Virtual Lives

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Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

The astonishing development of information technologies is fraught with moral ambiguity. Can we welcome the great blessings these innovations promise, but avoid being drawn into virtual lives that are careless and unreflective?

The astonishing development of information technologies—computers, smartphones, interactive television, and more—is fraught with moral ambiguity. These innovations—when they are widely and fairly distributed—promise to enhance our friendships, extend our knowledge, and overcome barriers of time and distance. But they also bring new temptations. They can draw us into virtual lives that are careless, unreflective, and unguarded by our moral practices.

"The question of the desirability of adopting any technological innovation is a question with two possible answers," Wendell Berry has written. "If one's motives are money, ease, and haste to arrive in a technologically determined future, then the answer is foregone, and there is, in fact, no question, and no thought. If one's motive is the love of family, community, country, and God, then one will have to think, and one may have to decide that the proposed innovation is undesirable." Before email completely replaces snail-mail, Facebook friends become more important than neighbors, blogs overtake books, and immersive fantasy games reshape our imagination, we would do well to examine new information technologies and the roles they play in our Christian discipleship.

Why is mobile connectivity (and the immediate access to vast amounts of information it provides) both so compelling and unsettling? In *Curiosity and Smartphones* (p. 11), Doug Henry answers by tracing the differences between two ways of desiring information—*curiositas* and *studiositas*, or curiosity and studiousness. "Whether or not our time in virtual reality runs contrary to the soul's deep need for the love of God and others," he concludes, "depends on why we pursue virtual lives, what they teach us to desire, and how we cher-

ish the things they provide." Kevin Miller notes in *Technological Prudence: What the Amish Can Teach Us* (p. 20) that "The Amish have managed for a century to keep phone technology in check to foster a sense of community that we yearn for in our electronically tethered and frenetically paced lives." Without romanticizing complex Amish practices or dismissing them as hopelessly compromised, Miller explores what we can learn from these attempts to manage information technology in a way that preserves the meaningfulness of time and the wholeness of community.

In *Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies* (p. 29), Robert Woods and Paul Patton offer guidelines for Christian stewardship of e-books, television, movies, the Internet, immersive video games, and smartphones. Media technologies (or channels that carry communication) are not value neutral; each one has distinctive values and biases. Woods and Patton urge us to inquire how these inherent values and biases affect our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the environment, because such "questions help us recognize the significant relationship between the content we consume and the delivery systems that bring it to us."

Amy Grizzle Kane offers a balanced critique of online social media in *Putting Ourselves Out There: Making Our Virtual Lives Virtuous* (p. 78). She met her husband through an online dating service, but she admits social networks are too often used for cyberbullying and vain display. "We can never let the transmission of megabytes of information be a substitute for nurturing our relationship with God or with each other, face to face, in real time," Kane writes. "To be known, we also must invest the time to know." In *Making Moral Choices in Video Games* (p. 69), Cameron Moore uses a Christian theory of fantastic imagination—developed by George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, and the Inklings—to explore immersive video games' potential as a fantasy art form. As we become "decision makers in the narrative structure of a game's secondary world," he notes we develop skills of moral perception and decision-making. "The right sorts of games provide opportunities for significant artistic expression and meaningful engagement of the intellect and will."

The Internet has become "a social sphere that facilitates spiritual interactions, establishes new authorities, and legitimizes practices for Christian communities," Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner observe in *Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet* (p. 59). For instance, "As people connect online and form networks of relationships that extend beyond connections within congregations, the organizational structures of traditional denominations have less power in determining religious identities." The situation calls for Christians to develop new skills in technological literacy and spiritual discernment.

Modern interpretations of artistic creativity, especially in regard to imagining alternate realities, have often run counter to Christian views of the artist's vocation. Heidi Hornik examines three important twentieth-century paintings to see how their creators probed real-life problems through depictions of alternate realities. In *Prayer in a Fourth Dimension* (p. 46), she notes

that Salvador Dalí's *Crucifixion* (cover) reveals a spiritual side of the flamboyant artist, as he makes "an affirmation of the reality of prayer in a…perplexed atomic age." Then in *The Field of Experience and Sensation* (p. 40), she interprets Edward Hopper's *New York Movie* and *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* as creations of "an alternate reality, a place that begins in the physical world of New York City but ends inside the soul of the individual viewer."

The worship service (p. 52) by Ann Bell Worley draws together recurrent themes in this issue—the human ability and responsibility to continue in God's work of creating, the discerning use of media technologies to enhance friendship and community, and avoidance of the "digital divide" between the technological haves and have-nots. In a new hymn "Full of Love and Christian Virtue" (p. 49), she writes, "may God's people always be / living out the new creation with faith, hope, and charity, / prudence to discern the truth, justice to give all their due, / fortitude to conquer fear, temperance toward earthly goods."

At least three kinds of books are written to pass judgment on the new digital technologies—the scolds, the cheerleaders, and the in-between books that neither damn nor bless. "While the latter books are harder to stereotype, harder to write, and harder to read, they are much more likely to tell the truth," Jason Byassee writes in *Living Virtuously in the Virtual Age* (p. 82), where he reviews Quentin J. Schultze's *Habits of the High-Tech Heart*, John Palfrey and Urs Gasser's *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, and *Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God* edited by Craig Detweiler. Byassee concludes, "Detweiler wants to rewire the Church for a sort of salvation-by-gaming; Schultze to rewire it to prevent a kind of techno-damnation. The 'answer' is somewhere in the middle. *Born Digital's* suggestion to calm down is a good first step. Now if we can just find the second."

In *Virtual Reality Comes to Church* (p. 88), Roger Owens reviews four books that address how new digital information technologies are reshaping congregations. He commends Shane Hipps's *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*, Quentin J. Schultze's *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely*, and Jesse Rice's *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* for showing how we can "adapt new digital technologies to worthwhile human ends by engaging them with intentionality and suspicion," but he worries Douglas Estes's *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* shows "no sensitivity to the hidden consequences of letting people think church can happen in a virtual world."

"What we need," Owens concludes, "is gospel wisdom, a way of navigating life in the world that is shaped by the life of this world's incarnate Lord. Such wisdom can open our eyes to the powerful ways technology can shape and misshape our discipleship. And only with eyes so opened can we be with our technologies both wise as serpents and innocent as doves." ✢

Curiosity and Smartphones

BY DOUGLAS V. HENRY

Why is mobile connectivity both so compelling and unsettling? Whether or not our time in virtual reality runs contrary to the soul's deep need for the love of God and others depends on why we pursue virtual lives, what they teach us to desire, and how we cherish the things they provide.

For all the frenetic change heralded by new technology, the human heart—with its longings and loves, heartaches and heartbreaks—remains essentially unchanged. We may delight in carrying new gadgets and developing virtual networks alongside our trusty old tools and time-tested friendships. We may even give pride of place to the new over the old. Yet whatever technology's wizardry does for us, it cannot fundamentally alter our heart's desire to love God and to love others in God.

That is not to say that life in the virtual world is without risks. The powerful mobile technologies betokened by Androids, Blackberries, and iPhones present challenges to Christians who are called to love God and others. What such potent tools make possible is astounding. They offer immediate access to important and trivial information alike; personally customizable news from around the world; books, furniture, clothing, collectibles, and anything else on amazon.com or eBay; and easy location of restaurants, replete with gourmet reviews and driving directions. Having immediate access to these things is not itself bad. However, living in a world of perpetual mobile connectivity can be spiritually distracting, and even deforming, for those who succumb to its inducements.

I am persuaded that we can live virtuously in the virtual world—maybe. Whether or not our time in virtual reality runs contrary to the soul's deep need for the love of God and others depends on *why* we pursue virtual lives,

what virtual lives teach us to desire, and *how* we cherish the things virtual lives provide. And while other aspects of our virtual lives deserve consideration as well, I am going to attend here to the kinds of *intellectual appetites* that we experience, nurture, and indulge through the medium of interactive devices such as smartphones.

Two principal forms of intellectual appetite are at stake: *curiositas* and *studiositas*. Because competing intellectual appetites motivate our fascination with virtual life, knowing the different ways that we can desire knowledge sheds light on why mobile connectivity is both compelling and unsettling. In short, by clarifying the "why," "what," and "how" which are at stake when we display *curiositas* and when we exemplify *studiositas*, we will be in a better position to see what Christians through the ages have seen: satisfying the desire for knowledge is an opportunity for sin and for grace.

AN APPETITE FOR KNOWLEDGE

Does it make sense to speak of an *appetite* for knowledge? We certainly desire knowledge. Indeed, so pervasive is the human desire for knowledge that Aristotle begins one of his important works by writing, "All men by nature desire to know."[1] One does not have to be brainy or educated for Aristotle's dictum to hold — merely being human suffices. *Everyone* longs to know about something. We wonder about all kinds of things: grand and small, personal and practical, natural and philosophical. Who was that? How does it work? Why does it happen? Where are we going? What shall we do? When we figure out answers to a given desire to know something, we are more or less satisfied, indeed sated, depending on how acute our desire for that knowledge happens to be.

But more than that, *appetite* is an especially fitting way of thinking about our desire to know. For one thing, speaking of intellectual appetites and cravings reminds us that our minds, no less than our bellies, can be spoken of in terms of wants, wishes, longings, and yearnings. When we want to know an unknown, our minds experience a nagging emptiness analogous to an empty stomach's grumbling for food. This is because, as Paul Griffiths explains, appetite at a basic level involves the desire to make present something that is absent.[2] Griffiths makes clear that we may have appetites for things both material (food, drink, clothing, the body of one's beloved, a place of sun-lit beauty) and immaterial (truth, love, goodness, knowledge). To be sure, we must exercise care in distinguishing material and immaterial things; in human experience we ordinarily find them bound together in complex ways. But that is all the more reason why we can naturally extend the language of appetite to cover desires for more than merely food and drink.

Consider the way we experience and satisfy physical appetites. When we make food present to a ravenous belly, our emptiness is filled and a craving is satiated. Our satisfaction on being fulfilled is not only physical; it is emotional, psychological, and even spiritual. In fact, a little reflection

makes obvious the reasons why significant religious rituals accompany seasons of planting and harvesting. With the exception of prosperous twenty-first-century Westerners, most human beings have anxiously anticipated physical hunger and thirst, vigilantly cultivated grains, fruits, flocks, and herds against future need, and celebrated, in lavish religious feasts of thanksgiving, the abundance that keeps hunger and thirst at bay for another season. The stronger our appetite, the more powerfully we celebrate our wellbeing in filling the emptiness.

In many respects our intellectual appetites are like our physical appetites. In the satisfaction of our intellectual appetites, we do not merely find ourselves in ho-hum possession of knowledge. When we grasp newfound understanding that once was absent, yet intently desired, we have gladness in our fulfillment. A craving appetite for knowledge can preoccupy us, prolonged difficulty in securing a desired intellectual good can pain us, and the presence of knowledge for which we longed can bring us joyful satisfaction.

There is a further reason why we should think about our desire to know as an appetite. Locating the desire for knowledge among our appetites helps us see that the desire for knowledge can be judged as better or worse. Appetites, after all, are not indiscriminately good. Some of them are good, of course. When our appetites are well motivated, seek fulfillment in appropriate objects, and pursue satisfaction in the right ways, then they are good. But when the "why," "what," and "how" of our desires go awry, our appetites become bad. We know this intuitively, for we make routine judgments about which of our appetites deserve approbation and which deserve censure. As I enter mid-life with its slackening metabolism, for instance, I may not *do* the right thing vis-à-vis my late-night appetite for tortilla chips and salsa, but I almost always *think* of it as a craving best denied.

Intellectual appetites, too, are not indiscriminately good. Christians worthily accede to some kinds of intellectual appetite.

> By clarifying the "why," "what," and "how" which are at stake when we display CURIOSITAS and STUDIOSITAS, we can see what Christians through the ages have seen: satisfying the desire for knowledge is an opportunity for sin and for grace.

However, some forms and objects of knowledge, pursued in the grip of particular kinds of intellectual appetite, are simply sinful. St. Augustine tells the story of his dear friend Alypius who, despite himself, was captivated by the sounds of violent gladiatorial combat in the Roman Coliseum, opened his eyes, and greedily feasted them on the cruelty unfolding before him. To his shame, Alypius succumbed to a powerful impetus to know

what was transpiring on the great field below. His longing was fulfilled, yet he left the Coliseum having given way to an unworthy intellectual appetite.[3] We find the paradigmatic instance of intellectual appetite gone awry in the Garden of Eden. Beholding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and under the insidious influence of the serpent, "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, [and] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6, ESV).[4] The desire to know is not good without qualification, and thinking of intellectual desire as an appetite can help us remember that we must exercise discernment in fulfilling it.

The language of *appetite* helps us attend to another helpful set of truths. Wayward appetites may be flatly refused. Indeed, among less-than-fully-virtuous folks (in whose company I stand), they often must be agonizingly resisted. Of course, we also can unthinkingly and automatically satisfy our appetites, both the necessary and good ones as well as the trivial and wicked ones. We can even take measures to cherish and coddle our appetites. Not only can we desire something, we can desire a deepening of our desire. Appetites can be nurtured and increased, so that they loom larger and stamp their imprint all the more deeply on our lives.

Put another way, appetites stand within a larger pattern of judgments and habits that give them more or less purchase upon our lives. When we unrelentingly crave something, it is almost always a desire to which we have made ourselves available in the past. Through habitual openness to an appetite, and certainly by routinely satisfying an appetite, we increase its hold on us, giving it near complete mastery over us in extreme cases. Although we may typically think of *physical* appetites as powerful influences in our lives, the fact is that *intellectual* appetites operate similarly. We can decrease or increase the intensity of our appetite to know something by habitually denying or satisfying it.

TWO KINDS OF INTELLECTUAL APPETITE

Curiositas and *studiositas* name two strikingly different kinds of intellectual appetite. In Christian moral theology, *curiositas* is the name given to a sinful form of intellectual appetite; s*tudiositas* identifies a praiseworthy form of appetite for knowledge. The two appetites are different in why they desire knowledge, what they desire in seeking knowledge, and how they dispose us toward knowledge. That is, *curiositas* and *studiositas* have different purposes, seek different things, and occupy different worlds.

