

TECHNOLOGY OR SIN? A WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WRONGDOINGS OF INFORMATICS FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

THE INTERNET IS LESS AND LESS ETHICAL EVERY DAY, SO IMMORALITY HAS A HUGE SUCCESS. THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS THE EXAGGERATED NUMBER OF FRAUDS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VIRTUAL SYSTEM IN GENERAL, AND THE CHILD PORNOGRAPHY IN PARTICULAR. ONE OF THE PURPOSES OF THE ARTICLE IS TO RESPOND TO THE QUESTION, WHICH SHOULD BE BLAMED: TECHNOLOGY OR SIN? THIS ARTICLE ALSO WANTS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE EXCESSIVE USE OF THE INTERNET PRODUCES NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE USER. IT ALSO DESCRIBES THE CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW RELATED TO THE PORNOGRAPHY AND OUR REQUIRED POSITION REFERRING TO VIRTUAL ETHICS.

KEYWORDS: INTERNET ETHICS, PORNOGRAPHIC SITES, CHILD PORNOGRAPHY, PROTECTION PROGRAM.

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the fast development in the informatics domain, we must recognize the need for an ethical approach in the online space as a very important issue. If you do not respect the least necessary of ethics on the Internet, your action could have very negative consequences. The crimes realized with the help of the informatics systems that occur more and more often convince us to treat this subject with a maximized attention. Even the recent reports from the National Council of Research drew our attention to the need to take actions in this situation. For example, one recent report released by the National Council of

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Research says that “Tomorrow’s terrorist could be capable of doing more damage with a keyboard than with a bomb.”² Knowing these conditions, this article is trying to approach the meaning of informational crimes briefly, concentrating on the answer of a modern question: What is ethics from a legislative point of view and what is ethics from a theological one with regard to the fact that the internet is full of pornography?

WHAT IS INFORMATICS CRIME FROM A LEGISLATIVE POINT OF VIEW?

In juridical terms, informatics infraction refers to any crime that involves using a computer in a way that is considered infraction.³

There are many types of informatics infractions, such as, damages to information and to software programs, computer fraud, computer sabotage, computer falsehood, unauthorized interception, unauthorized access, computer spying, unauthorized reproduction of a protected software, unauthorized use of a computer, software distortion of data or computer programs, child pornography through computer systems.⁴

The problem of informatics infraction was treated long time ago in most countries. It even exists a recommendation of European Council, R (89)9⁵, which clarifies all aspects of computer crime.

Regarding the laws that were issued against cybercrime, it should be noted that the first law issued in Romania was Law No. 8/1996; the law is called copyright law, which provides among other issues copyright protection for software. As there is no law in this area until 1996, “Romania has been considered a pirate country for a long time and couldn’t escape from this stigma even today.”⁶

²Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *Război și antirăzboi*, ANTET, f. 1., f. a., 179, apud Dan Baciu and Ion Vlăduț, *Internet-ul și criminalitatea informatică*, 3, accessed December 2, 2010. http://www.racai.ro/INFOSOC-Project/BanciuVladut_st_e03_new.pdf.

³Ciprian Pânzaru, *Dimensiuni ale infracționalității în spațiul virtual*, Revista de Informatică Socială, nr.5/ iunie 2006, Laboratorul de Informatică Socială, Facultatea de Sociologie și Psihologie, Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara, <http://www.ris.uvt.ro>, 82-87.

⁴Rău Petre, *Infracționalitatea pe calculator*, partea a-III-a, 2001, accessed November 20, 2010. <http://www.rap.freehosting.net/Infract/P3.html0>

⁵I. Vasiliu, *Criminalitatea Informatică*, Nemira, 1998, 49, apud. Maxim Dobrinou, *Infracțiuni în domeniul informatic*, București, 2006, 85.

⁶Andreia Simona Melnic, *Criminalitatea și terorismul informatic*, in D. M. Paraschivescu (ed.), *Buletin Științific*, Anul VII, nr.2/2004, Universitatea „George Bacovia”, Bacău, 181, accessed November 20, 2010. <http://www.ugb.ro/etc/issues/issueno2-2004.pdf#page=160>.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

As previously stated, one of the main topics that we propose to review is child pornography offense, specifically promoted through computer systems.

