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The metaverse's potential impacts on the God-centred life and togetherness of Indonesian Christians

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Many studies in Indonesia have analysed the metaverse from an education, communication, social relation and business view, but only a few from a theological perspective. This study questions whether theologically, the metaverse can be viewed as an opportunity where God-centred life and togetherness amongst humans are enhanced. To answer the question, the study uses literature analysis. The question is answered by exploring two issues. Firstly, the impact of the metaverse's features on human awareness and values as the basis of their roles in creating togetherness is examined. Secondly, the changes in the human image of God and their roles in relation to the divine as the consequences of immersion in the metaverse are investigated. From the analysis of the previous studies concerning those issues, the findings show that Christians who regularly immerse themselves in the metaverse and obtain overstimulation might acquire a set of values that foster collaborative togetherness on the one hand but enhance pervasive self-centredness on the other hand. In theological language, the metaverse might cause Christians to act as the masters of reality instead of as its stewards. The finding might give direction for the church to help Christians maintain regular detachment from the metaverse and to reflect more on their roles in creating togetherness and a God-centred life.

Keywords: Indonesian Christians; theology; metaverse; awareness; values; spirituality; experiential learning.

Introduction

Most Christians accept the truth contained in the first verse of the Bible that in the beginning, God created the universe. Then, God trusted human beings to take care of it. Their role was as God's stewards. The Genesis narrative also teaches about the limit of their roles. Furthermore, the narrative describes that God gives human beings choices; either they recognise God as their Lord or place themselves as the master of life and prioritise their own wishes.

After the creation, God commanded Adam to become fruitful and multiply. Such an instruction indicates the divine plan that they would not live in a static state but be in a non-stop state of change. In the terminology of Teilhard de Chardin, humans live in an evolutive world whose changes relate to God (De Chardin 2002:20). In short, changes or evolutions are inevitable, and God takes part in such changes. Later, after making the wrong choice, human beings fell into sin, and togetherness amongst the descendants of Adam and Eve dissolved. Separation and segregation emerged in humanity. Yet God's endeavour to help humans recover togetherness with each other and with the divine never ceases.

Each change triggers further change. The metaverse is the latest change. At a glance, the metaverse can be defined as a virtual universe where people feel entirely immersed in the 3D virtual reality constructed by a human-made computer program. A study by George et al. (2021) states that the metaverse is:

> [A] hypothetical upcoming iteration of the internet, providing support to decentralized, long-lasting online 3-D virtualized environments, links between the financial, virtual, and physical worlds have become more and more connected. (p. 1)

It exists as one of the continuous changes in communication media and technology since the dawn of human history. Walter Ong (1982:2) states that oral culture is the earliest method of human communication where people mainly used sound or voice. Concerning the supernatural life in oral cultures, especially in Indonesia, humans did not speculate about an abstract or logical knowledge of God but simply sensed, believed, spoke and memorised God's presence in a huge rock, an old tree or a dark cave. Their relationship with the divine was based on a simple faith that

the divine was a spirit or force but not a person. Some of them also believed that there were spirits in the whole of creation and also in a spiritual world (McLuhan 1962:35). Such an understanding, according to Zoetmulder, still exists in many Indonesian indigenous beliefs, mainly in Java, the most populated island of Indonesia (Machasin 2003). People in oral cultures also developed their anthropomorphic images or views when they described supernatural places or entities such as heaven, devils, angels or the Creator (Chandra & Nurcholish 2021:42).

After the era of oral culture, when writing and printing cultures appeared, humans used their cognitive ability to create what Havelock calls conceptualisation or exploration, as they were no longer burdened by memorisation (Halverson 1992). Thus, they developed their logical understanding of the supernatural realm. As studied by Zhao (2019:329), as the result of such development, some people who had better skills and commanded knowledge about the supernatural realm became religious leaders or priests. The division between the priests and laypersons emerged together with the perceived distance between the Creator and the creatures.

Broadcast culture, involving both radio and television, brought knowledge about the divine to a heterogeneous audience. Some televangelists in the United States of America caused people to sense God in different ways compared to what the church offered in their worship services.

