Reconciliation of Christianity with the People of Silicon Valley

Ryan Kelly

Milligan College

Abstract

Silicon Valley leads the world in technological innovation. Because of this, Silicon Valley is one of the most influential places in the world. Unfortunately, there is a division between Silicon Valley and the Christian Church causing the Church to have less of a voice in this influential area. This division can be seen in the fact that less than half of the people of Silicon Valley are Christian. This project will explore the causes of this division. One of the main causes is that Silicon Valley's political and religious views vary greatly from many of those in the Christian Church, leading to misunderstanding and resentment between the two groups. This project will explore these differences, and how the Church can begin to resolve them. This project will also investigate how Christians can prevent technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, from contributing to this division. By assessing the individual causes of this division, this project will show how the Church can begin the process of reconciliation with Silicon Valley.

Keywords: Christianity, Silicon Valley, Reconciliation, Technology, Political Views

Reconciliation of Christianity with the People of Silicon Valley

As his final command, Jesus says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, The Common English Bible). This command tells us that we are to identify areas where people do not know God and make disciples out of them. One such area is Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley has one of the lowest percentages in the United States of people who are Christians. Only forty-eight percent of people in Silicon Valley identify as a Christian denomination or offshoot whether it be Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, etc. (Pew Research Center, 2014). This is twenty percent lower than the average for the rest of the United States (Pew Research Center, 2014). It is clear that there is a division between the Christian Church and the people of Silicon Valley, but what causes this division?

There are a variety of causes that contribute to the division between the Christian Church and Silicon Valley. Christians throughout the United States tend to have more conservative political views while the people in Silicon Valley tend to have more liberal political views (Pew Research Center, 2014). Making the division worse is the variety of religious viewpoints in Silicon Valley that conflict with those of Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2014). The religious and political differences between the Christian Church and Silicon Valley are further exaggerated by Silicon Valley's recent technological developments. According to Yuval Harari, new technologies developed in Silicon Valley will make religion outdated by satisfying all of the promises that religions make (p. 1). Technological advancements, religious differences, and political disagreements create a unique set of challenges that must be addressed in order for the Church to Reconcile with Silicon Valley. The Church must reconcile with Silicon Valley for the good of both groups.

The Church must reconcile with Silicon Valley for several reasons. The first and most important is that the majority of Silicon Valley is not Christian. It is the Church's mission to spread the gospel, but the political and religious differences between the Church and Silicon Valley makes this incredibly difficult. The second reason is that Silicon Valley leads the world in technological innovation. Many of the world's largest companies, such as Apple and Facebook, are based in Silicon Valley. These companies have a global voice, making it important that they see the Church as a force for good rather than as an opponent or force for evil. The third reason is that, in spite of the fact that Silicon Valley is one of the richest areas in the world, twenty-two percent of Silicon Valley lives in poverty (Transforming the Bay Area with Christ, n.d.). The Church must gain a stronger presence in Silicon Valley in order to help with this problem. To improve this situation, the Christian Church must reconcile with Silicon Valley. To begin the process of reconciliation, the Church must start by addressing the political and religious differences that currently cause the division between the Church and Silicon Valley. The Church must then prepare for the future by embracing new technology in order to show that it cannot only exist alongside technology, but use technology as a tool to more effectively show God's love to others.

Political differences play a significant role in the division between Christianity and Silicon Valley. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), eighty-six percent of people in the United States believe the country is more politically divided than it used to be. While this only shows what people think, looking at opinions of Donald Trump's election makes it clear that this is far more than a perceived difference. Trump's election was both the leading reason that people thought 2017 would be better than 2016, and the leading reason people thought 2017 would be worse than 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017). This shows that conservatives and liberals have

vastly different views on how the government should work. Combine this with the fact that Christians most often lean towards conservative political views while Silicon Valley leans toward liberal political views and it is clear that politics play a significant role in the division between the two groups (Pew Research Center, 2014). To reconcile these political differences, the Christian Church must first look inward.

The Christian Church has internal political differences that must be reconciled before reconciling political differences with Silicon Valley. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), all denominations of Christianity are roughly one third conservative, one third moderate, and one fifth liberal with the remainder of Christians falling into the "don't know" category. While this does show that the Christians lean towards being conservative, it is clear that the Church is far from having a unified political view. There is good reason for this since neither conservative views nor liberal views completely reflect the teachings of Jesus. According to Ross, Lelkes, and Russel (2012), conservative Christians have to reconcile the fact that the Republican party promotes their views on issues such as abortion, but "[The Republican Party] has become ever more opposed to…policies designed to ease the burden of the least fortunate" (p. 3616). On the other hand, liberal Christians must deal with the opposite situation of conservative Christians and often hold entirely different views on issues such as abortion (Ross, Lelkes, Russel, 2012, p. 3616). Having these opposing political views leads to division inside the Church. Fortunately, there is hope for this situation to be resolved.