Article 51 (Law No. 161/2003⁷) indicates what that infringement is; the text reads as follows:

“(1) the crime of producing for the purpose of distribution, providing or making available, distributing or transmitting, purchasing for oneself or another of child⁸ pornography through a computer system, or possession, without right, child pornography in informatics system or computer data storage.

(2) The attempt is punished.”

The main goal of this law is to protect minors in social relations.⁹ It is unanimously known that the development of Internet child pornography “was an unprecedented scale.”¹⁰ This development, as stated by some studies in the U.S.A., is most harmful to children. Minors aged 12-17 years represent the largest group of pornography users and an analysis of the evolution of the porn industry has estimated that pornography industry alone produces an annual income of three billion dollars.¹¹

The Alliance of Romania's Families called pornography “a plague for Romania”.¹² The saddest thing is that Romania is at the top of the list of the countries that ignores child pornography.

⁷ The LAW No. 196 of 13 May 2003 referring to the preservation and combat of the pornography; from: PARLIAMENT; published in: THE OFICIAL MONITOR nr. 342 of 20 May 2003; modified by the LAW No. 496 of 12 November 2004 for the modification and addition of the LAW No. 196/2003 referring to the preservation and combating of the pornography; from: PARLIAMENT; published in: THE OFICIAL MONITOR No. 1.070 of 18 November 2004, apud Maxim Dobrinou, *Infracțiuni în domeniul informatic*, București, 2006, 154.

⁸ “Child pornography means any product that depicts a minor engaged in sexual conduct or a grown-up person having sexual contact with a minor or images that depict a child engaged in sexual conduct, even if it is not real.”, apud Maxim Dobrinou, *Infracțiuni în domeniul informatic*, 158.

⁹ Maxim Dobrinou, *Infracțiuni în domeniul informatic*, 230.

¹⁰ Daniel Răspop, *Flagelul HIV-SIDA, o bătălie pierdută - Analiza flagelului la nivel global. Studiu de caz: România*, Editura Lumen, Iași, 2009, 73.

¹¹ Jerry Ropelato, *Internet Pornography Statistics*, 2007, accessed November 29, 2010. <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>.

¹² Alianța Familiilor din România, *Pornografia este o plagă în România*, 28 ianuarie 2010, București (materialul a fost prelucrat de Alexandra Zărnescu), accessed November 28, 2010. <http://blog.nouadapta.org/2010/01/aliana-familiilor-din-romania-pornografia-infantila-este-o-plaga-in-romania/>

A year ago¹³ two American psychologists¹⁴ published a study in the Journal of Family violence showing that there is a direct connection between adults' viewing or distributing child pornography and the sexual molestation of minors.¹⁵

A study¹⁶ in 2006 generated the following statistics about child pornography:

- Number of public websites which publish illegal child pornography: 100 000;
- Number of searches using the word "Gnutella"¹⁷ 116 000 / day;
- 89% of young people require sex chat-rooms. Of these 20% renew requests;
- The average age at which a minor is faced for the first time with a pornographic site is 11;
- 90% of minors aged between 8-16 years are watching porn online;

Recently (July 2010) a study¹⁸ was developed in this area, leading to the following estimates:

- There are more than one million pornographic images of children on the Internet and approximately 200 others are uploaded daily. Also, one site containing pornographic images of children may have about a million views monthly.
- Over 75% of children with ages between 6 to 17 years are already online. 60% of them are contacted through the Internet by pedophiles and 40% respond to these calls.
- In Romania over 90% of teenagers use the Internet for socializing. Of these, 18% say that they send personal information over the Internet to other people, and 14% talk to unknown people.

¹³ In December 2009.

¹⁴ Michael Bourke and Andres Hernandez, *Porn use and child abuse*, December 2009, vol. 40, nr. 11, accessed November 28, 2010. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/12/child-abuse.aspx>.

¹⁵ Alianța Familiilor din România, *Pornografia este o plagă în România*, 28 ianuarie 2010, <http://blog.nouadreapta.org/2010/01/alianța-familiilor-din-romania-pornografia-infantila-este-o-plaga-in-romania/>.

¹⁶ Daniel Răspop, *Flagelul HIV-SIDA*, 74.

¹⁷ "Gnutella"- is a cod used for that practicing child pornography.