Today, the digital era brings a convergence of all features of the oral, written, printed and broadcast cultures (Jenkins 2006:6). The centralisation of 'spiritual knowledge' in the church faces challenges as each person can use social media platforms like YouTube to communicate their faith or experience with God. They can choose their faith community or even engage with multiple communities, as respondents of a survey in Indonesia stated (Chandra 2021:4). The latest shocking change in the digital era is the metaverse. A series of theological questions arise. Can the metaverse potentially change the God-image in people who use it regularly? What will happen with human interaction and the view of one's role in life when such human-constructed reality permeates civilisation? To answer these questions logically, this study should delve into the essence and main features of the metaverse, its impacts on the people (including Christians) who immerse themselves in the metaverse regularly and their image of or relation with God.

These findings can contribute to church life, in Indonesia especially, as many diverse communities are pervasive in the nation. Firstly, it might give a theological framework concerning changes and human roles in the process. Secondly, concerning the values to be retained in Christian life, it might give direction concerning the risks of humans immersing themselves regularly in the metaverse. Thirdly, concerning the human image of God, the study might give direction for a new spirituality in which a relationship with the non-physical and non-anthropomorphic God does not distort existing Christian spirituality if the Christians hold the Trinitarian God concept.

Methods

A qualitative research methodology was applied in this study. It included exploration on the field of communication, sociology, psychology, values and spirituality or theology.

Firstly, literature was explored concerning the continuous changes in human civilisation, mainly technology and media communications and their impacts on the image of God, the human role in reality and their values. This exploration includes an analysis of the theological perspective that Teilhard de Chardin proposed in the literature. Secondly, various studies were explored concerning the features of the metaverse from various fields. Thirdly, an analysis was carried out concerning the results of a psychological study on the impacts of the metaverse in the user's awareness, as well as a sociological study concerning the adoption of new habits and values caused by immersion in the metaverse. Finally, an analysis of the relationship between awareness and values on humans' insight concerning their God and their roles in reality was carried out.

Discussion
Understanding the metaverse

In 1992, Neal Stephenson invented the term 'metaverse' in his novel *Snow Crash*. Today, the word 'metaverse' has become popular, but a variety of understandings of it are evident. In the newspaper *The Business of Business*, Matthew Ball, a former head of strategy at Amazon Studios, described the metaverse as (De Luce 2021):

> [A]n expansive network of persistent, real-time rendered 3D worlds and simulations that … can be experienced synchronously by an effectively unlimited number of users, each with an individual sense of presence. (n.p.)

For him, the metaverse will be as transformative as the Internet. For some people, the metaverse is mainly a virtual world, which means a sphere where the users are mentally immersed in virtual reality. Others view the metaverse as a three-dimensional universe that humans create (Smart, Cascio & Paffendorf 2008). In the metaverse, people can freely interact. Computer games might be understood as the first applications of such a universe (Narin 2021).

Gradually, people have come to view the metaverse as a universe that offers accessibility and interactivity with anyone, including robots. Recently, as a result of more exposure to news and discussions about the metaverse, modern society realises that metaverse is more than just a space for entertainment. The metaverse is a virtual space with almost unlimited business possibilities. Among others, the metaverse can become a sphere where non-fungible tokens which is a digital asset that is verifiable on blockchain technology can be sold and bought. In the first two months of 2022, news about such non-fungible tokens in relation to the

metaverse increased and as the consequence, people recognised its value. Respondents to research conducted by Binawarga Training Centre in February 2022 showed such recognition (Chandra, Kurniawan & Naa n.d.). Although the development of the metaverse might take quite a long time, Indonesia is making serious efforts to prepare infrastructure for the metaverse by 2024. Amongst others, the government collaborates with an Indonesia leading digital technology business group named the WIR to prepare a metaverse prototype to be used nationally (Media Indonesia 2022).

The metaverse can also enable a new social sphere by helping people to arrange meetings between friends (Ball 2020) or even to worship and work together. In Indonesia, the Indonesian Christian Church's youth group Ignite has already shared their prototype of a metaverse church on 22 February 2022. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic might accelerate people's awareness of such possibilities.