The internal political divisions of the Christian Church can be reconciled. Ross, Lelkes, and Russel (2012) state, "the liberal Christians in our sample did characterize Jesus as somewhat less liberal than themselves…and conservatives did characterize Jesus as somewhat less conservative than themselves" (p. 3617). This shows that liberal and conservative Christians do

have some views in common. By uniting on these views, Christians can begin the process of reconciling conflicting political views within the Church. This will lead to discussion on how Christians can best reflect Jesus' teachings with their politics. It is almost impossible for this to lead to the Church having a single political view, but it will lead Christians to gain a better understanding of the reasoning behind opposing political views. This new understanding will allow the Church to create a more united set of political beliefs focused on doing what is best according to the Gospel. Reconciling internal political divisions in the Church will show that Christians are willing to listen to people on who have opposing views, opening the door for reconciliation of political views with Silicon Valley.

Reconciling the Christian Church's political differences with Silicon Valley will be a long and difficult process. The first step in this process can be illustrated by the story of Jesus eating with the tax collector Zacchaeus. This is significant because tax collectors were considered as some of the worst sinners during the time of Jesus. Instead of criticizing Zacchaeus, Jesus instead states "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:9-10). This story gives a clear message that Christians are to treat those who sin with love and respect. Silicon Valley's liberal political views lead them to have conflicting views with much of the Church on things such as homosexual rights and abortion. Christians must be like Jesus and show people that have these views love and respect. This means that the Church must be slower to judge people for being homosexual, supporting abortion, following another religion etc. and instead show these people God's love in the way that Jesus showed Zacchaeus. Christians must then apologize for past incidents where they were too quick to judge others for their actions. Doing this will lead to mutual respect between the people of Silicon Valley and Christians. Having

respect for each other will make it possible for the two groups to discuss political differences in a meaningful way in an attempt to reconcile. While it is nearly impossible for Silicon Valley and the Church to agree on every political viewpoint, respectful conversation can reduce the division that politics have caused between the two groups. Reducing these political divisions will make Silicon Valley more willing to see the charitable work of the Church as a good thing rather than an attempt to force Christian beliefs on others.

To reconcile with Silicon Valley, Christians must show they care about the people of Silicon Valley by helping those in need. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus states, "Sell your possessions and give to those in need" (Luke 12:33). This means that Jesus wants Christians to help those who are poor. It may seem odd for this to be necessary in Silicon Valley, but, in spite of the fact that it is one of the wealthiest places in the world, it still struggles with poverty (Transforming the Bay Area with Christ, n.d.). This means that the Church must help those in need in Silicon Valley in order to reconcile with the people there. One organization that is doing this is Transforming the Bay Area with Christ (TBC). Pat Gelsinger, the chairman of the board of TBC, states, "in spite of our affluence, 22 percent of people in the [San Francisco] Bay Area live below the poverty line. Although we have amazing teachers and educators, 51 percent of our 3rd graders cannot read at 3rd-grade level" (Transforming the Bay Area with Christ, n.d.). Since Silicon Valley is part of the San Francisco Bay area, it is clear that the people in Silicon Valley struggle with poverty. To show that Christians are devoted to benefitting others, the Church must find a way to help with this problem.

To address the issue of poverty in Silicon Valley, individual churches in Silicon Valley must work together to aid the poor. Pat Gelsinger descrives the situation of churches in Silicon Valley when he states, "many churches live a siloed and isolated existence" (Transforming the

Bay Area with Christ, n.d.). This statement shows that Churches in Silicon Valley do not work together. The goal of TBC is to unite these isolated churches to more effectively reach those in Silicon Valley (Transforming the Bay Area with Christ, n.d.). This will benefit the people of Silicon Valley because uniting churches will allow service projects to have more resources and more people making them far more effective than if the churches worked individually. Unfortunately, the small number of Churches in Silicon Valley creates a huge problem for this plan.