Let me take the "why," "what," and "how" of the two kinds of intellectual appetite in turn, following Paul Griffiths' excellent analysis of curiosity and studiousness. With the virtual world of smartphones in view, we can then explore some questions about how participation in a life of technologically enabled mobile connectivity might dispose us more or less toward curiosity and studiousness.

First, the motivations and purposes—the *why*—underlying the two kinds of intellectual appetite differ. As Griffiths writes, "Both intellectual appetites seek knowledge: that is what makes them forms of intellectual appetite. But they do so with different purposes: where curiosity wants possession, studiousness seeks participation."[5] In the clearest instances of curiosity, the control of knowledge for one's own purposes looms large. The curious are motivated by the desire to possess, conquer, own, and sequester for private purposes an intellectual good that could benefit others, but which the curious claim instead for themselves. By contrast, the studious desire "participatory intimacy" with knowledge. They delight in the joy of creaturely proximity to truth, regarding it as an inexhaustible good not diminished in the least when others share in it. In fact, studious persons know that sharing together in a common apprehension of the truth enriches everyone's delight in knowing.

Second, *what* the curious seek is profoundly different from what the studious seek. Griffiths helpfully limns what he calls "the deepest contrast between curiosity and studiousness," the kind of world that each inhabits. "The curious inhabit a world of objects, which can be sequestered and possessed; the studious inhabit a world of gifts…" (p. 22). Those in the grip of *curiositas* see and know things in the world as mere things, as objects out there to be taken as one's own. Bending in a different direction, those formed by *studiositas* see and know the world around them as constituted not by things, but by gifts.

Understanding the different worlds inhabited by the curious and the studious is crucially important. As Iris Murdoch writes, "*How we see our situation is itself, already, a moral activity*,"[6] and "I can only choose within the world that I can *see*."[7] Because the curious see only *objects* in the world, their purposes and choices range toward conquest, possession, and ownership. How jarringly out of tune such

> In Christian moral theology, CURIOSITAS names a sinful form of intellectual appetite; STUDIOSITAS identifies a praiseworthy appetite for knowledge. The two appetites have different purposes, seek different things, and occupy different worlds.

purposes are in a world that is understood as grace-filled, as full of God's good *gifts*! Conquerors do not receive or celebrate gifts, and neither do the merely curious. They can feel important in owning or in knowing something that nobody else possesses. For them, though, delighting in something that is graciously shared comes, if at all, with difficulty. But in a way of being that is a world apart from the curious, the studious can and do delight in a

created order that, as they see it, is a plenitude of gifts to discern, cherish, and know intently. As Griffiths writes, "the cosmos and its constituents are without remainder divine gift…and [they are], from beginning to end, saturated with God's glory, radiant with God's light, made beautiful by God's caress, given to its givees with entreaty to see it and to rejoice in it for what it is" (p. 73). The studious see that world of gifts, and they long to understand those gifts borne of God's goodness.

> A smartphone connected to the Internet is the ideal technology for cultivating and satisfying sinful CURIOSITAS. We might even wonder if prudence calls us to resist the virtual lives they make possible.

Third, how the two appetites orient us toward knowledge differs. "Curiosity," Griffiths tells us, "is concerned with novelty: curious people want to know what they do not yet know, ideally what no one yet knows" (p. 22). *Curiositas* causes us to chase after whatever "news" no one else yet possesses. By laying unique claim to knowledge of the latest developments, the curious seek to prove, both to themselves and others, their superiority. *Curiositas* also underwrites a tendency toward loquacity, Griffiths maintains. The "curious need not only to know, but to be known as knowers" (p. 218); unsurprisingly, then, the curious enjoy speaking about what they know that no one else knows, marking them out as *au courant* and publicly registering their possession of information, news, or gossip that no one else yet knows. Not only do the curious long for novelty and tend toward loquacity, but most of all their intellectual appetite savors a spectacle. Although I cannot adequately address the nature of the spectacular here, I can gesture toward its problems by once more letting Griffiths speak: "The spectacle is the icon's reversed image. It is a sensible array characterized principally by damage: damage in what it depicts, and damage, too, in the way it is received and understood and used" (p. 199). When we behold a spectacle, we encounter something that God does not intend, we typically see less than what is truly there, and we all too quickly exhaust our interest in it. Alypius' appetite for the violent sights of the Coliseum provides an apt example, though we regrettably do not have to look far for other examples. Sights of the sin-wracked damage of God's good gifts, along with our diminishment in seeking knowledge of them, characterize curiosity's appetite for spectacles.

Studiositas differs in every relevant way in how it orients us toward knowledge. "Studious people seek knowledge with the awareness that novelty is not what counts," not least of all because God already knows everything that we could know, and what we happen to learn we appre-

hend as a matter of God's good gifts (p. 22). More than that, the studious prefer repeated, deepening encounters with what they can always know only partially. They strive for an intimacy of understanding that is borne of oft-repeated experience with the same thing. In addition, because the studious have little concern to be known as knowers, they have no cause to broadcast their grip on the truth, preferring instead either silence or else the "studious stammer," which Griffiths calls a "figure for speech whose acknowledgement of its insufficiency to the topic is evident on its surface" (p. 218). Finally, the studious look not for spectacles, but instead for the true icon, a beautiful array that "beckons the gaze into something deeper than itself by opening its surface beauties…into something much more beautiful than itself, which is to say into the inner-trinitarian economy in which it participates as icon" (p. 192).

Our awareness of how *curiositas* and *studiositas* embrace different purposes, worlds, and practices can help us exercise self-critical judgment over our intellectual appetites. Given that not all appetites are good, we need to know which intellectual appetites to encourage and fulfill, as well as which ones to curb. In particular, we have good reasons to regard *curiositas* as a primary form of errant intellectual appetite. In the curious person's desire to possess endlessly new knowledge and exhibit it proudly, and even more in the appetite for the bizarre spectacle, he or she falls short of intellectual appetite ordered to the love of God. Thus aware of the lure of curiosity, we must make prudent decisions about how to nurture an appetite for the right sort of knowledge. We might even wonder if prudence calls us to resist the virtual lives made possible by smartphones.

CURIOSITAS, STUDIOSITAS, AND SMARTPHONES

A smartphone connected to the Internet is the ideal technology for cultivating and satisfying *curiositas*. These pocket-sized gadgets provide easy access to new knowledge on demand, so that a hunger for novelty finds endless fodder, inadequate though it is for real intellectual sustenance. Androids, Blackberries, and iPhones also present ample opportunity to be known as in the loop, so much so that simply sporting one implies the possession of knowledge. Someone carrying the latest smartphone model, after all, must be smart—right? Around my workplace, dueling iPhone users are ubiquitous, each one reporting to the other the *even more recently posted* Facebook entry, blog comment, or random news item. Smartphone savants, by and large, cannot keep silent about what they know. And if those pernicious habits were not enough to make us wary about virtual lives, the heartbreaking images of desecration and desolation all too readily conjured up by smartphones should do so. That they give us spectacles far more readily than icons is worrisome.

Smartphones often underwrite a way of being in the world that is more concerned with objects than gifts. Too often they are themselves objects to

which their owners bear a possessive relationship, and they stand in the way of their owners' enjoyment of the divinely superintended beneficence that characterizes our gift-laden existence. Sun-lit skies, songbirds' melodious celebrations, and friendly sidewalk greetings receive little notice by those in thrall to their smartphones. The curious, with their deformed intellectual appetites, want to know what *they* want to know; openness to the wisdom one acquires in graciously welcoming a self-transcendent gift is beyond them.

An intellectual appetite for endlessly new knowledge, possessed for one's private gain and proudly displayed to oneself and others, certainly seems the kind of thing that a smartphone renders likely, if not inevitable. Yet I ultimately do not want to say that perpetual mobile connectivity must be spiritually distracting or deforming. *Curiositas*, with its powerful, disordered love for knowledge, tempted God's faithful long before Steve Jobs presented the world with its first iPhones. While smartphones may increase the number of occasions for *curiositas* and uniquely intensify one's appetite for vain knowledge, getting rid of them will not eliminate *curiositas*.

In fact, the ubiquitous temptation to *curiositas* that our new technology presents can, paradoxically, help us. Because smartphones are such obvious instruments for sating curiosity about anything and everything, they can make us more aware of the need for discernment about our intellectual appetites. Apparent risks prompt us to cautiousness where hidden hazards naturally do not. Thus, because we know that mounting the high steps of a ladder is inherently risky, we ensure the ladder legs are well supported and we take deliberate steps. When we are healthy and fit, by contrast, we seldom think twice about rushing up or down a stairway. Entering the virtual world should be for us more like cautiously using a ladder rather than fearlessly dashing down the stairs. As long as we see how high the stakes are, and provided we appreciate how perilous virtual life can be, an Android or a Blackberry can be a useful tool.

We ought also to remember that iPads, netbooks, and smartphones are tools that can be put to good use. Especially when traveling, I use my iPad to search, read, and study Scripture. It can access virtually anything on the Internet, including the issue of *Christian Reflection* containing these very words. It gives me pictures of nature and works of art that, under the aegis of *studiositas*, inspire my contemplative gratitude to God. In tandem with a Dropbox account, my iPad allows me to review my lecture notes, read my colleagues' work, and make progress on my latest scholarly article. All of these activities, hopefully oriented toward *studiositas*, may be undertaken readily and well through the technology we now have.

Well-formed Christian disciples bear the marks of longing for redemption through Jesus and the peace of God's kingdom. Along with everything else it encompasses, that hope-filled yearning should be reflected in well-ordered intellectual appetites. Because we long for the right ordering of all our loves, we must pay attention to our intellectual appetites. We should

desire to know certain things but not others. We should cherish knowledge for particular reasons but not others. We should take satisfaction in fulfilling some intellectual appetites but not others. Whether virtual life helps or hinders Christian formation depends on why we pursue it, the kinds of things we seek in it, and the ways we inhabit it.

We do well to remember that all vices take something that is potentially good and ruin it by loving it inordinately. *Curiositas* takes our natural appetite for knowledge and distorts its motivations, objects, and modes. In doing so, *curiositas* recapitulates a theme that runs through every form of errant desire. All of the vices share "the same familiar prideful pattern: a quest to provide happiness for ourselves through whatever god-substitute we choose — pleasure, approval, wealth, power, status," Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung reminds us. "We are not willing to let God be in control, so we refuse to keep these goods in their place and accept them as gifts from his hand."[8] By developing habits of *studiositas* rather than *curiositas* — especially when wielding potent tools such as smartphones — we can see God's love more clearly in the graciously given gifts that we receive, seek to understand, and embrace as goods that direct us back to delight in God alone.

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by W. D. Ross, in The Complete Works of Aristotle, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 980a20.

2 Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 94. In this section I follow Griffiths' discussion in chapter 7, "Appetite."

3 Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.8, translated by F. J. Sheed and edited by Michael P. Foley, second edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006).

4 Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

5 Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite*, 21-22. Further page citations will be in the text.

6 Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 315.

7 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971; reprinted New York: Routledge, 2001), 35-36.

8 Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 183.

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Technological Prudence: What the Amish Can Teach Us

BY KEVIN D. MILLER

The Amish have managed for a century to keep phone technology in check to foster a sense of community that we yearn for in our electronically tethered and frenetically paced lives. How might we leverage this power of the air to subject it to the purposes of God's kingdom?

Nathan Yoder, an Amish farmer in his thirties near Grantsville, Maryland, milks cows and drives a horse and buggy. He does not own a car, a computer, or a cell phone. But he does own a tractor for some operations, shares a landline telephone with two other nearby Amish families (located two walking minutes from his house), and even hires an "English" neighbor with a van to "hull" his young family to other states to visit relatives and friends.

Such selective use of technology can seem maddeningly inconsistent to outsiders. But there is logic behind it—and one that makes increasing sense to modern Americans as we grapple with our relationship to technology and its hegemonic tendency in our lives. Whatever the apparent inconsistencies, the Amish have managed to keep technology in check, and in doing so they have fostered a sense of community that many of us yearn for in our electronically tethered and frenetically paced lives. It's not that we are not connected—280 million Americans out of a population of 307 million have a cell phone, not to mention Facebook and Twitter accounts—but we still find ourselves inwardly yearning for *that something* the Amish seem to possess in their lack and which we lack in our possessing: the serenity, the quietness, the sense of knowing where one belongs in a defined community.

Some moderns, as a result, are making feeble attempts to unplug from the grid. A *BusinessWeek* article lists notables who have stopped owning or carrying cell phones and smartphones, including the billionaire owner of the New Jersey Nets, Mikhail Prokhorov, investor Warren Buffett, and PBS talk show host Tavis Smiley. The article confirms the "worldly" dangers of cell phone technology that the Amish object to: thirty-three percent in a national survey admitted to breaking up with someone by text or email, fifteen percent said they suspended lovemaking to take a call or a text, and twenty percent of iPhone owners admitted to watching pornography on their smartphones.[1]

But not all of us are watching porn on our iPhones in solipsistic closets, and even the Amish are grappling with how to make modern electronic gadgetry serve relationships rather than sever them. So it is important in Amish-and-technology discussions to avoid falling into a common false dichotomy—to either romanticize as ideal or dismiss as hopelessly compromised the accommodation that Nathan Yoder and over 200,000 people in North American Amish communities have struck with modern technologies like the telephone in all its permutations. I propose that a more fruitful line of conversation begins by asking what we moderns might learn from the Amish and their attempts to control technology, and then re-contextualize those principles for our habitus. It may also be that the Amish will need to learn from our best practices using technology to foster community as social and economic forces challenge and reframe the Amish compromise with the telephone and other high-tech tools in this age of rapidly evolving electronic communication.