The above-mentioned views indicate that the metaverse means a human-constructed universe, based on digital technology and computer power with algorithms as its core. As Herman and Browning state, the metaverse is pervasive, and the consequences will be global. (Hermann & Browning 2021:10) It means that most people's attachment to the metaverse will be inevitable, similar to their attachment to mobile phones today. The technologies related to the metaverse, in particular, will continuously expand. All of them, based on the new development of computers, graphics and other hardware, may create an environment that is perceived as a 'reality' by its users (George et al. 2021:1–10).

The metaverse emerged as the consequence of the previous series of changes in digital and communication technology. The transformations in communication media technology cause the latest media technology to converge with the previous one. The changes will also transform people's view of the meaning of reality, their roles in the world, relationship patterns, values and even their image of the divine when a new communication reality takes over (Chandra 2021). The metaverse challenges Christians to make meaning of the new reality, their values in social life, their sense of God's presence and how they relate to the Divine in the new human-constructed reality without losing the essence, which is God's plan to create unity or reunion after human beings fell into sin.

The power and features or building blocks of the metaverse

In 2008, John Smart, Cascio Jamais and Jerry Paffendorf tried to draw the roadmap for metaverse development. Their study identifies four main building blocks of the metaverse: augmented reality, lifelogging, mirrored worlds and virtual reality.

- *Augmented reality* (AR) means that in the metaverse, users can see or sense the material or physical world differently. In Indonesia, for example, by using an augmented-reality capable device such as a smartphone, people could see their surroundings whilst driving by using Google Maps, depicting the roads they should take. Today, AR can be found in smart glasses that have sensors enabling drivers to keep track of a route they are taking whilst simultaneously watching the road and vehicles around them. Another example is the application of AR for interior decoration. A smartphone application, Ikea Place, allows customers to view furniture that they see in a store by placing it virtually inside their house, as shown through the smartphone screen. Such an application helps customers in their buying decisions.

- *Lifelogging* is a process to record personal activities in daily life. The record contains a comprehensive dataset of activities that could increase knowledge about many things, such as sleeping patterns, distance covered by walking, dietary habits or others (Gurrin et al. 2014:1–125). Interestingly, Kim mentions that when someone records their events in life for friends and family members, the data uploaded is not a reality but the way the person wants others to view or perceive it (Kim 2021:11). These 'records' are personal narratives and might not represent an accurate rendering of a person's life. Lifelogging gives a space for people to create their narratives, similar to the habits of Indonesia's 170 million social media users today. Thus, the metaverse means a human-constructed universe based on digital technology and computer power with algorithms as its core (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-indonesia).

- *Mirrored worlds* are the building blocks of the metaverse, creating a digital twin of the Earth. Reality will be substituted or even replaced part by part by a software-generated imitation. David Gelernter states that humans might live inside the imitation (Gelernter 1993). A mirror world would allow its users to see, observe, analyse, explore and gain insights into some substantial settings in the real world. Virtually, they can explore the interiors of a building that exists in the real world. They can also inspect how congested a road is in a certain day, for example, a week ago or last month. They can even track changes that have taken place in a town or a coastline.

- *Virtual reality* (VR) revolves around people and their relationships or interactivity. It is the fourth building block of the metaverse (Smart et al. 2008). In the beginning, people understood the metaverse as something related to computer gaming, and then people came to know about virtual reality. With special VR goggles, people can play games as if they are inside the arena or environment where the game takes place. Amongst others, one of the popular games in Indonesia is Minecraft, which leads people to realise more about the metaverse and the complexity that it offers. As has been stated, today people can even worship together in a virtual church.

Bikram Lamba also describes the metaverse by emphasising its key aspects: a sense of presence, interoperability and standardisation (Lamba 2021:1).

- *Sense of presence* is related to virtual reality technologies such as head-mounted displays. Presence is the users' perception of existing in a virtual space with others present simultaneously.
- *Interoperability* refers to the fact that metaverse users can seamlessly shift or travel between virtual spaces with their virtual assets. The virtual assets may be their avatars or some acquired capabilities.
- *Standardisation* is a feature that makes the interoperability of platforms and services across the metaverse functional (George et al. 2021).

