Chapter 17
Uberveillance and Faith–Based Organizations:
A Renewed Moral Imperative

Marcus Wigan
Oxford Systematics, Australia & Edinburgh Napier University, UK

ABSTRACT

Uberveillance extends the responsibilities of faith-based organisations to the power imbalances now emerging. This is less a matter of governance and strategy, and more one of the core values of faith-based organisations. These might be regarded from an ethical or moral standpoint, but the approach taken is to focus on the constituencies of faith-based organisations and the imperatives that have been woven into their aims and values. The specific ways in which such disempowerments emerge and the functional importance of making organizational responses are considered. Acknowledgement is made of the Science and Society Council of the Churches of Scotland, who catalysed the expression and articulation of these issues.

INTRODUCTION

The perspectives of faith-based organizations encapsulate most of those in the broader community, but with a stronger representative role when power exertion by society on weaker members, not only of their own community, becomes evident. This is a historically important role, in which most share. The developments in large scale databases, government pressures for a single identity, and the merger of a wide variety of data and information holders create cumulative ethical and moral issues for the community at large, and it is arguable that the value systems used to resolve these are currently neither sufficiently diverse nor effective enough to moderate these cumulative effects in a humane and ethical manner.

The fundamental nature of uberveillance, surveillance and integration of multiple identities is to create power imbalances. The special feature

of the information and communications system's disintermediation of this process is removal of most of the mechanisms that could correct or undo the cumulative power shifts that information asymmetries establish.

Faith-based organisations are, in the main, religious bodies, but not all, as a range of humanist bodies also share many of the same characteristics. Faith-based organisations usually have a special mission to correct power imbalances that disadvantage the weaker and more vulnerable in the community, not only amongst their members, but in the community at large. While not widely known, the Roman Catholic Church states this explicitly (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005) in the words of Pope John Paul II addressing the Bishops in Mexico in 1979:

This love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without health care and, above all, those without hope of a better future (p62).

This view, reiterated in several contexts by Pope Paul II[1], is typical of the formal underpinnings of the commitment of faith-based organisations to addressing asymmetries of power and possibilities for the weak. The new imbalances induced by the asymmetric application of state-based dataveillance and physical surveillance to accumulating vast data records on individuals are steadily becoming more comprehensive and widespread; they need to attract the attention and action of faith-based organisations, at the very least in the interests of their more vulnerable members, and more broadly by attesting to their political capacities in influencing these objectives for the broader community.

Such actions are not often visible: why? One reason could be the comparatively limited use of the Internet by religious individuals as compared to their secular counterparts (Armfield, Dixon, & Dougherty, 2006), although Armfield et al point to

the organizational structural power of the pastor in articulating, explicitly or implicitly, the desirability of certain uses. This Foucaultian perspective (O'Farrell, 2005) on a Christian sample community, where the pastor's powers derive from being expected to guide, feed and protect a spectrum of humanity unable to spiritually fend for themselves, resonates with the functional role of the Mullah in Islam. Thus the enunciator expresses much of the power of faith-based organizations – and may well not express the same range or emphasis of the overall organisation at the higher level exemplified by the text cited for the Catholic Church (op.cit).

While these mediations of power at the congregational level are understandable, articulation of the higher levels of the faith-based organisations is where the political influence materializes.

The scarcity of public commentary by the Churches and other faith-based organisations on the values implied by uberveillance was highlighted (Wigan, 2010a) at a panel run by the Church of Scotland Church and Society Council towards a policy for science and society for this church; the implied moral duty of the churches to take positions on the disadvantaged by these trends and express them was asserted to be a logical consequence.

Secular approaches also emphasize the imbalances, more from an equity of access standpoint (Celeste, DiMaggio, Schafer, & Hargittai, 2004), yet echo a similar stance as follows:

… the research we call for here is one front in what should be a larger effort to understand the causes and impacts of inequality in access to and use of information of many kinds. Information figures crucially in the generation of inequality in advanced industrial societies in myriad ways …

The approaches so far recognised to be relevant by a wider professional society are still limited, and largely neglect the shared values and roles of faith-based and even secular civil liberties internet-sensitive organisations such as the Electronic

Related Content

Ethical Rationality in AI: On the Prospect of Becoming a Full Ethical Agent
Jonas Holst (2021). *Machine Law, Ethics, and Morality in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (pp. 69-84).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethical-rationality-in-ai/265714

From Hardware to Hardcore: Formalizing Systems with Form Theory
André Reichel (2017). *International Journal of Systems and Society (pp. 37-48).*
www.irma-international.org/article/from-hardware-to-hardcore/185671

The Influence of Expressive Images for Computer Interaction
Zhe Xu, David Johnand Anthony C. Boucouvalas (2006). *Encyclopedia of Human Computer Interaction (pp. 324-331).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/influence-expressive-images-computer-interaction/13141

A Model for Predicting User Intention to Use Voice Recognition Technologies at the Workplace in Saudi Arabia
Khalid Majrashi (2022). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 1-18).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-model-for-predicting-user-intention-to-use-voice-recognition-technologies-at-the-workplace-in-saudi-arabia/300287

Toward Improved Community-Supporting Systems Design: A Study of Professional Community Activity
Malte Geib, Christian Braum, Lutz Kolbeand Walter Brenner (2005). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 19-36).*
www.irma-international.org/article/toward-improved-community-supporting-systems/2871