<p style="text-align:center">◈</p>

Context—including historical context—shapes what cell phones and other electronic devices mean to relationships and community structures. Nathan Yoder is my third cousin. The reason I own a cell phone and he doesn't stems from the differing church membership choices our respective great-grandmothers (who were sisters) made in 1895 when their congregation split between a stricter "old older" and those accepting more modern technologies and theological tenets (such as evangelism, which the Old Order Amish reject). As a result of that church split in Grantsville, Maryland, I was raised decades later hearing the ring of a kitchen telephone in my Conservative ("Amish" was in the name until 1957) Mennonite home. Nathan's Old Order Amish home not only lacked that ring but also the sound of the radio (which we had, but not a television).

Of course, that 1895 church schism ran deeper than just the question of owning Alexander Graham Bell's recently invented talking device. It included, for example, deeper differences about how and by whom decisions were made concerning telephones and other modern inventions like the automobile. Thus, in the Conservative Mennonite Conference today members decide

to own a cell phone without consulting the will of the congregation first, but members of Nathan's church submit to asking for the church's permission for such an acquisition.

It is an understatement to say that most Americans do not want their purchasing decisions subject to such oversight. And yet it is this very practice of discernment and discipleship in the Amish church order—grounded in an ecclesiology structured to produce full accountability between individual members in the church and the will and discernment of the larger group—that has allowed the Old Order Amish to control and manage technologies across an amazing breadth of time and geography. One can find these plain "brethren" living simple, unwired lives not only in the eastern states (where they first settled when immigrating from Europe as early as the 1730s to escape military conscription and to find new farm land) but also in regions ranging as far west as Colorado, to Canada in the north, and to Mexico and Belize in the southern stretches of the North American continent.

> Getting rid of one's cell phone does not an Amish make. Imitation by degree is not the answer. The lesson to be learned does not lie in the number of mobile devices one is connected to or disconnected from.

Given the huge cultural and religious gap between these pre-moderns and us postmoderns, what of true relevance can be learned from them in our ultra-wired lives? The *BusinessWeek* celebrities giving up cell phones even as they jet about the globe with members of their entourages (who are, as the article pointed out, carrying Blackberries if their VIP should need one) cannot really approximate the simplicity and communality of the Amish made possible by their tight control of technology. Getting rid of one's cell phone does not an Amish make. Imitation by degree is not the answer. The lesson to be learned does not lie in the number of mobile devices one is connected to or disconnected from. I propose it lies instead in what might be called the "life narratives" Nathan Yoder and the Amish purposefully and religiously lead that a jet-setting Mikhail Prokhorov or any typical modern person cannot cohabit—unless they undergo a major conversion in their relationship to time.

For the Amish, there is a steadfast determination to make technology fit what anthropologists call relational time. The ancient Greeks and the Apostle Paul (in Titus 1:1-3; also Galatians 4:4) called it *kairos*, or "ripeness," time. When we zip past an Amish buggy on a Holmes County, Ohio, or Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, road, it hits us that our modern time is on a different wavelength than the time those Amish in our rearview mirror are experiencing. Ours is a trajectory of time shaped like an arrow. *Chronos* time gets us

"there" quickly and efficiently but just as often leaves us feeling as if *there* is nowhere. There was little joy in the journey; our existence is reduced to a ride down a conveyor belt we have been dumped upon and will be dumped off at the end of the production line.

If philosophers like Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor are right, humans make their lives meaningful by giving the events in them a narrative structure, which Ricoeur calls the "emplotment" of time, or making time "meaningful."[2] A diet high in chronological time leaves us undernourished and craving the richer fiber of *kairos* time. Or to switch metaphors, we fill the void of broken relationships and isolation with pornography, always titillating but never ultimately satisfying, its greatest allure perhaps being not the content it offers but temporary amnesia it provides to our aching loneliness and hunger for communion. That longing is for an existence that transcends the ticking of the mechanical clock—a device that first came into common usage in the fourteenth century and was arguably as formative of modernity as the printing press.[3] Spiritually we realize that the less *kairos* wholeness that we experience in our relationships and schedules and the more we are in tutelage to the god *chronos* (and its cousin mammon), the more our life stories feel plot-less, which is to say, pointless. Cell phones and laptops and iPads, and the very mobility of these devices—the constancy and immediacy of their demand for our attention and their parasitic attendance on our very persons—leave us feeling lost in the moral topography of our lives. We do not feel Sabbath or shalom or whole. We instead feel…a vibration in our pockets.

But telephones themselves are not evil, are they? Is it not our relationship to them that is of moral significance? That answer to these questions leads us to the specific lesson the Amish (an unlikely people group for this topic) can teach us about the latest smart mobile devices and how we should think of them in relation to our socially constructed selves. A look at their complicated and varied relationship with the telephone in the last hundred years and up to the newest cell phone app suggests to us values and approaches we might apply in our own dance with modernity and from our side of the digital divide.

The first point is that the history of the telephone and the plain people has always been fluid and negotiated and never a settled matter. Life narratives—even Amish ones—are elastic and unfolding, not static and set in stone. What is hopeful here, then, is that there are multiple practices we can employ to make technology serve humanity rather than humanity serve technology. The Amish teach us that these practices can and must be adapted over time and in different situations with the advent of new technologies.

There is more than a touch of irony in the fact that a century ago a number of Amish were among the early creators and stockholders of emerging telephone companies. The *New Holland Clarion* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) in

1891 reported that farmers in the area "have established among themselves a telephone system covering eight or ten miles of wire, the wire used being barbed wire fences. The middle wire of the fence is used, and the farmers are able to converse with each other without difficulty."[4] In what would become the Conestoga Telegraph and Telegraph Company by 1902, Amish Mennonite farmer Aaron K. Stoltzfus connected fifteen homesteads by wire.[5] Most of these homes, Diane Zimmerman Umble recounts in her book *Holding the Line: The Telephone in Old Order Mennonite and Amish Life*, were between Amish Mennonite farms.

What was the immediate reaction of the Amish congregations to these innovators? Nothing. A decade would elapse before an Old Order Amish congregation formally pronounced a ban on the telephone. By then (1910), some Amish families had already installed telephones in their homes.[6] By comparison, Lancaster County Old Order *Mennonites* (horse-and-buggy Mennonites, but direct descendents in the Menno Simons line and not from the Jacob Ammon tradition) prohibited only ministers from owning telephones while members could opt to have a single phone in their homes. By 1950, most Old Order *Amish* districts had adjusted their Ordnung (the oral tradition of community rules and practices) to allow their members, including ministers, to own a telephone if it was shared by multiple families and located away from the house. (They are often located in a stand-alone shanty that outsiders mistake for an Amish outhouse.)

To this day the Old Order Amish still prohibit landline telephones inside their homes. Cell phones, on the other hand, are being informally accepted in some communities for some uses. The Maryland districts of the Old Order Amish I am most closely acquainted with strictly prohibit cell phones. Yet Stephen Nolt, a historian and interpreter of the Amish to the outside world, observes that with the Old Order Amish in northern Indiana cell phones are commonly used by young people who have not yet joined the church, but that even for church members the picture is increasingly mixed. In some more progressive districts in northern Indiana, he notes, cell phones are permitted for use by business people, while in more conservative districts they are prohibited. "It happens that the more progressive districts are geographically clustered around Shipshewana where a good deal of the tourist trade is located, with the effect that it's probably more common for outsiders to see Amish people with cell phones here. In other words, the Amish who have the most exposure are disproportionately cell-phone owners, which can give a skewed picture of the whole settlement to someone visiting the area if they only visit the Shipshewana area."[7] He adds anecdotal stories of Amish adult children purchasing a cell phone for an aging parent who might need to dial 911.

Another increasingly common accommodation of the phone is hooking up landline telephones in sheds or booths next to woodworking and metalworking shops, sometimes even inside them.[8] This trend reflects the economic reality of

many Old Order Amish having been forced out of farming by the scarcity of land and into small business ventures, where business transactions depend on phone connections with "English" customers and vendors. By contrast, New Order Amish groups—which emerged out of Old Order congregations who rejected the New Order's evangelical emphasis on "new birth"— have from their beginnings in the 1960s and 70s allowed telephones in the homes of members if their usage was limited. And in the 1990s, the 1910 Old Order Mennonite compromise in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which restricted church leaders from having a phone in their homes, was lifted for most congregations.

This quick historical survey of telephone usage among the Amish demonstrates that a plastic rather than rigid posture toward innovations allowed these groups to successfully leverage the telephone as a tool for maintaining community rather than ripping its fabric apart. Flexible traditionalism, as opposed to a rigid dogmatism, kept their traditions and communities alive and pliable. I found this logic present in the idiomatic answers to questions I put to a brother named Moses and a sister named Nancy, both in their early twenties and members of the Old Order Amish community where Nathan Yoder lives. Why can't telephones be in your homes? I asked bluntly. "If you walk a quarter mile," Moses told me, "you don't use it as much." Did they ever wish they had a cell phone? "What you never had you never miss," Moses answered. Nancy added: "The phone itself isn't wrong. It's about keeping with simplicity. Without a phone, there's more quietness. Once you jump to one thing, you then jump to another. You never stop. So before something new is accepted, we think about it for a while. Everything is decided through the voice of the church."

Nancy's reasoning was confirmed by a bishop of a New Order Amish congregation, even though his district has allowed a single telephone per home since the church district became New Order in 1964. "The

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misuse of something is what makes it wrong," he told me. "The phone can lead to idle and foolish talk, which the apostle Paul warns against." Cell phones, he added, were not prohibited, but the newer smart phones "have become a problem for our congregations" since they play videos and connect to the Internet. His congregations were presently considering banning video- and internet-connected cell phones. He noted that they were already

actively "discouraging" texting among their young people since texting involves so many "slang words." "We see that as another kind of idle and foolish talk that could also lead to the younger losing the German language."

<center>◈</center>

The sociologist Donald Kraybill explains that the conditional acceptance of modern technology by the Amish is, in fact, an ongoing negotiation around the Ordnung. What guides the discussion is the ultimate interest in keeping sacrosanct the form of community the Amish see as mandated in Scripture and which has been handed down to the present from their European Anabaptist forebears of the sixteenth century. Kraybill identifies several Amish values and positions that have allowed them to control technology rather than letting it control them.

First, the Amish through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century have managed to *keep birth, work, play, education, worship, friendship, and death in (or close to) the home*, even as each of these societal functions have become specialized and regimented to separate spheres by moderns in the form of "birthing centers, fitness spas, day care centers, schools, grooming salons, factories, hospitals, golf courses, hospices, and funeral homes."[9]

The Amish *emphasize commonality*. That is why Nathan Yoder and every man in his congregation dress the same and do not have telephones in their homes. Modernity in its pluralistic ethos, by contrast, is held together by diversity (e.g., what color laptop do you want?).

The Amish *nurture relationships that are "local, enduring, and stable"* while modernity, with its discontinuity in social life, leaves us often with social ties that are temporary and transitory.[10]

The Amish *order their church districts as loose federations* and *shun artificial approaches to planning families or careers* as opposed to the highly rationalized and future-oriented modernity with its propensity for controlling physical and social relationships through hierarchical bureaucracies.

Similarly, the Amish order themselves to *free individuals from choice*. This rings contradictory to the modern person who sees choice as an individual human right, though this often leaves us feeling paralyzed by the lack of calling in our lives.

The Amish, unlike the modern, seek to *safeguard "the predictability that undergirds traditional cultures*, which are regulated by seasonal routines, customary norms, and fatalistic views."[11] Individualism is the keystone to modernity, Kraybill explains, and a characteristic the Amish particularly resist in its excesses.

These principles are abstract enough to allow for varied applications, not only within plain communities but also modernist ones. All new technologies acquire over time and through trial and error an emerging social etiquette, and there are signs of our own worldly Ordnung forming to protect our online identity and humanity in its more meaningful, narrative forms.

A *New York Times* article with the surprising headline "Tell-All Generation Learns to Keep Things Offline" reports on teen and young adults having second thoughts about tell-all Facebook postings. Unlike even five years earlier, a majority of young adults—the generation that pioneered "sexting" through cell phone and social networking sites—now mirrors the percentage of adults their parents' ages who are concerned about their online footprints and reputations.[12] In *Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology*, Yale and MIT graduate Eric Brende describes how he and his young wife, disillusioned with the corporate rate race and in pursuit of a more sane life, learned to live off the land and off the electric grid among a group of Amish and plain people he calls "the Minimists." He soon came to the realization that in our modern information-saturated society, "the human brain is treated as just another processing device."[13] He found these Amish were not against tools per se, but deeply cautious of *automated* machinery. The extent automation is constrained from a community, the members of that group are made interdependent and the threads of the community remain interwoven.

These are examples of the e-generation recovering balance and re-calibrating chronological time to human time. Even as I type these words, I viewed the first Facebook post on my wall from my mother, an eighty-two-year-old covering-wearing Mennonite who just opened a Facebook account and admits to finding the technology hard to master. One of my young nephews warned her in a teasing manner about becoming addicted to social networking. Her reply: "Your Grandma is not smart enough to get addicted. I do however want to connect with my children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and friends of Flint years. My desire is to use it for good."

I do not know how soon or if ever I will be able to text Nathan Yoder to ask how milking is going. The challenge we face on a planet where mobile phone subscriptions are projected

> All emerging technologies acquire through trial and error an emerging social etiquette, and there are signs of our own worldly Ordnung forming to protect our online identity and humanity in its more meaningful, narrative forms.

to reach five billion by the end of 2010 (when the world population is 6.9 billion) is to leverage this electronic connectivity in ways that create rather than destroy community.[14] Drawing from the theological ethics of John Howard Yoder (who draws on the work of Hendrik Berkof), one might frame the question this way: How might we leverage this power of the air to subject it to the just and good purposes of the kingdom of God?[15]

Cell phones have been used to photograph and instantly transmit abuses by police in Iranian street protests. In developing countries, poor people employ cell phones to gain information and as a form of currency for the first time. Social networking sites are being used to connect grandmas with their families and to organize for the good. These are indicators of how the modern permutations of the telephone can foster not alienation, but community.

NOTES

1 Joel Stein, "America's Most Exclusive Club," *Bloomberg BusinessWeek,* August 5, 2010, *www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_33/b4191077620370.htm* (accessed November 12, 2010).

2 See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1 (Time & Narrative)* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1990), and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

3 Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains," *The Atlantic*, July/August 2008, *www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/6868/* (accessed November 12, 2010).