From both descriptions of these features, it can be concluded that the metaverse is a human-constructed reality as a result of computer technology, offering interactivity, access, space for participation, multiple spheres to choose from, connectivity and room for either individual or cooperative creativity. Its stimulating power is very strong, and its presence is pervasive; these two features can lure human beings to immerse themselves more completely in it by suspending their self-awareness or reflection.

The impacts of non-physical presence in the metaverse on humans' image of God

Before the invention of written text, people related to supernatural beings by experiencing the divine's presence in physical reality or nature. They worshipped God by using natural elements, such as stone, fire and oil on an altar. The biblical narrative about Jacob in Bethel describes this. 'Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel' (Gn 28:18).

Later in written culture, people developed abstract knowledge of God and various symbols or metaphors. They developed a sense of an anthropomorphic God. In the modern age, broadcast cultures taught them to visualise an emotionally caring God who visited them through television or radio channels. However, in written culture, each religious group viewed their beliefs about the divine as the only truth. They considered other religions or beliefs as false ones. Such views created rifts between ethnic identities and nations as they were classified and labelled by their beliefs. Either confusion or enrichment appears as humans have developed more new views of God, especially amongst Christians.

Furthermore, what will be the modern human image of God in the metaverse? As the Internet gives wide opportunities for information, continuous interaction, expression and collaboration without physical presence, the metaverse offers even more. Interaction in the metaverse is non-physical, non-natural and non-anthropomorphic interaction, but the sense of presence is stronger. This means the presence of other humans who listen, comfort, give solutions, reconcile and bring togetherness does exist, although without physical presence. It is, then, very probable that the Christians who use it regularly, especially in worshipping, will become more accustomed to a more experiential sense of God's presence. Will they also become accustomed to God's presence, which is non-anthropomorphic and ever-present, powerful, comforting, leading, giving solutions, reconciling, uniting and guiding or even transforming them? If it is probable, those are the roles of the Holy Spirit (Chandra & Nurcholish 2021).

The probability for Christians to sense God as non-anthropomorphic and ever-present is parallel with the development of Christian theology in the last three decades. In 1991, in the Seventh Assembly of the WCC conference in Canberra, most church leaders agreed that the church had not spent sufficient energy on its theology about the Holy Spirit or Pneumatology. They realised that the emphasis had been overly on God as the Father and Son. The event was the first WCC assembly to focus on the third person of the Trinity and took as its theme, 'Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation'. The theme was a rediscovery of the Spirit's activities in the church and the world as the impact of the Orthodox Church's pneumatology and Pentecostal-Charismatic experience (Putney 1992). Later, Jürgen Moltmann (1991) stirred more responses to the issues of pneumatology. Afterwards, more discourses and experiential testimony of the presence of the Holy Spirit emerged.

Christians who regularly use the metaverse will probably wish to learn more and sense the presence of the Spirit. Aside from such positive developments, there is a risk. The metaverse opens a space for humans to develop their image of God based on their own likeness and desires. Leone (2011) succinctly states:

> [*I*]f pre-modern monotheisms sought to convince human beings that they were all made after the likeness of a single God, post-modern monotheisms seek to convince us, that Gods are all made in our image and after our likeness. (p. 354)

In short, concerning the changes in the human image of God and how they relate to the divine, there are two sides to the metaverse. The risk is not insignificant, as the features of the metaverse can create delayed awareness in experience. Humans may simply immerse themselves in an enjoyable and stimulating reality, and thus they may wish to interact with a God who is always enjoyable and stimulating. Later, if it is rewarding, such a wish might create a habit that causes them to create such a god based on their own desires and image (Wood & Rünger 2016).

The impact of the metaverse on the human view of their roles

To what extent does the metaverse influence and change human beings, especially with regard to their views of their roles in reality? The first framework to answer the question is the role of habitual behaviour. When people enter and use the metaverse, they learn a set of human behaviours or even habits from their interactions with each other and immersion in the environment. Habitual behaviours relate to the development of values (Bardi & Schwartz 2003).