The small number of Churches in Silicon Valley makes it difficult for the Churches there to effectively help the poor. Foremski (2015) states, "with the very small number of church goers in Silicon Valley there also needs to be a strong secular program aimed at attracting people to the goal of improving philanthropy and solving problems." There is good reason for Foremski to believe this since Silicon Valley is one of the wealthiest areas in the world, but there is a flaw in his argument (Transforming the Bay Area with Christ, n.d.). According to Charity Navigator (2018) only eight percent of donations came from corporations such as those in Silicon Valley while individual people gave eighty percent of all donations. This makes it clear that large corporations will not fix Silicon Valley's problems without a significant change in their giving practices. The important role Churches play in philanthropy is made clear by the fact that thirty-one percent of all donations in 2017 were to religious organizations. While this does not immediately fix the issue of the small Church presence in Silicon Valley, it does show that the Church plays a significant role in philanthropy. As the small number of Churches in Silicon Valley work together they will begin to grow, leading to more resources for them to use. This will lead to the poor being better served by the Christian Church and show people of different beliefs God's love, making them more open to the idea of Christianity.

Religious differences play a significant role in the division between Christians and the people of Silicon Valley. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), more than half of Silicon Valley is not Christian. This can be further divided into two groups of people: those who follow a religion other than Christianity, and those who are religious "Nones" (Pew Research Center, 2014). Each of these groups represents a unique challenge to reconciling the Christian Church with Silicon Valley and each must be reconciled with in a different way.

In order to reconcile with Silicon Valley, the church must reconcile with those of different religions in the area. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), fifteen percent of the people of Silicon Valley belong to a religion other than Christianity. This is three times the average percentage of people following other religions in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2014). Bringing the word of God to people of other religions is an incredibly difficult thing to do, but there is a way to do it without creating anger and hostility. Frances Adeney, a professor of Evangelism and Global Mission at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, describes this in her book *Graceful Evangelism*. Adeney does this by describing the story of Paul preaching to the Athenians in Acts. Adeney (2010) states:

> Rather than take an adversarial position to their beliefs, which he certainly could have done…he found the nuggets of wisdom in their philosophers' thought and spoke them back to them. After affirming their views in ways that he could with integrity, Paul preached the gospel to them. He didn't shy away from the difficult parts but prepared the way with affirmations.…Some scoffed, but some believed and were added to the Church. (pp. 138-139)

Adeney makes it clear that Christians should be considerate of other peoples' beliefs when preaching the gospel, but Christians should not try to hide any part of the gospel in fear of

offending someone. This method leads to two possible outcomes. The first is that the person being told the gospel comes to believe in Christ. In this case, the person has become reconciled with Christianity. The second case is that the person does not come to Christ. Which leads to the question: how can this case lead to reconciliation? The answer can be found in the Bible.

For the Christian Church to reconcile with the people of Silicon Valley, it must be able to reconcile with people of other religions who reject the gospel. Jesus makes it very clear how these people should be treated when he says, "Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete" (Mathew 5:48). Jesus makes it clear that Christians are to love everyone no matter what. This means that Christians must love people who reject the gospel rather than treating them as enemies. Doing this leads to reconciliation in two ways. The first is that it allows Christians to coexist peacefully alongside those with other religious beliefs. The second is that it leaves the door open for them to accept the gospel at a later time since they have not been turned away from the gospel due to hateful acts from Christians. A similar approach can be used to reconcile with those who identify as religious "Nones."

Reconciling with Religious "Nones" is a key step for the Christian Church to reconcile with the people of Silicon Valley. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), thirty-five percent of the people in Silicon Valley identify as religious "Nones." These people are particularly difficult for Christians to reconcile with since they either don't believe in a particular religion, don't believe there is any god, or simply don't care (Pew Research Center, 2014). Reconciling with these people is similar to reconciling with people of other religions with a few key differences. The first is that these people must see that Christians desire to help them rather than just impose Christian beliefs on them. This can be accomplished through acts of charity,

such as those being done by TBC. Then, like Adeney (2014) stated in her plan for reconciling with people of other religions, Christians must gain an understanding of why these people believe the way that they do (pp. 138-139). After doing this, Christians must share the gospel with these people and hope that they accept it (Adeney, 2014, pp. 138-139). If they do, then they are reconciled with the Church, and if they don't, then the Church must show them love anyways so that they can still be reconciled. Reconciling with peoples' different religious beliefs will make it significantly easier for the Church to reconcile with Silicon Valley's leaders.