4 Diane Zimmerman Umble, *Holding the Line: The Telephone in the Old Order Mennonite and Amish Life* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 64.

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6 Umble, *Holding the Line*, 113.

7 Personal email, July 30, 2010.

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9 Donald B. Kraybill, "The Amish Encounter with Modernity," in *The Amish Struggle with Modernity*, edited by Donald B. Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 21-34, here citing 25.

10 Ibid., 26.

11 Ibid., 31.

12 Laura M. Holson, "Tell-All Generation Learns to Keep Things Offline," *New York Times*, May 8, 2001, *www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/fashion/09privacy.html* (accessed November 12, 2010).

13 Eric Brende, *Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology (New York:* HarperCollins, 2005), 67.

14 Lance Whitney, "Cell Phone Subscriptions to Hit 5 Billion Globally," *CNet.com,* February 16, 2010, *http://reviews.cnet.com/8301-13970_7-10454065-78.html,* (accessed November 12, 2010).

15 See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972) and Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, translated by John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977 [1953]).

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Faithful Criticism of Popular Media Technologies

BY ROBERT H. WOODS JR.

AND PAUL D. PATTON

What values and biases are inherent in each communication technology? How do they affect one's relationship with God, oneself, others, and the environment? These questions help us recognize the significant relationship between the content we consume and the delivery systems that bring it to us.

The Sherpas know intimately the face of Mount Everest, but only as seen from their home valley. Sometimes when climbers show them a different side of the mountain, they refuse at first to believe. How could it possibly be the same mountain from a different angle? But they are moved emotionally, and their disbelief eventually turns to amazement at the revelation that their timeworn mountain can open to them in a new way.[1]

So it is with most Christian media use and criticism, driven both by belief and disbelief, the familiar and unfamiliar. Christian critiques of media focus only on one side of the mountain. On this side, popular media *content* matters most when it comes to influencing our culture. They think that media technologies (or channels that carry communication) are neutral—albeit powerful—channels of communication that simply transmit news and entertainment to eager audiences.

But from the other side of the mountain, media technologies are seen as more than just neutral. Rather, they are value-laden human constructions that send their own messages in addition to the actual news or entertainment they carry. Each technology influences the way people think about themselves

and interact with others and institutions in society. On this new side of the mountain, media technology, as well as media content, is a cultural creation and therefore falls within the critic's scope of analysis.

In this article, we argue that technology *is* culture. Just as popular media content reflects the values of its writers and producers, so too do popular media technologies themselves reflect the values of their human creators. Each communication technology has values — or things it considers valuable — apart from the messages it sends that influence individuals and societies. Also, each technology — whether radio, film, or computers — has its own unique language (or grammar) that gives distinct shape and bias to its messages.

More important, perhaps, a particular technology's values and biases present additional opportunities for faithful Christian critique and media stewardship. Therefore, in approaching any popular media technology critically, we need to ask some basic questions: What values and biases are inherent in each medium? How do such values and biases affect one's relationship with God, with oneself, with others, and with the environment? These questions allow us to critique popular media in fresh ways, recognizing the significant relationship between the content we consume and the delivery systems that bring it to us.

TECHNOLOGY IS NOT NEUTRAL

Generally speaking, with some notable exceptions, Evangelicals pay little attention to the media technology itself.[2] Many suggest that technology is neutral, meaning it is morally neutral, or amoral. They believe that technology, like rocks and trees, is soulless; only humans have souls and are capable of sin. Accordingly, what makes a particular technology good or bad is the actual use to which it is directed. It is good in the hands of good people and bad in the hands of bad people. Although much has been written to demonstrate that technology is not neutral, we can best serve our readers by offering a simple but helpful explanation of two foundational ideas.

First, a belief in technological neutrality confuses inanimate objects in nature with objects created by human beings. Popular media technologies are human creations and as such are cultural artifacts, or products, that nurture the values and biases of their human inventors. For instance, personal computers were created by people like Bill Gates, who valued organizing vast amounts of information, sending messages (at high speeds), and connecting individuals and businesses worldwide. Thus, regardless of the actual messages sent, computers nurture efficiency, information sharing, speed, and globalization. These values are the additional *message* of the computer system that accompanies any content, regardless of whose hands the system is in.

Computers indeed consist of soulless microchips and motherboards, but the values they nurture still affect human life and consciousness in positive and negative ways. For instance, computers let us organize and send vast amounts of information, but also encourage *informationism* — an almost religious "faith

in the collection and dissemination of information as a route to social prog-
ress and personal happiness."[3] Computers create jobs and allow us to work
efficiently, but research demonstrates that heavy users typically communi-
cate differently from the rest of us. And despite our reported "global village"
sense of belonging, our collective sense seems to be that community is dimin-
ishing rather than increasing. As one critic put it, "The planet is falling pre-
cipitately [abruptly] apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same
moment," a phenomenon described as "McWorld."[4]

Second, although technology does not speak directly, it has its own lan-
guage apart from the content it delivers. By language we mean that each
communication technology has its own unique way of capturing and pre-
senting reality to audiences that involves a structural bias in its communica-
tion. In this sense, the potential of any technology is limited not just by social
institutions or by its human operators, but by the very language of the tech-
nology itself.

For instance, we cannot watch radio—its bandwidth is too narrow to
carry pictures. We can only listen to it. Theater requires a different kind of
acting than film or television does. In most instances, the theater audience
is far away from the actors' faces. Audience members must be told in a loud
voice what is going on, and plot movements must be marked vividly rather
than gently shaded by subtle facial expressions. And filmmakers must decide
whether their work will be released in its original format or reformatted to
fit the different aspect ratio of the television set. If reformatted, it loses some
of its original image quality; if not reformatted, images may be too small for
people at home to see adequately.

We agree that a communicator's message may be aimed at improving
or demeaning the human condition whether it is carried by voice, print, or
electronic technology. We also acknowledge that technology is not determi-
native: our computers or cell phones do not make us do anything. People
still act or fail to act based on their interpretation of certain messages. Despite
these acknowledgments, however, we maintain that technology is not neutral.
It clearly affects how messages are constructed and delivered, and it shapes
the individuals who are immersed in its use. It is helpful, then, to view
faithful media criticism as a type of social criticism that addresses not only
(1) the *content* of media itself, and how such content affects individuals, groups,
and organizations in society, but also (2) the communication *technology* (or
channels) that distribute songs, novels, newspapers, movies, and other cul-
tural products or artifacts to large numbers of people in society.[5]

As a way to encourage additional analysis of technology beyond these
pages, we illustrate the key concepts presented thus far as they relate to
television. We demonstrate how television's inherent values and biases
ultimately interact with the messages it sends, and how understanding its
unique technological properties help us to make better, more discerning
choices about which content to consume.

TELEVISION VALUES

Although each medium needs to be understood and critiqued, we chose television for several reasons. First, television continues to be the most influential popular media in the United States more than sixty years since it first became commercially viable. Second, in recent years, smaller, more portable, and less expensive video equipment has led to an explosion in new programming by mainstream and independent producers. Third, despite ever-increasing picture quality and media convergence — or the appearance of older media on the new media channels — television retains its key values and distinguishing properties.[6] Finally, as the reigning champion among evangelical media, television is an excellent candidate for analysis and critique.[7]

When it comes to television's inherent biases, television values images over words and encourages us to think that seeing — more than reading or hearing — is believing. It also can weaken our imaginative capacities. Unlike books, television does the imaginative work for us: it pictures the castle, shows us the landscape, and draws the detailed contours of the protagonist's face. Over time, under the guise of the least effort principle, we may come to accept and even prefer the imagination of others over our own.

Television for the most part is "visually hyperactive": it values the dramatic cut and short commercial over the long-term event.[8] Television thus values interruption rather than continuity or sustained reflection, such as that found in a Mozart symphony. Imagine an orchestra stopping every seven minutes so the conductor can pitch his sponsors' latest products!

As we watch television, our attention is attracted to the images on the screen more than to others in the room. The bursts of color ignited with every scene change and camera angle change draw the attention of the viewer much like the flames of a campfire draw the visual focus of those gathered around it. But unlike the campfire, there is typically no conversation around the television by its viewers. Faces are glued to the screen and drawn away from family members and friends.

Finally, television encourages physical inactivity. As we watch and enjoy our favorite sporting event, for instance, we are discouraged from practicing the sport we are watching. Television's very popularity is built upon the vicarious experiences it offers, from sports teams to soap operas. The phrase *couch potato* refers to individuals who spend too much time in sedentary activities, such as watching television or playing computer games.

Hence, the values inherent in television include image over word, visual interruption, interpersonal distraction, and physical inactivity. Over time, these values can subtly influence our interactions with others, including our desire for face-to-face interaction in community and the world around us.

TELEVISION LANGUAGE

In addition, each technology has its own unique language, or way of capturing and presenting reality. Television's unique language, or iconogra-

phy, includes at least two properties that are specific to this medium: intimacy and immediacy.

Television is inherently an intimate medium. Compared with other dramatic media, television emphasizes intimacy and accentuates characters and personalities over ideas and propositions. In fact, the face is the image that television captures best. It fits the size of the TV screen and overcomes issues related to picture resolution. Most fine details on television are lost — even with a high-definition quality picture — unlike on film, which gives us a view of the wider world.[9] With its huge screen, film is perfectly suited for Civil War epics, panoramas, the sea, and so forth.

The small screen's constraints force producers to develop the drama by concentrating on characters' faces and trusting them to unfold the beauty and depth of the human personality in all its complexities. A television actor's facial expressions are as important as the dialogue in interpreting the actor's character. Television's visual scale grants a level of privacy unavailable elsewhere and thereby demands a believable performance. Vivid and highly professional acting over the history of television accounts for nearly all those series most highly rated for quality — *Hill Street Blues*, *M*A*S*H*, *The West Wing*, and *Law and Order*, to name a few.

Not surprisingly, given television's emphasis on characters' faces, it often creates the illusion of face-to-face interaction between individual viewers and people on the screen. Because of the close-ups of faces and private content, many viewers feel they have a personal relationship with certain characters — a phenomenon that researchers refer to as para-social interaction (PSI).[10] On the positive side, the illusion of intimacy makes for good television by providing characters that audiences can connect with along the dramatic journey. On the negative side, it leads some to find interaction with real-life characters less rewarding than interaction with television personas. It further accounts for powerful personality cults that form around mainstream celebrities.

> The values inherent in television include image over word, visual interruption, interpersonal distraction, and physical inactivity. These can influence our desire for face-to-face interaction in community and the world around us.

The same effect occurs among audiences of various Christian programs. Thanks to television's inherent intimacy, even when it is not intended, viewers often feel as if they know Joel, Joyce, Kenneth, Pat, Robert, Charles, and T. D. (Do you recognize any of these personalities?) Media personalities may not seek to promote their own personality cults, but their use of the medium counteracts even their best of intentions.

Television is inherently an immediate communication technology. Some of the most powerful moments in television programming have been live transmissions—the funeral of assassinated President John F. Kennedy, the moonwalk, O. J. Simpson's trial, 9/11, the Iraq War, and Barack Obama's inauguration, to name just a few.

Partly due to the multi-camera setup and the instantaneous switching capacity from one angle to another, television captures immediacy and eventfulness; its portrayal of reality often coincides with a particular event's origination. John F. Kennedy's burial did not take place in Arlington Cemetery alone, but in the living rooms, bus terminals, and town squares of the world. Because of television, his "casket did not ride down Pennsylvania Avenue only. It rode down Main Street."[11] Television made the land mines in Iraq explode in our own backyards. And because of television, we were at ground zero for 9/11 as helpless victims jumped from the smoke-filled Twin Towers. Television has the tremendous advantage of enabling us to participate in events as they occur. As one critic explained, each shot provides the viewer with a "God's eye view" that is always front and center.[12]

Sometimes television's immediacy is used purposefully to increase viewership: Princess Diana's royal wedding or a "very special live episode" of our favorite show during sweeps week. Celebrities and activist groups alike regularly leverage live media coverage of staged events not only to spread the word about their causes but to connect immediately and emotionally with potential supporters. Similarly, in the hands of certain religious communicators, immediacy can narrowly serve personal or institutional agendas. Television creates a sense of visual immediacy even when—much like intimacy—it is not intended, communicating televangelists as power-brokers over empires, for example, and audiences as members of their world-wide congregations.

These brief examples of some of television's technological properties illustrate the potency of technological biases. These biases place limits on television's symbolic capacity, or the way it captures and presents reality to its audiences. Audiences, for better or worse, are affected by these biases as they interpret content and assign meaning to certain events. The challenge for faithful critics, then, is to respond creatively and imaginatively to a medium's inherent biases, or its symbolic limitations, in ways that promote peace and justice.[13]

CONCLUSION

Back on Mount Everest with the Sherpas: what you once perhaps took for granted now appears fresh. What was once unfamiliar now appears familiar, even if you cannot yet fully grasp its splendor. In any case, it is clear that things are not always as they appear. Tired from the journey? Perhaps. Intrigued enough to keep exploring? We hope so.

Media content is an easy target for Christians, and for good reason. Concerns about the coarsening of cultural life through excessive displays of sex

and violence are legitimate. But the technologies that deliver the content are also made by human beings, and as such reflect human values, desires, and aspirations. Each communication technology has its own unique DNA, or characteristic predispositions that shape human communication. Playing video games is fun, but it may desensitize us to the lasting consequences of our choices. Television delivers important news and rich entertainment, but it encourages us to think that seeing is believing. In short, each technology comes with benefits and burdens apart from the content it delivers.

For now, remember that developing technological literacy begins by asking some basic questions: What values and biases are inherent in each medium? And how do such values and biases affect one's relationship with God, with oneself, with others, and with the environment? To the extent that we understand the inherent potential and limits of any particular technology, we open up its redemptive possibilities—whether as critics, consumers, or creators of popular media and technology.

The goal of our brief expedition was not to exhaust every nook or cranny of television's technological landscape. In actuality, we only scratched the surface of one particular medium. But if our bird's-eye view of both sides of the mountain planted a seed compelling enough to convince you to take further expeditions on your own, then our journey, at least for the time being, was a success.[14]

NOTES

1 Jacob Bronowski tells the story of the Sherpas in *Science and Human Values*, revised edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1965 [1956]), 30-31.