Another framework to answer the question is the tacit learning concept, especially concerning worship, church life and Christian education. Tacit knowledge refers to intangible knowledge that people acquire from their experience, environment, interaction or observation of their role models. Polanyi explained that people 'can know more than they can tell' (Polanyi 2006:4–6). The opposite of such knowledge is *explicit knowledge.* Explicit knowledge appears as codified and transferable information, created purposely through written or oral language. Most formal learning, including religious education experiences, relies more on transferring explicit knowledge instead of passing on tacit knowledge. From such an understanding, logically, the metaverse as an experience or environment as vivid as real life will create tacit knowledge in the user's life without them realising it. In short, the users undergo experiential learning in the metaverse and obtain much knowledge and shared values without being aware of it.

The last framework to study the impact of the metaverse on the praxis of humans' role is the concept of values. As Bonetto et al. state, values are guiding principles in human life (Bonetto et al. 2021). Huijbers (1992:74) mentions that according to William James, the values that humans hold will influence their choices. Value is confirmed as something good because it is sought, wanted and fought for (Bagus 2007:713). Values are personal because they are personal beliefs about what one wants. Thus, the concepts of James, Bonetto, and Bagus about human values show that they influence human behaviour.

There is also another concept of values. Values are general concepts that people subscribe to and believe in (Jamieson 2005; Morgan 1992; Wallace 2005). For example, togetherness, fairness and equality are values that people embrace.

Thus there are numerous studies conducted on values, but Schwartz's basic human values offer a construct that includes theological questions. In his construct, Schwartz distinguishes 10 distinct basic human value orientations. He categorises the values into four value domains:

1. Self-transcendence is the tendency to transcend self-interest to promote the well-being of others.
2. Self-enhancement refers to the tendency to focus on personal interests or achievements.
3. Conservation is the focus on stability and conserving traditional customs and practices.
4. Openness to change (hedonism, stimulation, self-direction) is an orientation to change and independence (Schwartz 2012).

The values of the first domain significantly intersect with the Christian view on their roles in life.

The experience of immersion in the metaverse that drives people to enjoy its various features can influence human cognitive, affective and behavioural patterns. It can even change people's values without them realising when new values are acquired as tacit knowledge through their experiential learning from the metaverse, especially as they enjoy the stimulation from such a human-constructed reality.

Relationship between tacit knowledge or experiential learning, new values and the metaverse

What habitual behaviours will the users learn from the metaverse? The answers can be related to the features of the metaverse that have been described earlier.

1. **Presence in the metaverse: human consciousness and immersion**
   Today, one of the definitions of consciousness relates to an awareness of oneself and of reality. The most important concept of awareness is the introspective consciousness proposed by Locke and Kant. It is a perception-like awareness of one's current mental state and activities. The metaverse, with seamless and continuous stimulations, can make people enjoy their non-stop immersion in it. Such emotional reward from the habits of immersion might inhibit introspective consciousness. The users are drawn to enjoy the sense of presence, control and enjoyment whilst exploring or adventuring in it, to the point that there will be a limited wish to introspect or reflect on their activities and reality.

2. **Interoperability**
   Interoperability refers to the fact that metaverse users can seamlessly shift or travel between virtual spheres. The sense of power and control experienced by the users of the metaverse is undeniably stronger compared to that of people who only use the Internet or smartphones. Time and space become forgotten barriers. Blockchain technology allows users to enter different metaverses and use their assets. It becomes the foundation of economic life. As the avatar of a person can be used in different games or transactions, a sense of identity is created, even in a digital environment. However, the sense of control or power that people obtain is the utmost sought-after value. Concerning the human–divine relationship, such a value might inhibit love or intimacy between humans and God.

3. **Interactive relationship and community building**
   The metaverse promises a wide-open space for the users to choose, relate, participate or collaborate with parties that they can freely select. The metaverse also provides a space of participation in which users can enjoy self-expression, self-exploration, creativity, self-determination, pluralism and information-sharing. In the metaverse, they can build friendships, community and various relationships. People connect based on similarities of interests or needs. They can even engage themselves in multi-communities. Thus, the value of having unlimited choice becomes prominent.

