profit has come back to haunt them. Technologists have been driven principally by profit and Promethean propensity for history making at all costs inherent in technology since the Renaissance. This hubris banished the ethical wisdom, '*it is not all that can be done that should be done.*' If technologists like Cook and his ilk had internalised this wisdom Apple would not be expressing his fear of the potential process of decrypting a single phone leading to stealth proliferation of such software to be used by hackers in future. Of course, Ashley Madison's experience is a stark reminder of what is possible in DICT world. Ashley Madison was very confident that no hacker could break its firewall. Yet, hackers like conventional technologists assent to the same 'devil's doctrine.' The hackers kept trying till they succeeded. Cook is afraid of this happening to its flagship, which would be disastrous for iPhone's competitive edge in the market. Unfortunately, if technologists had not banished virtue and moral sense in their laboratories and complexes, they would have had the moral imagination that there is knowledge that is practically off limit, even if possible. What more demonstrates the ambiguity and limitation of technology than Apple's moral catch-22?

### **7.3. On Communication Technologies and the Loss of Common Sense**

There is one thing that is common to this article's first and second moral quandaries. It is the loss of common sense regarding the limited safety guarantee offered by any DICT's mode. The clients of Ashley Madison became victims of technology's narrative of the lie. Technology sells itself by making absolute promises, especially that it offers perfection where human errors are 'mathematically' impossible. It is a claim that shows how humans have attempted to reinvent themselves as capable of creating perfection. This is contrary to a fundamental truth of the human person — finitude and imperfection. However, Ashley Madison's clients believed the lie that nothing could happen to their data because the business organisation had built an impenetrable firewall. Hence, banishing their moral common sense, the clients supplied personal data. Paradoxically, postmodern persons that claim to walk by conviction walked by belief in dealing with a *human* organisation. They forgot the common sense that information that is shared via any commutation technology cannot be guaranteed to be private irrespective of how one controls it. They

became overconfident to the point of forgetting that information freely or innocently supplied on social media can be gathered and used without one's knowledge or consent. There are devices today that can be used. The most popular are electronic tracking and third party application.

Unfortunately, because we have been seduced by the technocratic model, the postmodern person is inundated with another lie: One needs more technology to solve a problem created by technology.<sup>17</sup> Computer firms are taking advantage of the breakdown of the power to control personal information by producing software "allowing suspicious spouses to electronically spy on someone's online activities."<sup>18</sup> This is akin to hacking. Hence, other communication technologies have equally developed anti-hacking software; some have developed 'traceback' technologies that can help trace the origin of unauthorised invasion by tracing the IP address of the source.<sup>19</sup> The cycle of technology's seduction continues.

## 8. Conclusion

Regardless of DICT's contributions to a better world, we cannot be blind to its ethical ambiguities and problems. One cannot say with certainty that what one reads or views have been scrutinised and critically reviewed before being posted. Furthermore, one cannot sufficiently control one's information online. Hence, one must be careful about the 'private' things posted on any social media. One has to be careful also about the presence of DICT devices around because private data can be collected by turncoats who use gossip as a trade. Responsible users, especially Christians, must internalise the principles that *be critical of what exists online*,<sup>20</sup> and *with moral commonsense and prudence discern what is posted online*. These internet ethical principles should be regarded as cardinal for those who wish to protect individuals' right to privacy.

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<sup>17</sup>Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* deconstructs this narrative of the lie in his discussion on certain proposals to curb the environmental mess created by science and technology. Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* (Encyclical Letter - includes Discussion Questions), Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015, nos, 60, 109-114.

<sup>18</sup>"Facebook Fuelling Divorce" (accessed).

<sup>19</sup>Kenneth Einar Himma, "The Ethics of Tracing Hacker Attacks through the Machines of Innocent Persons," *IJIE International Journal of Information Ethics* 2 (November 20014) 1-13, at 2, <http://fiz1.fh-potsdam.de/volltext/ijie/05256.pdf> (accessed 17.02.2016).

<sup>20</sup>Leonardo de Chirico, "Ethics and the Internet: Starting from Theology," *European Journal of Theology* 17, 2 (2008) 129-132, at 132.