2 Recent notable exceptions include Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), and *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009); Quentin J. Schultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002); and Tex Sample, *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998).

3 Schultze, *Habits of the High Tech Heart*, 21.

4 Benjamin R. Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld," *Atlantic Monthly* 269:3 (March 1992), 53-63, here citing 53. Available online at *www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/3882/* (accessed December 7, 2010).

5 Elsewhere, we explain that faithful media criticism must also consider "the practices and process of various social *institutions* that surround and regulate the channels of communication and determine how and when content is delivered." See Robert H. Woods Jr. and Paul D. Patton, *Prophetically Incorrect: A Christian Introduction to Media Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), chapter 1, here citing 13.

6 The medium of television has evolved since its inception in the late 1940s not only in screen size (which now varies from fifty-inch flat screens to palm-sized models) but also in its interfacing with other communication media (e.g., in viewer voting by phone for reality television contestants, shopping online, or downloading television programming to view on computer). Such interfacing, we suggest, intensifies television's inherent properties of intimacy and immediacy. For an introduction to the wildly changing media

convergence landscape, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

7 Several sources have critiqued how religious television shapes culture and how culture shapes religious television, for better or worse. For example, see Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977); Quentin J. Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), and *Redeeming Television: How TV Changes Christians—How Christians Can Change TV* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

8 Schultze, *Redeeming Television*, 86.

9 We recognize that with high definition (HD), news stations must now find more graphic content to fill the sides of the screen and background. And, in dramatic programming with HD production, set designers must now pay closer attention to props and scenery. Yet it is unlikely that increased attention to such superfluous elements as a result of HD will detract from television's bias toward a character's face. News and dramatic television are still driven by personalities and characters. It is more likely that HD will bring increased attention to the lines and subtle expressions visible on a character's face.

10 Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl introduced the term "para-social interaction" (PSI) for the perceived relationship of friendship or intimacy by a media consumer with a remote media "persona" in "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observation on Intimacy at a Distance," *Psychiatry* 19:3 (1956), 215-229.

11 *Newsweek*, December 9, 1963, 88.

12 Thomas de Zengotita, *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 7.

13 For now, space precludes us from exploring such responses in detail. The interested reader should consult the last half of Woods and Patton, *Prophetically Incorrect*, 113-119.

14 This article is drawn from chapters 1 and 7 of our book, *Prophetically Incorrect: A Christian Introduction to Media Criticism*. Much of the material in chapter 7 was adapted from material authored by Clifford Christians that originally appeared in Quentin J. Schultze, ed., *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 331-336.

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❧ Other Voices ❦

In the first quarter of 2009, five million people joined Facebook *every week*…. In a very short period of time (five years), a very large population (several hundred million and counting) has been synchronized (pulled into the orbit of a single Web platform called Facebook). And what kind of gravity is capable of accomplishing such a feat?

The human need for *home*.

JESSE RICE, *The Church of Facebook®: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* **(2009)**

Nearly two-thirds of online Americans use the Internet for faith-related reasons. … [T]he majority of the online faithful are there for personal spiritual reasons, including seeking outside their own traditions, but they are also deeply grounded in those traditions, and this Internet activity supplements their ties to traditional institutions, rather than moving them away from church…. Faith-related activity online is a supplement to, rather than a substitute for offline religious life.

"FAITH ONLINE," *Pew Internet & American Life Project* **(April 7, 2004)**

[A]bout every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur. When that mighty upheaval happens, history shows us, there are always at least three consistent results or corollary events.

First, a new, more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity which up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self…. The third result is of equal, if not greater significance, though. That is, every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread—and been spread—dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas….

It would, quite literally, be impossible to exaggerate the central importance to the Great Emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web. By the same token and in absolutely analogous ways, it would be impossible to overstate the importance to the Great Reformation of the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1440 and his subsequent development of movable type and oil-based inks.

PHYLLIS TICKLE, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* **(2008)**

Bringing religion into the global arena, online religion ensures that humanity's religious acumen is kept alive and positions that heritage to maximize its relevance for future generations. Most important, for all the risks entailed, the wisdom Web pages and holy hyperlinks that are the stuff of online religion possess the potential to make a unique contribution to global fellowship in the frequently volatile area of interreligious understanding. Fueling the trend that widespread mobility began, cyberspace diminishes the relevance of location for religious identity. As it widens the social foundation of religious life, cyberspace erodes the basis from which religion contributes to the destructive dynamics of xenophobia. In the process, it lessens potential interreligious hatred.

BRENDA E. BRASHER, *Give Me That Online Religion* **(2001)**

The phrase "digital divide" refers to the gap between those who have access to cyberspace and those who do not. Sometimes the gap is caused by physical limitations, such as no access to computers or the Internet. But the gap also includes the skills necessary to use cyber-technologies. Many schools around the world lack resources for teaching basic computer skills that the industrialized West takes for granted. The divide is evident in the rich versus poor, urban versus rural, educated versus uneducated, able-bodied versus disabled, and somewhat even in gender differences. Language is also an issue since English dominates cyberspace. For Christians, the digital divide ought to be an important social justice issue.

QUENTIN J. SCHULTZE, *"Following Pilgrims into Cyberspace"* **(2008)**

As virtual reality becomes less virtual and more real, more and more people—especially youth—will choose this kind of ignorance: a life lived inside movies and games rather than in families and schools and relationships and jobs.

TONY JONES, *"Liberated by Reality," Books and Culture* **(September-October 1999)**

Fear is very much part of the climate of Facebook. When we are afraid of what people think of us, we work hard to craft just the right image composed of just the right pictures, personal information, and status updates. We position and reposition the spotlights on our Facebook portraits to reflect our most interesting side. The emphasis is on being clever, not on being genuine…. Unfortunately cleverness has the lifespan of a sickly gnat.

JESSE RICE, *The Church of Facebook®: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* **(2009)**

There's no escape from having to do with each other, which is our torment and our salvation. Nevertheless, the transactional efficiency of the Net can be seen as giving us practice in ignoring. We learn to conduct ourselves as if no one were there on the other end of the transaction—no one we needed to reckon with….

Everything depends on our ability to find occasions for more deeply personalized transactions to counter the ever more pervasive mechanized ones, thereby keeping a grip upon our humanity….

We can seize every opportunity to deepen our engagement with persons wherever such engagement is still an option. This does not necessarily mean investing huge energies in making our online encounters as intense and fully dimensioned as possible (although such an exercise will always bear fruit). It may make at least as much sense to minimize online engagements in the interest of those all too intense (and all too easily neglected) relationships in our immediate physical environment. In any case, the point is to achieve a meeting of persons, as opposed to a kind of semi-automated engagement with mere words. Strategies such as these, I believe, offer the most straightforward answer one can give to the question "How can we make the Net a healthy part of society?"

STEVE TALBOTT, *Devices of the Soul: Battling for Our Selves in an Age of Machines* (2007)

It's not a coincidence that the term *distracted* once referred not just to a loss or dilution of attention but also to confusion, mental imbalance, and even madness. It's all too easy to spend much of your life in such an unfocused, mixed-up condition, rushing toward the chimera of a better time and place to tune in and, well, be alive. It's the fashion to blame the Internet and computers, cell phones and cable TV for this diffused, fragmented state of mind, but our seductive machines are not at fault. The real problem is that we don't appreciate our own ability to use attention to select and create truly satisfying experience. Instead of exercising this potential, we too often take the lazy way out, settle for less, and squander our mental money and precious time on whatever captures our awareness willy-nilly, no matter how disappointing the consequences.

WINIFRED GALLAGER, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life* (2009)

North Americans are largely unreflective, voracious consumers of cyber-novelty and informational trivia. We have naively convinced ourselves that cyber-innovations will automatically improve society and make us better people, regardless of how we use them. The benefits of information technologies depend on how responsibly we understand, develop, and employ them in the service of venerable notions of the meaning and purpose of life.

QUENTIN J. SCHULTZE, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (2002)

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is only available in the print version of
Christian Reflection.

Edward Hopper's NEW YORK MOVIE creates an alternate
reality that begins in the physical world of New York
City but ends inside the soul of the viewer.

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), NEW YORK MOVIE (1939). Oil on canvas. 36½" x 45". New York, The Museum of Modern Art. Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

The Field of Experience and Sensation

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Like many of Edward Hopper's paintings, *New York Movie* (p. 40) and *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* (p. 43) appeal to a wide audience, evoking from viewers differing interpretations relevant to their experiences in America's large cities. In essence, Hopper's paintings create an alternate reality, a place that begins in the physical world of New York City but ends inside the soul of the individual viewer. The paintings touch a sensitivity within each of us that may elicit quite diverse thematic interpretations—of isolation and loneliness, or constructive solitude and meditative reflection—at different times in our lives.

Edward Hopper was not born in the big city, but he spent a majority of his professional life working there. He is from my hometown, the small Hudson River town of Nyack, which is about thirty miles north of New York City. The house where he and his sister were born has never left the Hopper family. Today it has been restored to serve as a community cultural center and a gallery space that maintains the famous artist's memory.[1]

When he graduated from Nyack High School, Hopper moved to New York City in 1900 for art instruction, but he commuted to Nyack on weekends to teach drawing classes in his family's home. Because his parents wanted him to study commercial illustration in order to have a more secure economic future in fine art, he began by taking coursework at the Correspondence School of Illustrating (1899–1900). He continued to study illustration at the New York School of Art (1900-1906), but turned to study painting and drawing after only a year. Hopper took classes from the American Impressionist painter William Merit Chase (1849-1916), but he strongly preferred to study with Robert Henri (1865-1929), a leading figure in the Ash Can School of artists who painted gritty realistic images of the poorer neighborhoods in the city.[2] When he finished his studies at the New York School of Art in the fall of 1906, Hopper made his first trip to Europe to examine first-hand the artwork there, visiting Paris, London, Harlem, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Brussels. He made two other trips to Europe. These trips had an enormous influence on his art. He especially enjoyed painting *en plein air*, as the

Impressionists did. He continued to read French Symbolist poetry and emulated French painters, including Edgar Degas (1834-1917).

In 1910, Hopper moved to a room on East 59th Street in New York City. After selling his first painting in 1913, he purchased a larger apartment and studio, Number 3 Washington Square North in Greenwich Village, where he lived until he died. He worked as an illustrator for several trade magazines and painted in his free time. Yet, he detested illustration to the point that he would not discuss it in his later life. Hopper began exhibiting his work in 1908, and sold his first painting in 1913 at the International Exhibition of Modern Art—the famous "Armory Show" that introduced the work of many contemporary modern painters.

In 1924, Hopper married the painter and actress, Josephine Nivison, whom he had known in art school. She served as a model in many of his drawings and paintings. They spent their summers on the coasts of New England, and many of Hopper's works depict scenes from places they vacationed, especially on Cape Cod and in Gloucester, Massachusetts. But most of his subjects are drawn from locations near his home and studio in New York City. The two paintings illustrated here reflect daily life of New Yorkers in locations still popular today—a movie theater and a cafe.

◈

Hopper was able to capture a moment and incorporate a personal context that spoke to many viewers. A keen observer of the people and situations surrounding him, he was especially intrigued with the City's ability to isolate its inhabitants.

For instance, Hopper enjoyed going to see a film with friends, but the subject of *New York Movie* (p. 40) is not the film or fellowship with friends, but a blonde usherette who stands, deep in thought, leaning against the wall positioned on the right side of the composition. Two moviegoers are seated separately. These three figures share a common space, but they do not interact with each other. The viewer, however, is immediately concerned with the usherette who raises her right hand to her chin as in thought and reflection. To her right is a stairway, presumably leading up and out of the main theater area. The painting is organized with strong verticals: the slender usherette, the curtains, the yellow spiral column, and the walls to the right of the seated moviegoers. The large square lights receding towards the stage and film screen convey the depth of the theatre space. There are eight rows of seats, clearly painted in deep red velvet, which further help our understanding of the vast space.

City life evokes an anonymity and, perhaps, resulting loneliness that this scene explores. Hopper believed that great art expressed an artist's "inner life" which he described as "a vast and varied realm." Yet he did not identify this inner realm with the sense of social isolation that critics

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Sᴜɴʟɪɢʜᴛ ɪɴ ᴀ Cᴀꜰᴇᴛᴇʀɪᴀ draws viewers to weave a scenario to explain the relationship between the figures who sit in unexplained isolation from one another. Hopper's image remains mysterious, an invitation for viewers into a virtual reality they imagine.

Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Sᴜɴʟɪɢʜᴛ ɪɴ ᴀ Cᴀꜰᴇᴛᴇʀɪᴀ (1958). Oil on canvas. 40 3/16" x 60 ⅛". New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery. Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark. Photo: © Yale University Art Gallery / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

find in this painting. In diaries that Jo Hopper kept about her husband and his paintings, she notes that Hopper spent much time in a state of reflection, "so enjoy[ing] his inner life, he can get on fine without interruption from other humans." The solitary figures in Hopper's paintings may well be evocations of such contented solitude, rather than the loneliness so often cited in discussion of his work. Hopper stated that his primary subject was "the field of experience and sensation which neither literature nor a purely plastic art deals with."[3]

This work is contemporary with the Surrealist movement, which valued surprising, fantastic imagery in art. André Breton (1896-1966), a leading poet and theorist of the movement, wrote about this painting soon after the Museum of Modern Art acquired it in 1941, "The beautiful young woman, lost in a dream beyond the confounding things happening to others, the heavy mythical column, the three lights of *New York Movie*, seem charged with a symbolical significance which seeks a way out of the curtained stairway."[4]

⬧

Hopper enjoyed going to urban restaurants; he sketched such a scene when he was only fourteen years old. In *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* (p. 43), Hopper depicts just two figures: a woman sitting at a table by the window, and a man sitting to her left who raises his hand towards her but does not speak. The woman tilts her head ever so slightly to be aware of the man, but her attention is focused on her hands. The sunlight enters the cafeteria from the empty street outside on a diagonal and moves us from one side (that of the woman) in the direction of the man. There is an unspoken uneasiness in this painting because the two figures share the same space in a close proximity, but remain in unexplained isolation from one another.