The leaders of Silicon Valley are some of the most influential people in the world. Companies such as Apple, Alphabet (or Google), and Facebook are all based in Silicon Valley. The leaders and workers of these companies are incredibly wealthy, which leads to division between them and the Church. Jesus made it clear that wealth is a major obstacle to a person's faith when he states, "It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom" (Mark 10:25). The difficulty that wealth causes can be seen by looking at the story of Michael Yang. During the late 1990s, Yang helped found many companies in Silicon Valley (Carnes, 2001, 35). One of these was an incredibly popular website that Yang sold for 700 million dollars (Carnes, 2001, 35). Tony Carnes (2001), says in his article, "'It is a fact,' Yang said recently in a Bible study, 'It is hard to feel spiritual need' when all of your needs are fulfilled" (35). This makes it clear that Yang's wealth became a major stumbling block in his spiritual life. Fortunately, Yang did come to know Christ, but not until he began to experience financial troubles during the recession of the early 2000s (Carnes, 2001, 35). As companies such as Apple continue to gain enormous amounts of wealth, it is clear that financial hardships are not going to lead Silicon Valley's leaders to Christ, nor should this be the

preferred path of reconciliation. This leads to the question: how can Silicon Valley's leaders be reconciled with the Church?

The answer is that the church must provide something that money can't and that is community. It is clear that community is an important part of Jesus' teachings. The Bible states, "Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). These verses make it clear that the early church grew by creating a sense of community and inviting everyone into it. The effectiveness of creating a community can be seen in the work of St. Patrick. According to Adeney, "[St. Patrick] was convinced that belonging preceded believing (Muck and Adeney, 2009, 94). After experiencing life in the community, individuals were drawn to Christ and became dedicated Christians" (35). This statement shows that becoming a part of a community often comes before coming to believe in Christ. Therefore, the Church must develop loving communities to welcome the leaders of Silicon Valley in order for them to be reconciled. Reconciling with the leaders of Silicon Valley will allow the Church to prepare for developments in technology, which will lead to further division in the future if the Church is not prepared.

Technology poses a significant threat to the reconciliation of the Christian Church and Silicon Valley. According to Yuval Harari (2016), a lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, "the most interesting place in the world from a religious perspective is not Syria or the Bible Belt, but Silicon Valley. That is where hi-tech gurus are brewing for us new religions that have little to do with God, and everything to do with technology" (p. 29). From this statement, it is clear that Harari believes technology will replace religion. Mark Coeckelbergh (2010), an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Twente, takes this idea of

technology-based religions even further by suggesting new religious models including one based on Gnosticism, one based on Animism, and even one based on Christianity (2010, pp. 963-971). The validity of these ideas can be seen by looking at one of the technologies being developed in Silicon Valley – artificial intelligence.

One of the leading technologies that will lead to division between Silicon Valley and the Christian Church is artificial intelligence. According to Lior Gazit (2017), "Artificial intelligence is penetrating everything we consume create and own" (p. 11). This makes it clear that artificial intelligence is beginning to become a significant part of our daily lives. While it is still in the early stages of development, its potential is clear. This potential can be found in Gazit's (2017) research where he found that artificial intelligence can be used to identify cysts in the pancreas faster than a doctor could (p. 14). This means that AI can be used to diagnose someone with cancer in its early stages so that doctors can begin treating it as soon as possible (Gazit, 2017, p. 14). Artificial intelligence is only in its early stages. As computers become faster and artificial intelligence becomes more advanced, it will be used to solve many more of mankind's problems. This gives validity to Harari's (2016) idea that technology will replace religion because it will "promise all the old prizes – happiness, peace, justice and eternal life in paradise – but here on Earth with the help of technology, rather than after death and with the help of supernatural beings" (p. 29). Since Silicon Valley is the center of development for artificial intelligence, its future developments could lead to division between Christians and Silicon Valley. It is clear that the Church must address new technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, in order to prevent future division with Silicon Valley.

To prevent technology from causing division between the Church and Silicon Valley, the church must embrace new technology as a tool for the betterment of mankind. While describing

how technology will be the end of religion, Harari (2016) also describes how the medieval church grew by leading the world in ethical and technological reforms (p. 33). Coeckelbergh (2017), states that religion has played a key role in creating new technology throughout history. This shows that the church must again lead the world in technological advancement in order to prevent future divisions with Silicon Valley. The first thing the Church must do is determine what new technologies can benefit mankind without going against the teachings of the Bible. After doing this, the Church must then push to develop these new technologies to their full potential so that they can help people in need. This process can be better seen by looking at how the church embraced medicine.