¹⁸ *Raportază pornografia infantilă online pe www.safernet.ro*, București, 28 July 2010. accessed November 28, 2010. <http://www.copiidisparuti.ro/ro/raporteaza-pornografia-infantila-online-pe-www.safernet.ro.html>.

WHICH ONE IS GUILTY: TECHNOLOGY OR SIN?

Is preferable to address ethics in internet, we focus specifically on people and not on the technology itself.

The theological perspective with regard to those who commit computer crimes is that this is nothing but a result of sin that once entered the world, and it affects all the existing areas. The Fathers said, “The one who does not do well is ready to do evil”.¹⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa correctly emphasized that “sin is at the same time affirming and losing freedom”.²⁰ Since Adam, man through rebellion to divine commandment, “and subject to corruption and created a life of living death in it.”²¹ No matter how much you may try to punish these acts, they will not be removed, because the real change in man should not proceed from outside to inside, but from inside to outside. Most of those who are caught and imprisoned will learn almost nothing from this experience (this doesn’t mean that they do not deserve punishment for what they did), but it is important to accentuate that they have a pressing need for a change within themselves, which is surely going to materialize outside as well. Human education is nothing but a way to make humankind get rid of sin.

THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THE OVERUSE OF THE INTERNET

We must admit that the Internet provides many advantages to scientific research, education, government, business, inter-human communication through its services.²² But we can’t hide the fact that the excessive use of the Internet attracts many negative consequences. First, Internet usage unduly desensitizes us to the people around, and then removes even the need for human presence. E-mail and beyond, creates a relationship between the people who correspond. This determines those who are users of the Internet for a long while to have a higher fear of coming in direct contact with people. So, people are canceling the chance to defeat their own fears and defects; they are hidden in a space characterized by replacement of real people, with the monitor and the keyboard as the instruments through which the shy one maintains conversation.

¹⁹ Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul, *Chipul lui Hristos în viața morală a creștinului*, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, 55.

²⁰ Jerone Gaît, *La conception de la liberté chez St. Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 103, apud Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul Bistrițeanul, *Chipul lui Hristos în viața morală a creștinului*, 55.

²¹ Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul Bistrițeanul, *Chipul lui Hristos în viața morală a creștinului*, 55.

²² Dan Baciu and Ion Vlăduț, *Internet-ul și criminalitatea informatică*, 1.

Another damaging consequence is reflected by the discrepancy between appearance and essence they offer in specific circumstances on the Internet. It is accepted that most online communities are specialized to provide intense socialization. But this, by direct contact with people, remains virtual. The possibility of using a false identity, which is provided by the Internet, is misunderstood; thus, most of the times it is used in order to impress, eventually even to commit a fraud. We can even say that the Internet employed without limits dehumanizes us, damaging relationships between people. If people use the Internet more, they spend less time for socializing in the true sense. So, the relationship between the internet and social relationships (“face-to-face”) is presented as an inversely proportional cause-effect relationship that constitutes an imminent danger to the social side of human personality.

Pope John Paul II said: “The Church cannot stand as a spectator of the social effects of technological progress, effects that profoundly affect people's lives. For this reason <<Ethics on the Internet>>²³ can be of great help to pastors and the faithful of the Church in dealing with the many challenges of the mass-media.”²⁴

Moreover, the Internet as a tool of the media should be treated as such, taking into account all aspects: “The problems and opportunities created by new technology, globalization and privatization of the media present new ethical and spiritual challenges for those who work in social communications. These challenges will be faced effectively by those who accept the fact that serving the human person, building a community based on solidarity, justice and love and presenting the truth about human life and its fulfillment in God it was, it is and it will remain in the centre of the ethics in the media.”²⁵

A legitimate question to ask ourselves at this point is how much we are ready to risk using the Internet excessively, the dangers to which we expose our personality every time we prefer to send an instant message to a person who uses a computer in the same building or each time we prefer to watch a movie online (about friendship) instead of walking through the park with our beloved.

²³“Ethics on the Internet” is an article wrote as a reaction for a project of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications .The first proposals for this text were among the first subjects discussed in the gathering which had place last week under the lead of the American archeobishop John P. Foley. <http://www.catholica.ro/stiri/show.asp?id=804&lang=r>

²⁴Papa Ioan Paul al II-lea, *Este nevoie de o etică a Internetului*, 16 martie 2001, Vatican, accessed November 28, 201. <http://www.catholica.ro/stiri/show.asp?id=804&lang=r>.