In September 1958, Hopper wrote to his patron, Stephen Clark: "I'm very pleased that you have acquired my picture, *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*. I think it's one of my very best pictures."[5]

The image draws viewers to weave some scenario or other to explain the relationship between the woman and man. (Indeed, a Brooklyn playwright Anna Ziegler has written a one-act play *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* in which she imagines the two characters in this painting coming to life and talking to each other.[6]) Yet each scenario will be a personal narrative that is more indicative of the moment and emotional life of the viewer than of the artist and his painted figures. Thus, Hopper's image remains mysterious, an invitation for viewers into a virtual reality they imagine.

NOTES

 1 For more information on the Edward Hopper House Art Center in Nyack, New York, please see *www.hopperhouse.org* (accessed December 2, 2010).

2 Gail Levin, "Hopper, Edward," Grove Art Online, *www.groveart.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu* (accessed November 4, 2010). For more information on the life and work of Edward Hopper, see the other publications by art historian Gail Levin, especially *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980); *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1998); and *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonnè*, three volumes (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

3 Pamela N. Koob, "States of Being: Edward Hopper and Symbolist Aesthetics," *American Art* 18:3 (Autumn, 2004), 52-77, here citing 63. Available online *www.journals. uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/427532* (accessed December 2, 2010).

4 Gail Levin, "Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, Surrealism, and the War," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 22:2 (1966), 181-195, 200, here citing 181-182.
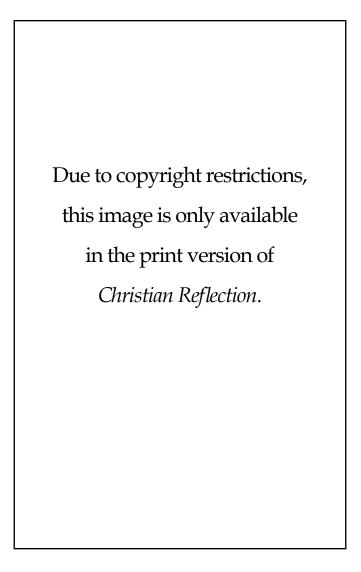
5 "Edward Hopper, Sunlight in a Cafeteria," Yale University Art Gallery online, *artgallery.yale.edu* (accessed November 4, 2010).

6 Anna Ziegler, *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*, produced by Dina Leytes and Gbenga Akinnagbe as part of the playwright's "Under the Influence" at the Tank, New York City, May 2010.

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In CRUCIFIXION (CORPUS HYPERCUBUS), Salvador Dalí reveals a spiritual side that is not what we expect of his flamboyant public persona.

Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), CRUCIFIXION (CORPUS HYPERCUBUS) (1954). Oil on canvas. 194.5 x 124 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

Prayer in a
Fourth Dimension

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Best known for his Surrealist paintings, the Spanish artist Salvador Dalí returned to themes of religion—his mother was Roman Catholic, his father was an atheist—science, and philosophy during the last forty years of his life. The *Corpus Hypercubus*, renamed *Crucifixion* when it became part of the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1955, is one of the artist's most famous paintings from this later period.

When Dalí was born, his parents named him in memory of a recently deceased brother. The brother, Salvador, had been only twenty-two months old when he died. This had a profound effect on the artist as a child. His early understanding of himself was as "a reply, a double, an absence," Dalí reported in 1970.[1] Throughout his life, then, in many respects he imagined an alternate reality, a virtual life.

Dalí was considered a successful Surrealist painter between 1922 and 1948. However, the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, inspired him to take his art in a new direction. "The atomic explosion of 6 August [1945] shook me seismically," Dalí wrote. "Thenceforth, the atom was my favourite food for thought."[2] During World War II he had lived in New York City. When he returned to Europe in 1948, he completed his disassociation from the Surrealists and reinvented himself and his art.

In an essay "Mystical Manifesto" (1951), Dalí introduced the concept of "nuclear mysticism," his new theory of art that combined religion, mathematics, science, and Catalan culture in an attempt to revive classical values and techniques. The next year he did a lecture tour in America to promote nuclear mysticism.

Crucifixion (*Corpus Hypercubus*) exhibits many elements of the new theory. Dalí employs a traditional Christian motif of Christ's crucifixion being meditated upon as in a vision, yet the cross is formed by an unfolding octahedral hypercube (a four-dimensional cube). The artist's metaphysical, transcendent cubism is based on the *Treatise on Cubic Form* by Juan de Herrera (c. 1532-1597), the architect and builder of Philip II's royal palace in Madrid. It is also influenced by the *Ars Magna* of the Catalonian philosopher and alchemist Raymond Llulle (1232-1315). Dalí's wife, Gala, stands on the "human level" of the

painting. The bay of Port Lligat, where Dalí had purchased a house and lived most of his adult life, can be seen in the background. An appreciative Christian reviewer of that day wrote of this painting: "critics of religious art have viewed with comprehension and approval what appears to be a sincere effort to express traditional values in forms consistent with modern art. Dalí offers this *Crucifixion* as 'an affirmation of the reality of prayer in a…perplexed atomic age.'"[3]

Through the artwork of his later years, Dalí was able to come to terms with his own "surreal" tendencies and his belief in God. His use of mathematics and science furthered that discovery and investigation. The later works reveal a spiritual side of the artist that is not what we expect of his flamboyant public persona.[4]

NOTES

1 Salvador Dalí, *Dali par Dali de Draeger* (Paris, 1970; English translation, 1972), 92. See also, Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* (New York: The Dial Press, 1942).

2 D. Ades, *Dalí* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 174.

3 George A. Cevasco, "Dali's Christianized Surrealism," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review,* 45:180 (Winter, 1956), 437-442, here citing 440-441.

4 For more information on the artist's later works, see the exhibition "Dalí: The Late Works," August 7, 2010 – January 9, 2011, at the High Museum in Atlanta, GA; and Michael R. Taylor, *The Dalí Renaissance: New Perspectives on His Life and Art After 1940* (Philadelphia Museum of Art and New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008).

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Full of Love and Christian Virtue

ANN BELL WORLEY

Full of love and Christian virtue, may God's people always be
living out the new creation with faith, hope, and charity,
prudence to discern the truth, justice to give all their due,
fortitude to conquer fear, temperance toward earthly goods.

In a world that's ever-changing, you, O God, are constant still.
Help us in each age and season, your high purpose to fulfill:
dare us to embrace new boundaries, grounded in your liberty;
teach us how to be good neighbors, building true community.

Let us be a mindful people, walking in the way of Christ;
keep us from the base and shallow of a merely virtual life.
Meet us in our work and worship, at the table, with our friends;
usher us to life abundant with your love that never ends.

Full of Love
and Christian Virtue

ANN BELL WORLEY

C. HUBERT H. PARRY
(1848-1918)

Full of love and Chris-tian vir - tue, may God's peo - ple al - ways be
In a world that's e - ver-chang-ing, you, O God, are cons - tant still.
Let us be a mind-ful peo - ple, walk-ing in the way of Christ

liv - ing out the new cre - a - tion with faith, hope, and char-i - ty,
Help us in each age and sea - son, your high pur - pose to ful - fill:
keep us from the base and shal-low of a mere - ly vir-tual life.

pru - dence to dis - cern the truth ___ , jus - tice to give all their due,
dare us to em-brace new bound'ries, ground-ed in your li - ber - ty;
Meet us in our work and wor - ship, at the ta - ble, with our friends;

fort - i - tude to con - quer fear____, tem - per - ance toward earth-ly goods.
teach us   how to   be   good neigh-bors, build - ing   true   com - mun - i - ty.
u - sher   us   to   life   a - bun - dant with your   love   that ne - ver ends.

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Baylor University, Waco, TX

Tune: RUSTINGTON
8.7.8.7.D.

Worship Service

BY ANN BELL WORLEY

Prelude

Call to Worship: Psalm 8:3-5

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
>   the moon and the stars that you have established;
> what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
>   mortals that you care for them?
> Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
>   and crowned them with glory and honor.

Processional Hymn

"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (vv. 1-3)

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

All thy works with joy surround thee, Earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,
singing bird and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,
well-spring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother—all who live in love are thine;
teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

Henry van Dyke (1852-1933)
Tune: HYMN TO JOY

Pastoral Welcome

> We welcome you to this time of worship in the name of Jesus, the Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow, and who called his disciples "friends."
>
> His earthly ministry was in a different day—before friendship across continents was possible and "friending" became a casual verb. In our techno-savvy world we face new ways of living, yet life is still about relationships with God, ourselves, and our neighbors.
>
> So we gather as Christians to examine our virtual lives in light of God's call to virtuous living. May God open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to understand as we sing, reflect, and pray together as his friends.

Invocation

> Creator God,
>   the universe and all that it contains are yours.
>
> You formed us in your image,
>   giving us the ability and responsibility to continue
>   your work of creating.
>
> We celebrate the ingenuity behind the ever-evolving technologies
>   which have given birth to the virtual worlds
>   that are part of our common life.
>
> Acknowledging their amazing potential
>   for good and for ill,
>   we seek your guidance in their use.
>
> Give us clarity to examine
>   the virtual lives that they make possible,
>   and holy desire to live virtuously in and through them.
>
> Give us the searching questions
>   we must continually ask
>   if we are to follow faithfully
>   in the way of life and of your son.
>
> In Christ's name and through the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

The Witness of the Old Testament: Exodus 20:2-11

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

The Witness of the New Testament: Romans 12:1-2, 9-18

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Choral Anthem

"The Majesty and Glory of Your Name" [1]

Tom Fettke (1979)

The Witness of the Gospels: Matthew 7:1-5

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

Hymn of Invitation

"The Summons"[2]

[*Choir*]
Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

[*Women*]
Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

[*Men*]
Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

[*Choir*]
Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

[*All*]
Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

John L. Bell (1987)
Tune: KELVINGROVE, Scottish traditional, arranged by John L. Bell

Homily

"Virtual Lives, Virtuous Lives"[3]

Discipline of Silence

Prayers of the People

Let us pray to God for the Church and the world.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who find their livelihood and leisure in virtual technologies,
**that they may have the wisdom and will to use them properly,
in service of human life and creativity.**

For the poor, the simple, the disabled, and the old, and all who are left
behind in the digital divide,
**that they might find in the Church honor and dignity and partners
in social justice.**

For all who suffer from addiction, who are drawn away from the world
you created to a world of screens and images,
that they may rediscover the joys of life in flesh and blood.

For all who are weary from life without boundaries, between day and
night, work and play,
that they might know the blessing of sabbath rest.

For all who are lost in our wired world, who have grown passive,
reactive, and detached,
**that they might reconnect to the Source of life and find a renewed
sense of purpose serving God and neighbor.**

For all who hunger for friendship and community,
  and for all who feel alone,
    that they may find the love and acceptance they seek
      in the presence of God and the communion of saints.

For all who seek to follow the way of Christ and dwell meaningfully
  with others in the virtual realm,
    that they might be gracious and discerning,
      witnessing to the faith through their life and practice.

Ever-living and ever-loving God, hear the prayers of your people.
  Breathe your life into us that we might live the words we pray and
  that all who profess your name might be signs of your great love and
  presence in the world. **Amen.**

Passing of the Peace

Communion

The singing of songs, passing of the peace, and taking of Communion
are ancient traditions of the early church and part of our heritage as
Christians. When we come together in worship, we are practicing the
faith, that we might carry it with us to all of the communities where we
reside. Jesus calls us to the table, saying, "This is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love
than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12-13).

Hymn of Commitment

"Full of Love and Christian Virtue"

Full of love and Christian virtue, may God's people always be
living out the new creation with faith, hope, and charity,
prudence to discern the truth, justice to give all their due,
fortitude to conquer fear, temperance toward earthly goods.

In a world that's ever-changing, you, O God, are constant still.
Help us in each age and season, your high purpose to fulfill:
dare us to embrace new boundaries, grounded in your liberty;
teach us how to be good neighbors, building true community.

Let us be a mindful people, walking in the way of Christ;
keep us from the base and shallow of a merely virtual life.
Meet us in our work and worship, at the table, with our friends;
usher us to life abundant with your love that never ends.

Ann Bell Worley (2011)
Tune: RUSTINGTON
(pp. 49-51 of this volume)

Benediction: Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentle-
ness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about any-
thing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksiving let
your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which sur-
passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in
Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is
just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think
about these things.

Postlude

NOTES

1 *The Majesty and Glory of Your Name* (SSAA), words by Linda Lee Johnson and music by
Tom Fettke, copyright © 1979 Word Music. The text of this anthem is based on Psalm 8.

2 *The Summons* by John L. Bell. Copyright © 1987 by GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S.
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3 The homily is a reflection on modern technology and human virtues—the cardinal
virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and the theological virtues (faith,
hope, and charity).

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Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet

BY HEIDI A. CAMPBELL
AND PAUL EMERSON TEUSNER

As the Internet changes how we interact with one another, it transforms our understanding of authority by creating new positions of power, flattening traditional hierarchies, and providing new platforms that give voice to the voiceless. How is it reshaping Christian leadership and institutions of authority?

Since its emergence the Internet has often been presented as a revolutionary tool, transforming society in a myriad of ways, from how we do business, educate youth, perform our daily tasks, and even live out our religious lives. The Internet has become not only a tool facilitating new forms of network interactions, but an environment that is changing how we perceive and interact with one another. It is transforming our understanding of authority by creating new positions of power, flattening traditional hierarchies, and providing new platforms that give voice to the voiceless. The ability of the Internet to challenge traditional political, social, and even religious authorities has become an accepted assumption. As the diversity and breadth of Internet users has increased, more people have been given access to a global audience for their ideas, creating new sources of authority.

In this article we will explore how the Internet may alter our understanding of religious authority and the challenges this can pose to churches and Christian communities. We begin with a brief history of Christian attitudes and approaches towards the Internet as a technology and its uses by individuals and communities. Then we offer a model for considering the interplay between media use and changing patterns of authority, in order

to highlight key questions and challenges that Internet use brings to structures and institutions of authority in modern Christianity.