The Church's history with medicine shows how Christians can integrate other research, such as technology, in ways to further God's kingdom. Beal-Preston (2000) states, "From the fourth-century to present times, Christians have been especially prominent in the planning, siting and building of hospitals, as well as fundraising for them" (p. 10). This statement makes two important points about how the Church embraced medicine. The first is that the Church saw medicine as following the teachings of the Bible since it is able to help people. The second is that the Church used previously discovered medical advances to help others. Beal-Preston (2000) also states that Christians have played an important role in the development of medicine by listing many Christians, such as Louis Pasteur, the man who discovered that infections are caused by bacteria (p. 12). She also points out that the Church founded many universities that contributed to medical research (Beal-Preston, 2000, p. 11). By doing this, Beal-Preston shows that the Church has valued medical research throughout history. The Church's history of utilizing medicine has direct parallels to how Christians can take advantage of technology.

Applying the same process used to integrate medicine into ministry to artificial intelligence will show how the Church can integrate new technology into ministry. In the same way Christians decided if medicine followed the teachings of Jesus, they should likewise determine if artificial intelligence goes against the teachings of the Bible. According to Gazit (2017), artificial intelligence is the ability for computers to "learn" how to do something that a human could but much more quickly (p. 11). In other words, artificial intelligence is just a more efficient way to use a computer. The Church's extensive use of computers shows that it has already decided that computers do not go against the teachings of the Bible, so artificial intelligence does not go against the teachings of the Bible. After doing this, the Church should take advantage of existing resources, similar to when it built hospitals. According to Gazit (2017), artificial intelligence has potential to be used for cancer diagnosis (pp. 13-14). Christians could take advantage of this already existing research to help those in need. Gazit's (2017) research only created an artificial intelligence capable of recognizing pancreatic cancer (pp. 13-14). This presents an opportunity for the Church to extend the capabilities of artificial intelligence to recognize other cancers, following in the footsteps of Christians who promoted medical research. This will give the Church experience working with artificial intelligence, allowing it to expand artificial intelligence to be useful in other fields. Researching artificial intelligence may seem like an expensive process, but there are resources available for Christians to do so.

It is possible for the Church to take advantage of existing resources in order to promote technological development that helps others. According to the Council of Christian Colleges & Universities (CCU) (n.d.), there are over 150 Christian colleges in the United States. All of these colleges include Christian teaching as a part of their education and most of them also have

programs in the sciences (CCU, n.d.). This means that the Church has established resources for promoting research of new technologies, and colleges are not the only resource that Churches have available to them. There are many free and powerful tools available on the internet for creating powerful new technology. One example of this is Luminoth. Luminoth is an open-source API designed to make image recognition easy (Azzinnari, 2018). According to Azzinnari (2018), the leader of Luminoth's development team, Luminoth comes with the ability to recognize eighty different kinds of objects in images and it can be "trained" to recognize other objects as well. This means that Luminoth could be "trained" to recognize things such as cancer in images, making it possible for the Church to utilize it as a tool for helping others (Azzinnari, 2018). By combining the efforts of Christian Colleges with free resources such as Luminoth, the Church can use technology to help others, preventing technology from causing divisions with Silicon Valley and making it possible for Christians to begin the process of reconciliation.

Silicon Valley's unique position as a world leader in technology has led to a series of issues that divide it from the Church. The issues the Church should prioritize are political disagreements, religious differences, and technological advancements. These issues are often intertwined with each other, so Christians must find ways to address all of them in order to reconcile with Silicon Valley. Reconciliation with Silicon Valley begins with Christians putting aside their own differences and working together to create a respectful and meaningful conversation with the people of Silicon Valley in order to resolve political and religious disagreements. The Church should unite to meet the physical needs of the poor and create a loving community for all who live in Silicon Valley. Doing this will show that the Church has good intentions, making people more open to the Gospel. The Church must then use its available resources to integrate technology into ministry, making it more effective and preventing

technology from drawing people away from God. To achieve all of this, it is clear that the Church needs unity.

Unity within the Church is the key to reconciliation with Silicon Valley. The Apostle Paul states, "Now I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Agree with each other and don't be divided into rival groups, instead be restored with the same mind and the same purpose" (1 Corinthians 1:10). This makes it clear that Paul wants the Church to work together. Following Paul's instructions will benefit the Church's outreach in Silicon Valley in several ways. Unity will show that the churches are focused on the needs of Silicon Valley rather than being focused on being the "best church." This will lead to faithful witness, attracting people with other views to the Church. Unity will allow the Church to combine the knowledge of colleges, universities and individuals in order to integrate technology into ministry in a way that is both moral and effective. To reconcile with the people of Silicon Valley, or any group of people who do not follow the Gospel, Christians must strive to achieve unity.

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