Analysis of value changes points out that each user of the metaverse will walk in his or her personal life primarily to pursue their own needs and dreams or a sense of being in control. If a group of people gather in the virtual community,

such gathering only serves to fulfill their social needs. To create the virtual community, they select the members who have values or patterns of thought that fit their own. If someone chooses to join a virtual community, he or she will make sure that it has members with similar values as theirs. Simon Evans states that such virtual experience of self–other interactions has existed for a long time in symbolic spaces of 'imagined community' and self-representation, such as theatrical settings (Evans 2012).

People welcome similar kinds of people into their community but reject the different ones. As a result, exclusivity might become the pervasive mode. Even spiritual and religious communities in such a virtual environment might be open only to people who have similarities in religious values but are closed to others. Thus, such a community can be coloured by exclusivity. Furthermore, the members who choose to join it, practice a religious consumer-producer relationship which means that they show loyalty to the community as far as their needs are fulfilled. It might also cause more isolation for people who could not find satisfaction in such relationships. The values that the users learn from the metaverse without realising are a transactional relationship and self-centredness. The spirit of such self-centredness will detach them more from God. Theologically, it can be stated that they tend to adopt habits and values to become the master of the universe or reality instead of serving as God's steward in life.

On the contrary, analysing the metaverse by using Teilhard de Chardin's framework points out that the metaverse will help people learn. They may wish to diminish negative aspects in life that people in the present physical reality cannot change, such as discrimination in the name of ethnicity, gender, race, ideology, religion or social status. The values that the metaverse teaches are appreciation of plurality or unification in diversity as meaningful objectives of reality. Without being aware, people who are immersed regularly in the metaverse may also acquire values of tolerance, appreciation and mutual care, something that can become tacit or embedded knowledge acquired from relationships in the metaverse. Thus, to conclude, the metaverse is an opportunity for the unification of humanity.

The metaverse promises space for unlimited choices. Human users seem to have almost unlimited freedom and free will to joyfully create, relate or collaborate in the metaverse. However, in fact, in such a space, their perception of reality is mainly based on the virtual environment and does not include the actual reality. The metaverse even suspends their ability to experience both realities simultaneously as they immerse in the virtual one thoroughly. As spirituality is an intimate relationship with the Almighty, a meaning-making process and the transformation of one's own life and others' lives (Sheldrake 2010:4–24), the metaverse might not open the real space for spirituality, especially for someone who does not want to stop to do reflection and listen to God. Thus, it can prevent people from having a serious spiritual life because it traps people in continuous immersion in activities

(including virtual religious worship) without recognising the need for detachment, quietness or complete stop for reflection before God. To fulfil the needs of spirituality without the users' desire to separate themselves from constant visual engagement, a new version of spirituality might emerge in which the users play the role of modern customers, and then the spiritual experience becomes a commodity. Thus, the challenge for religions is to help their believers to maintain their real free will by realising the need to maintain introspective consciousness or regular reflection. To conclude, some spirits potentially entrap the people who regularly use the metaverse.

Why would God allow the metaverse to come to being? The answer to this question is that in each change, there are choices and risks for human beings. They either choose God as the centre of their lives or make themselves the pivotal point by replacing God. The narrative of the forbidden fruit in Genesis 2 points out such a choice. Thus, God would allow the metaverse to exist for human beings as another phase of the human journey to learn about the right choices and grow in divine grace.

The roles of the church

Practically, how should the church educate believers to deal with choices and risks? This question relates to the meaning or goal of reality. In *The One and the Many*, Donal Gray (1969) posits that the Trinitarian concept provides the key to understanding the whole movement of reality as a process of evolution or (more precisely) unification. The unity of God consists in the very plurality of relationships. With such a concept, the metaverse potentially serves as a next step to give space to pluralism as the users value it deeply, and at the same time it will provide a space for unification. Indeed, the metaverse can create a self-centred plurality and unity consisting of exclusive groups or communities. In comparison, as Cronshaw (2020:3) shows, in the Trinitarian concept, unity relates to the plurality of relationships with love at the centre and God's mission to unite humans, something that the church should emphasise. Kärkkäinen (2017) also describes such pluralistic relationships and unity in Trinitarian theology, which many scholars have studied.