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INTERNET

Arguably, Christian computer enthusiasts were some of the first religious adopters and innovators of the Internet. In the 1980s hobbyists and computer professionals began to experiment with ways to use this new technology to facilitate religious conversation and interactions through email and BBS systems like Usenet. These forums gave space for individuals to debate spiritual issues and exchange prayer requests. In the 1990s, at the introduction of the World Wide Web, Christian groups produced Web sites and resources that offered online religious seekers new opportunities to learn about the faith. Christian email lists (such as the ecumenical email listserve Ecunet) and even virtual congregations or cyberchurches appeared online. While some of these online environments were electronically linked to offline groups who aimed to reproduce some aspects of conventional church life, there were other online churches that existed solely on the Internet with no equivalent structure offline.

The Internet also gave people new opportunities to spread their faith through what Andrew Careaga called "e-vangelism." His *E-vangelism: Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace* offered guidelines for creating witness-focused Web sites and doing evangelism in online chat rooms.[1] With the rise of Web 2.0, Christians continue to take their share their faith through new social media—making religious-themed group pages on Facebook and creating alternative spaces such as GodTube.com, a Christian version of the popular video-sharing site YouTube.

The Internet continues to provide Christians with new ways to explore religious beliefs and experiences through a growing number of Web sites, chat rooms, and email discussion groups dedicated to a variety of faith-related issues. These new opportunities are readily embraced by some, but met with skepticism by others. Christian scholars offer a variety of interpretations of the promises and perils posed by Internet technology. The spectrum of their critique of the Internet ranges from warnings about the potential seduction and deception of Internet technology and the virtual worlds it helps create, to enthusiastic advocacy of the Internet as an essential tool for Christian ministries.[2] In the middle are approaches that raise theological concerns while considering the benefits the Internet offers to religious community.[3]

For example, one notable criticism involves the potentially deceptive nature of the virtual realities created through disembodied interaction on the Internet. When we interact with one another through simulations formed by images on a computer screen, Graham Houston warns in *Virtual Morality*, we may lose touch with our faith that the reality and value of human beings are grounded in their creation in God's image.[4] In *Habits of the High-Tech Heart*, Quentin Schultze echoes this concern that the form of Internet inter-

actions can threaten genuine Christian community, communication, and reciprocity.[5]

Yet equally notable is the argument by some Christian theologians and computer executives that the Internet empowers people to reconnect with religious beliefs in postmodern society by providing them opportunities to explore spiritual time and space in electronic environments.[6] The Internet in some respects models the experience of pilgrimage through unknown lands to find and experience God or the sacred. Many would agree with Father Pierre Babin and Sister Angela Ann Zukowski that the challenges the Internet poses to the Church should not cause people of faith to shy away from the potential benefits that can come from sharing traditional presentations of the gospel with new technologies.[7]

While it is important to reflect on the debates over the potential influence of the Internet on Christian belief and practice, it is also important to consider the research scholars have undertaken regarding Christian practice online. In the past decade a growing number of empirical studies have examined the impact of the Internet on Christianity. For instance, Glenn Young shows that the different expressions of "Internet Christianity" surfacing online—ranging from providing traditional religious information and forms of Christian practice (such as online stations of the cross) to hosting virtual worship services—is not unconnected to offline Christianity.[8] Theologian Debbie Herring argues that an online Christian newsgroup may be understood as a community whose distinctive theological methods, doctrines, and praxis are closely linked to traditional theological sources and processes.[9] While the Internet provides Christians a new context for creating community and organic theology, it is still clearly connected to offline religion. Michael Laney's in-depth study of Christian Web site users shows they primarily employ the Internet to connect with information

> The spectrum of Christian critiques of the Internet ranges from warnings about the potential seduction and deception of Internet technology and the virtual worlds it helps create, to enthusiastic advocacy of the Internet as a tool for Christian ministries.

and establish relationships that reinforce personal beliefs.[10] Thus, the "faith factor" surfaces as a prime motivator and determinant of use, whether it leads to seeking religious information or a community of faith online.

What is crucial in all the discussions outlined above is that the Internet is not a value-neutral technology. The Internet has entered society with the promise of facilitating free speech and access to information. Some Christians

receive this promise with hope for the flourishing of the gospel message and for the promotion of justice and equality. Others fear the spread of false and harmful messages, and the promotion of behaviors that exacerbate social isolation and disconnection from local communities.

CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

One of the core concerns raised for religious groups by the Internet is how online engagement changes our understanding of religious authority. The discussions here are complex, in part because researchers pose the issue of "religious authority" in different ways. Is it a question of how the Internet may influence or subvert traditional religious hierarchies (e.g., denominational structures or theological training systems for clergy)? Is the Internet giving rise to new leaders who serve as religious interpreters of theological ideas or spiritual guides for groups? Do online texts mirror or re-frame traditional religious texts and systems of interpretation? How does online religious discourse transform people's understanding of commonly held Christian teaching, or of a specific group's religious identity?

Some scholars think the non-hierarchical nature of the Internet is a serious challenge to traditional religious structures. Lorne Dawson speculates that the Internet will result in the "proliferation of misinformation and disinformation" by opponents of particular religious groups or disgruntled insiders, the "loss of control over religious materials" by religious organizations, and provide "new opportunities for grassroots forms of witnessing" that encourage the rise of unofficial or alternative voices to traditional discourses.[11] In general, the Internet's potential to enable users to transcend time, geography, and traditional channels of protocol may encourage practices and discourses that bypass or subvert the authority of accepted religious structures or leaders. For example, offline religious organizations have expressed concern about bringing normally closed private policy or theological discussions of religious leaders into public Internet forums where new conclusions may arise that "stewards of the public image, would wish to deemphasize."[12] Some worry the Internet will create new religious authorities, such as the moderator of an online group being identified and treated as a legitimate spiritual authority by members of an online religious community.[13]

However, other research has questioned these assumptions and suggested the Internet may empower traditional religious authorities. Eileen Barker notes that certain religious organizations—namely, strongly hierarchical religious cults—infiltrate online groups in attempts to control information shared online or create alternative forums that reinforce their established structures.[14] In their study of Haredi Jewish communities in Israel, Karine Barzilai-Nahon and Gadi Barzilai find that elites can use the Internet to control information flow and access in several ways.[15] Religious leaders may bring public pressure on members who post information online that is perceived as hostile or challenging to the community, condemn the Internet publicly so that its

use is seen as a mark of rebellion against the community, and attempt to limit availability of technology required to access the Internet.

Some features of the Internet that have been identified as new challenges to religious authority are not really unique to this technology. The critiques of the Internet's potential influence on the Church strongly echo concerns, raised for decades, about the impact of television and especially televangelism. Some Christians welcomed television as potentially transforming evangelism and missions, anticipating that the "electronic church" would attract a mass audience for the gospel who could not otherwise be reached. Others feared that audience would "tune-in and drop-out" of offline church. Research has shown that neither is the case. Televangelism audiences are often comprised of religious conservatives who are marginalized in their local faith communities; religious broadcasts provide them with rituals through which they find a sense of purpose and belonging.[16] Thus, these viewers generally are not the "unreached"; rather, they often have a congregational affiliation. Mass media, then, can be readily used for religious purposes, but claims about its potential blessings and harms to traditional religious institutions have often been exaggerated.

Other features of the Internet provide truly distinctive opportunities or threats to religious institutions. The interactive nature of network technologies allows people not only to access alternative sources of information, but also to create their own news outlets through a variety of social media platforms like blogs and Twitter. Users can build social connections and foster relationships that are unlimited by traditional time and space constraints. Networked mobile technologies also allow people to be present in different ways in local gatherings; for instance, church members can use their iPhones to check their preacher's facts during a sermon.

> The Internet challenges traditional religious authority in several ways. It offers easy access to information, alternative spaces to report on and reinterpret leaders' claims, and opportunities to create new online rituals and social practices.

These new features of social media can pose a challenge for traditional authority in several ways. The Internet offers users easy access to information; they can seek answers to questions without having to go through traditional gatekeepers or interpreters of information, such as a pastor or youth group leader. It offers alternative spaces to discuss what leaders teach in church: members can use blogs to report on, critique, or reinterpret leaders' claims through their own theological lenses. Finally,

on the Internet members can create new online rituals and social practices to express their beliefs: in online Bible studies, prayer groups, and even cyberchurches they can reinvent church practices and spiritual disciplines.

These challenges to religious authority, however, need to be put into the larger context of changing social patterns and attitudes toward religious institutions in Western society. Even before the rise of the Internet, people's lifestyles were becoming increasingly mobile and they tended to identify less with a local congregation or Christian denomination. Increasingly their religious identities are tied to personalized networks of friends and acquaintances they know through telecommunication technologies, rather than to local religious communities bound together by geographic and family ties. Congregations exist in a marketplace of organizations, denominations, and associations that compete with one another to attract membership or gain a voice in the public sphere. Because the mass media play such a central role in that marketplace, religious authorities become answerable to the television and radio journalists who present them to viewers and listeners, to promote, criticize, or challenge their messages and authority.

While the Internet may be seen as a catalyst facilitating this pattern of change, in many respects it is just the newest component on the media landscape that shapes practices and patterns already emerging in the religious marketplace. So when considering what impact the Internet may have on the authority of people and structures in traditional religious institutions, we must think about why people seek information from sources outside their churches. We must also consider what attracts people to the Internet as a place to gain information and to connect with others, and why they choose some online sources over others.

THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET

Here we will focus on three ways that the Internet is transforming the authority of religious leaders and institutions.

The Internet is changing how we understand Christian community and, therefore, how we gain and maintain religious identity. As people connect online and form networks of relationships that extend beyond connections within congregations, the organizational structures of traditional denominations have less power in determining religious identities. Consider the following story as an example.

> Casey has recently moved to the area and is looking for a congregation to connect with. She was previously a member of a Baptist congregation in a different city, but spent a lot of time talking with people from other churches at *churchoffools.co.uk*. One of her online friends tells her about an Anglican church in her new neighborhood. There she meets some parishioners who ask her about her story. One parishioner asks her why she has not checked out the nearby Baptist church, or even Methodist church (knowing the *churchoffools.co.uk* is run by

the Methodist denomination in Great Britain). Casey responds, "Those words mean nothing to me."

The Internet fuels a challenge to the traditional hierarchical and familial understanding of community (held by the parishioner who asks about Casey's denominational affiliation). Casey, who connects with people from various Christian backgrounds both online and offline, considers her affiliation as more fluid, and less bound by a particular location and its history.

The words and actions of religious leaders are increasingly susceptible to scrutiny by alternative voices online. This is impacting the authority of leaders within churches offline. Arguably, it would be difficult for a person who has high standing in an offline church community to carry that authority into many online environments. The Internet favors certain discursive and symbolic practices that may seem alien in modern Christianity. Many social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, do not lend themselves to formal theological discourse as found in sermons. Small pieces of text, videos, and links to other online sources have become the currency of social interaction on these sites. Here is an extreme, but important example.

> Frustration and anger got the better of the Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne on an afternoon in 2006. Storming out of his cloister, he used all the strength in his voice and gestures to shoo away a group of young people who were loitering and skateboarding on the church's grounds. The young people reciprocated with taunts, apparently entertained by the old man's loss of composure. An argument ensued, and the priest resorted to racist and slanderous abuse against the group.[17] If this event had not been recorded on one young person's mobile camera, it would have fallen into obscurity, joining so many other ignored urban battles young people often experience in Australian cities. But in July 2007 it was discovered on YouTube, a popular video-file sharing site, by both domestic and overseas mainstream media journalists. The Dean's displayed behavior attracted criticism from the general public, and, despite the support of his colleagues in the archdiocese, he felt forced to resign from his post at the cathedral.[18]

This episode shows how online media platforms have become places for users to examine the authority of religious figures from a different perspective. In the age of television, many religious leaders have undergone scrutiny by journalists and presenters. In the online media era, anyone with a camera and access to YouTube is empowered to expose and criticize public figures.

Internet culture is challenging traditional Christian structures, especially those that appraise and correct theological knowledge. Just as the words and actions of religious leaders are susceptible to scrutiny by online sources,

so the Internet can create spaces for people to re-examine the doctrines, symbols, and practices of religious traditions. The following two stories may serve as illustrations.

> Megan is a member of a conservative Christian community. Since going to university she has developed a keen interest in eco-feminism. She started a personal Web log where she journals her thoughts on the relationship between faith, politics, and the environment. Through her blog she has had many conversations with like-minded Christians and has formed a group called "Three Places," a small network of bloggers who discuss common topics and share links to each other's sites. She is asked whether she feels more at home, or more supported in her faith development, at Three Places or in her local congregation. She answers, "I need both. My church makes me feel grounded, and the relationships are more real. But there are questions that I have that I can't ask at that church. The people I have met at Three Places are great, and it's really good to have that space to ask those questions. But all of our conversations are topic-based. It's not really church."

> Enrique is a priest at a small Catholic parish. One Sunday the number of attendees triples when the extended family of a child comes for his baptism. While Enrique conducts the ceremony, he notices that many of the visiting young people are texting on their mobile phones. He is perturbed by this because he thinks they are not really paying attention to him or their family. After the Mass, one of these young people approaches Enrique to talk about the ceremony. The youth mentions to him that he has sent one of Enrique's prayers to Twitter, and has received some responses from the young person's friends. One friend is concerned about the mention of Satan during the ceremony, so the youth asks Enrique why Satan is talked about in Catholic Masses. Enrique realizes that these young people, while texting, have been more attentive to the service than he presumed. Moreover, Enrique's audience during the ceremony has actually been larger than the number of people inside the church building, and involved in a conversation of which he could not be part.

For people like Megan, who may feel dissatisfied with church practices or at times unable to voice their opinions and concerns, the Internet offers an alternative place to examine Christian doctrine and practice. Enrique has discovered that the Internet offers a setting for interaction that is free from the constraints and control of religious authority.