²⁵ Papa Ioan Paul al II-lea, *Este nevoie de o etică a Internetului*, 16 martie 2001, Vatican, accessed November 28, 201. <http://www.catholica.ro/stiri/show.asp?id=804&lang=r>.

HOW SHOULD WE REFER TO THE OBSCENE MATERIAL ON THE INTERNET?

Using commercials and other things, Internet is a way of promoting a society characterized by immorality. Although pornography is banned (especially the one showing child pornography), most of the people do not respect this. So, we witness the desacralization of the world by the Internet, if one may say so, the profane enters with no limits even in the private domain of humans. From sites that contain mailboxes to personal blogs, almost all are affected by advertising, which surely contains something “hot” in order to fulfill its “mission”. Knowing these, which should be the position of the moral people relating to the pornography in the virtual space?

WHY WATCHING PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS ON THE INTERNET IS NOT MORAL?

Before answering this question, we should define the term pornography. Pornography is the depiction in any form of sexual acts and images in a way that is intended to make people feel sexually excited. Outside of marriage, this means inciting sexual desire and seduction, so, a deliberate temptation. Pornography is a serious sin.²⁶

God is definitely against pornography. Why?

– God decreed that man has to walk dressed. In Eden God made clothes for man- Genesis 3, 21;

– Pornography is a sin, impurity. In this context, the apostle Paul says that the body of a true Christian is “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6, 19). So it should not be polluted by such a sin;

– Spiritual pornography destroys those involved; – pornography involves the failure of their bodies - all the apostle Paul commands us is to “flee from sexual immorality.” Immorality is consequently the only sin that affects the body first (1 Cor 6, 18);

– Porn pictures supply the mind with sinful images which will follow the watcher for a long time. Pornography is the violation of chastity and of fidelity in

²⁶ Ioan Brie, *Teologie Morală*, curs univ. al Institutului Teologic Penticostal din București, Facultatea de Teologie Penticostală, București, 2008.

marriage. - Paul is categorical in stating the life partners' fidelity, namely: "... because of immoralities, each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 6, 18);

- Pornography destroys society and distorts the character of young children²⁷;
- Pornography brings demonic possession;
- Pornography steals your privacy - you become more vulnerable to sin;
- Pornography causes you to sin - the Bible, in Mat 5, 28 abolishes any difference between the sexual act (understood as adultery or immoral) and the simple act of looking at a woman (or at a picture with a woman) having the desire to make the sexual act. Often, just watching a woman, especially if she is physical attractive, is enough in order to activate the pornographic images from a man's mind. The media presents such images all the time. The difference between the psychic adultery and the physic one consists only in the immediate consequences; it is the same sin, adultery, in both cases;
 - Your child creates an unreal world, promoting situations, ideals that are impossible or difficult.
 - Pornography promotes other sins like homosexuality, lesbianism, rape, sexual perversion, bestiality and others.²⁸

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the situation of the internet from a moral point of view, we talk about the same conclusion. Even if we refer to the statistics of infantile pornography or to the negative consequences of using internet excessively, it is necessary to be made a radical change. An amicable agreement to protect us, mature people and children, who use personal computers from pornography is to install a protection program. The program can

²⁷ Recently the psychologist Dumitrașcu Hanibal has pointed that: "For kids from ages 8-9 and up the impact of the street universe together with pornographic elements is devastating, because they are at the beginning of their sex life and the distortion of the child's conscience is durable. Those magazines arouse his curiosity to explore that sexual universe. Everything will reflect in a behavioral disorder that many teenagers express. From the sexual disorder to the alcohol and drug consume there's only one step because they're part of the same type of experience based on over excitement and on the absence of moral order, apud Daniel Befu, *Câtă pornografie vede zilnic un copil în vârstă de 3 ani?*, 29 noiembrie 2010, accessed December 4, 2010. <http://www.romaniailibera.ro/exclusiv-rl/reportaj/cata-pornografie-vede-zilnic-un-copil-in-varsta-de-3-ani-207688.html>.

²⁸ *Ibidem.*, 153.

March 2013

be downloaded (free!) at the following address: <http://www1.k9webprotection.com>.
Password²⁹ is set; it does not allow viewing any pornographic images.

²⁹ The password should be set by a person who doesn't use that computer.

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