Unfortunately, in Indonesia as in many other places, the unity of theology and praxis is overly Christ-centred or Christocentric. Such centredness tends to neglect an emphasis on the knowledge of and experience with the Holy Spirit and God as the Father or Mother (Congar 2017:163). Diverse Christian communities emerge, even amongst the main churches, such as the mainline denominations, the evangelical churches or the Pentecostal-Charismatic communities. Togetherness is limited. One of the possibilities is that many Christians often do not spend their energy developing the holistic teaching of the Trinitarian God. The Holy Spirit as a nonphysical and non-anthropomorphic person of God received less attention, as the respondents in a study on the perception of Christians

on the Holy Spirit in Greater Jakarta churches stated (Chandra & Tambunan 2019). Francis Chan (2009) mentions that such a global phenomenon is tragic neglect of the Holy Spirit's roles, works, and intentions. Jurgen Moltmann points out that Christians have treated the Holy Spirit as the Cinderella of theology (Sirks 1957). It is understandable, as it is easier for them to imagine or relate to a person of God who has anthropomorphic features rather than the Holy Spirit. Thus, the theological concept of God's unity is incomplete, a phenomenon that hampers closeness and togetherness amongst church denominations.

In the digital era and mainly in the metaverse, people might be more accustomed to relating to others and the Holy Spirit due to the following reasons. Firstly, people might become used to experiential presence. Such new experiences might help them learn to be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence in the metaverse compared to when they are in the actual physical universe. Secondly, Christians need the Holy Spirit who comforts, protects, guides and teaches them because the isolation in metaverse immersion is evident.

Plurality in such spiritual experiences of sensing the Spirit's presence is inevitable because each Christian church differs from the others, as the Book of Acts shows that each Apostle's experience of the Holy Spirit was unique. Yet, realising that they experience the same Spirit, each can learn to appreciate or reconcile differences.

Therefore, today, the church should facilitate awareness training for its members that with diversity, plurality and experiences in the metaverse, they can sense the presence of the Spirit of God. Yet there could be many other spirits in the metaverse; thus, it is important for the Christians to maintain a Christocentric praxis. Without an intense relationship with God the Creator, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Christians can easily be lured into centring their lives on new values that foster self-centredness that leads them away from God.

Thus, the metaverse is a new Genesis where another apple is accessible and offered to all people, including Christians. Inevitably, the metaverse is another phase of evolution or humanity's journey, where Jesus' followers can be more sensitive to various spirits and learn more about the Holy Spirit. In the Indonesian context, since the prehistoric age, people of most tribes have learned about the presence of various spirits in their lives. Therefore, the Indonesian churches should facilitate more learning processes, social environments, and relationships, where Christians acquire the tacit knowledge about the Holy Spirit and immerse in the Divine's presence but centred in Christ. At the same time, Christians can learn to distinguish the power of other spirits and not embrace them, including the spirits embedded in modern technology, such as the metaverse. In short, the metaverse can be either beneficial or detrimental to bringing people closer to God.

Conclusion

This study explored the literature to answer a series of theological questions. Concerning the metaverse as a human-created reality, it can be viewed as a part of God's continuous transformation in human civilisation. Indeed, very probably, the metaverse as a non-physical reality can potentially change the human image of God and direct them toward more intimacy with the Holy Spirit after they receive God's grace in Christ. Thus, they will not abandon Christ-centred life when they walk in the Spirit. The metaverse might create a yearning for an experiential relationship with the Spirit as with Christ. On the other hand, the metaverse's features might also lure humans to a set of new habits and values that drive human beings to behave like the self-centred masters of reality instead of living as God's stewards who serve to recover unity and togetherness. With such findings, the study can contribute a direction for the churches. They need to learn and use a more experiential process of learning to help people build habits and values of retaining their awareness of reality, instead of being immersed regularly in human-constructed one. People also need to learn more about their role as the stewards of God when dealing with changes in order to create togetherness in humanity.

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