REFLECTIONS ON AUTHORITY ONLINE

Issues of religious authority online are complex. As we have argued, it is not simply the presence of the Internet as new technology and the unique features it offers that creates challenges for religious community. It is how

Christians use these new technologies combined with larger cultural shifts in how religion is practiced in contemporary Western society that challenge traditional religious leaders, institutions, and patterns of religious life. Like newspapers, radio, and television, the Internet is another media platform for the public scrutiny of religious leaders and the exploration and critique of Christian practices and doctrines outside ecclesial control. The Internet also fuels an already shifting pattern of sociability among people for whom connections are fluid, mobile, and transcend space and time.

Yet the key challenge the Internet poses to traditional structures of religious authority is the democratization of knowledge online. The Internet not only increases access to alternative sources of religious information, but empowers people to contribute information, opinions, and experiences to public debates and conversations. This means Christians must develop new skills in technological literacy. They also need new skills of discernment to see how the Internet has created a new social sphere that facilitates spiritual interactions, establishes new authorities, and legitimizes practices for their community.

NOTES

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3 Douglas Groothuis's *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997) is representative of this mediating position.

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Making Moral Choices in Video Games

BY J. CAMERON MOORE

Video games can provide immersive experiences in fantasy stories of good and evil. As players become agents in their complex narrative arcs, they develop skills of moral perception and decision-making. More importantly, they may experience what J. R. R. Tolkien calls "eucatastrophe."

Should we treat video games—at least some of them—as objects of art worthy of serious study? We tend to dismiss all of them as silly and commercialized entertainments, as colossal wastes of their players' time. Yet, despite these common dismissive attitudes, there is a growing trend to take some of them seriously. They may provide not only new artistic possibilities as a form, but also a medium for exploring important ideas. In "Philosophical Game Design," Lars Konzack suggests the most interesting games are those that not only present "immersive experiences" but also express a "consequential philosophical system, a coherent cosmology."[1] Such video games, he thinks, can be platforms for thoughtful exploration of theories about the human self, the universe, and God.

Following Konzack, I take many video games seriously as works of art that express and explore philosophical ideas. Some games create elaborately imagined other worlds in which characters pursue intricate plot-paths that require important moral choices. I have in mind titles such as the *Fable* series and the *Mass Effect* series—role-playing games in which narrative progression by characters through a created world is a crucial element of the play.[2] These are an obvious place to begin in taking video gaming seriously, because among video games they are closest in structure and content to traditional literary fantasy.

Christian theories about the fantastic imagination can help us both appreciate and evaluate these video games. These theories were most fully developed by George McDonald (1824-1905) and G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), the so-called "proto-Inklings," and more recently among the Inklings themselves, especially C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) and J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973).[3] They offer a perspective from which we can articulate these video games' potential as an art form and critique particular examples and trends.

PRINCIPLES OF FANTASTIC IMAGINATION

These four writers, despite some important differences among them, agree on three fundamental principles of fantastic imagination. First, fantasy as an artistic endeavor allows us to participate in an act of secondary creation, which Tolkien calls "sub-creation." This art is so enjoyable precisely because sub-creation is proper to us as human beings. Second, as we enjoy fantastic sub-creation, our powers of perception and experience are broadened beyond normal reality. The best fantasy allows us to experience "eucatastrophe," the good ending drawn out of the midst of evil. This widened experience should lead us to greater appreciation of the actual world we inhabit. Finally, these writers agree, the same moral law holds in all worlds, created or sub-created. After briefly examining these defining principles of the fantastic imagination, I will consider how some role-playing video games take up these categories.

The construction of other worlds in imagination is not primary creation, it is sub-creation. Acts of fantastic imagination, which are appropriate to us as creatures made in the image of the creator God, are always grounded in and mirror God's own creative act. "We make still by the law in which we're made," Tolkien explains in a poem he addressed to Lewis in defense of myth-making.[4] Fantastic artists do not create *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing; rather they take up what Tolkien terms the "primary world," the actual world created by God, and refashion its materials to make coherent secondary worlds. Even though we have abused the privilege of sub-creation—as we have all the other privileges God has granted to us—"Fantasy remains a human right."

The creative act of fantastic imagination is not only for the world-maker; when secondary worlds have been well crafted, others can imaginatively enter into them in a consistent and believable fashion.[5] Importantly for Tolkien, participation in these secondary worlds allows us to experience eucatastrophe—the unexpected, final defeat of evil and victory of the good, which is an echo of the gospel.[6]

Fantasy involves creatures and events beyond the normal ken of our experience. It draws us into alien times and places that are inaccessible through any medium other than the imagination. Ancient writers could imagine their inaccessible lands were located at the Earth's antipodes—the opposite points on the globe from where humans lived—but since we have explored the entire planet, we must travel further afield to the distant stars

to locate our secondary worlds in places beyond our experience. This is why moderns developed the literary genres of science fiction and science fantasy, Lewis suggests.[7]

Because fantastic worlds can be structured much differently than the real world—for example, they need not share its natural physical laws—they can help us distinguish between what is necessary and what is merely contingent. "Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense," Chesterton writes, by which he means that fantastic worlds must obey necessary rational relationships even when they surprise us by violating our merely habituated certainties based on repeated perception.[8] Two and two always equal four in Fairyland (just like everywhere else), but the water may run uphill and the horses may fly. By calling attention in this way to the difference between the necessary and contingent elements in its secondary worlds, fantasy redirects our attention to what is contingent and wonderfully strange in the primary world.

Our sojourn in strange and fantastic secondary worlds should lead us back to engage the primary world with renewed appreciation. "[Fairy] tales say that apples were golden," Chesterton claims, "only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green."[9] We return from our travels in secondary worlds with renewed wonder and interest in the primary things of the world around us: stones, fields, and streams. As Tolkien puts it, "we should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses—and wolves."[10] Likewise, Lewis observes that Kenneth Grahame's classic story *The Wind in the Willows*, far from hindering our interaction with the real world, actually enables the simple pleasures of eating and companionship: "this excursion into the preposterous sends us back with renewed pleasure to the actual."[11]

> Christian theories of fantastic imagination—most fully developed by George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, and the Inklings—help us articulate video games' potential as a fantasy art form and critique particular examples and trends.

Finally, exploration of the other worlds of fantasy helps us recognize the moral fabric of the universe that holds everywhere. Moral truths are true, whether one is in Texas or the Shire. Fantasy stories need not be about moral truths (the best ones are not moralistic at all), but they must be faithful to those truths. MacDonald insists on this point in a brief essay "The

Fantastic Imagination." Artists may tinker with the laws of the natural world, provided they stick with the new ones they have imagined, but

> In the moral world it is different: there a man may clothe in new forms, and for this employ his imagination freely, but he must invent nothing. He may not, for any purpose, turn its laws upside down. He must not meddle with the relations of live souls. The laws of the spirit of man must hold, alike in this world and in any world he may invent.[12]

While the fantastic imagination legitimately imagines cities floating in mid-air and populated with rational creatures quite different from humans and angels, it must not imagine that the good is evil or an injustice is just. In this way sub-creation remains a free exercise of the creator's art, though it mirrors the moral aspects of the divine creation. Since we make by the moral "law" in which we are made, our creations ought to accord with the law that governs our own beings.[13]

ENTERING THE FANTASTIC IN VIDEO GAMES

MacDonald, Chesterton, Tolkien, and Lewis develop their theories of fantastic imagination in regard to literature. Indeed, Tolkien specifically argues that literature as opposed to visual art or drama is the best form for fantasy. Nevertheless, we can draw insights from their theories to evaluate fantasy in those video games that develop what Tolkien calls a secondary world—a whole system of fantastic creatures and events into which "both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside."[14] Many video games create secondary worlds that give players, in the language of game advertising, an "immersive experience."

Tolkien believes fantasy is better realized in literature than in visual art forms because stories require much more imaginative participation from the audience. Literary authors create only the skeletons of secondary worlds and their readers must flesh out these landscapes in their minds. Each reader's imagination cooperates with the author's to create a final vision, which becomes, insofar as the reader has participated in it, incredibly personal. Thus, Tolkien claims that literary fantasy is both "more universal and more poignantly particular" than visual fantasy.[15]

Video games, insofar as they are forms of visual art, are susceptible to Tolkien's critique. Yet they make possible a different mode of participation, by offering players the opportunity to manipulate elements of secondary worlds that are already fully represented on the screen. Let me explain. When we read "tree" in a fantasy story, we must imaginatively construct a tree in our minds, drawing not only on the author's descriptions, but also on our experiences of trees. The tree you imagine and the one I imagine may be quite different—each is "poignantly particular." This is an incredibly rich mode of participation in a story, but it is generally the limit of our determi-

native role. Other than fleshing out fantastic landscapes, characters, and events in this way (or, by contrast, refusing to imagine them more richly than their author has sketched them), we have little agency over the development of the secondary world. We can cooperate (or not) with the author in imagining the secondary world and its narratives, but we cannot direct them. In a video game, on the other hand, we encounter a fully imagined tree on the screen. We do not co-imagine the tree, but we must choose whether to cut it down. This requires a fundamentally different sort of participation.[16] Rather than employing our imagination to help create secondary worlds by fleshing out their details, we are called on to make choices within those worlds.

Many games require players to make significant choices about pursuing good and avoiding evil, about self-sacrifice and loyalty. Players must choose whom they will follow, whom they will help, and how they will help them. Some of the most interesting new video games allow players a greater role in developing the moral traits of the characters they inhabit within the fantasy narratives.

A good example is the "alignment" rubric used by many role-playing games. As players navigate through the secondary world, they must make choices which in turn impact their characters' relative alignment to a set of binaries: good or evil, just or merciful, cunning or honest, and so on. Players' status according to these binaries usually has an impact on their interaction with the game world. For instance, villagers might flee a character aligned with "feared" while they would circle round a character that is "loved." In this way, players are able to participate in the construction of their game characters.

Beyond character construction, many role-playing games allow players to determine which narrative sequences they participate in. In the *Elder Scrolls* series of games, for example, players are placed in a free roam universe: that is, they can wander at will through a complex secondary world

> While the fantastic imagination legitimately imagines cities floating in mid-air and populated with rational creatures quite different from humans and angels, MacDonald insists, it must not imagine that the good is evil.

brimming with choices, possibilities, and narratives.[17] Players can choose to participate in the central story line, or ignore it altogether and spend hours engaging in hundreds of other stories and quests. The associations they form and the sorts of quests they choose are entirely self-directed. These choices allow players to significantly determine their narrative experience of the secondary world.

This opportunity for player-directed character and narrative development in fantastic worlds is, to my mind, one of the more interesting aspects of role-playing video games, as it presents a new mode of engagement with fantasy. In worlds quite different from our own, free from the requirements of "observed fact," players are required to exercise their intellect and will to make significant choices between goods to be sought. Now how are these moral choices made in video games related to our choices in the primary world? Of course, there are significant differences in many outcomes—for example, the majestic trees we cut down in a video fantasy world may be easily replaced, while in real life they would really die—and corresponding differences in moral culpability for our actions. But for other important effects (and our resultant culpability), the differences may not be so great. Consider how each of our choices, in a secondary world of fantasy or in the primary world, shapes our intellect and will to some degree. Each choice disposes the will towards that which it chooses because, as Thomas Aquinas notes, the "will is a subject of habit."[18] The choices we make in video games can influence our patterns of perceiving situations, evaluating options, and choosing to act in the primary world.

EXPERIENCING EUCATASTROPHE IN VIDEO GAMES

Video games, then, have a great potential to provide immersive experiences in fantasy stories of good and evil. As we become agents within their complex narrative arcs, we can develop skills of moral perception and decision-making. More importantly, they can lead us to experience and appreciate eucatastrophe.

Yet many role-playing video games blow it! They do not fulfill this potential because the choices they require of players are not morally significant: either these choices have little effect on the narrative development in the game or they occur within an amoral secondary world. Ironically, *Fable 2*, the award-winning 2008 game by famed designer Peter Molyneaux which is all about making choices, is a prime example of this final disregard for players' choosing.

Players of *Fable 2* engage a stunning array of choices ranging from what house to buy (all of them are for sale for the right price) and whom to marry (most adult non-player characters, or NPCs, in the game are potential spouses) to whether to become good or evil (characters grow dramatically more angelic or demonic in appearance according to the choices they make). Indeed, players must often choose between self-preservation and self-sacrifice. For instance, when one is captured by an evil magician and forced to work as a prison guard in his fortress, tormented prisoners beg one to bring them food or water. Just attempting to help the prisoners requires sacrifice (one loses precious "experience points"). Or later, after one has been tricked by a cunning ally, one must choose to offer oneself or another innocent victim as a sacrifice to a malignant spirit (in terms of the game, one loses "youth").

While these choices may seem to be significant to players, the game's ultimate narrative progression does not depend on them at all! Whether one feeds the prisoners makes no difference; whether one chooses to act uprightly (and look angelic) or to act abominably (and look demonic), the final result is the same. Regardless of players' choices for self or for others, evil is ultimately defeated and peace returned to the world. *Fable 2* is like a choose-your-own-adventure novel in which all choices lead to exactly the same final chapter.

We can praise this fantastic role-playing game for depicting eucatastrophe, the ultimate triumph of good over evil which comes as an unexpected victory at the hour of apparent defeat. That the eucatastrophe will occur despite our evil actions is a key tenet of the Christian story. The problem in games like *Fable 2* lies not in the fact that they culminate in eucatastrophe, but that they are unfaithful to players' participation in it. One who has consistently chosen the good ought to have a significantly different experience of eucatastrophe than a player who has consistently chosen evil. The "sheep" and "goats" should be clearly divided in the final reckoning—the former welcoming with joy the final triumph of the good, and the latter recognizing the ultimate folly of their ways. This is not the case in *Fable 2*, where players' choices for good or evil in no way affect their participation in the final victory. As a result, every choice is morally insignificant or, worse, amoral. It does not matter in the end whether one chooses to murder the innocent villagers or save them. All that matters is the exercise of one's will.

This narrative disregard for the choices a player makes is not exclusive to *Fable 2*. In many games, the final alignment of character that players choose and the actions they commit do not influence their participation in the final outcome. This violates George MacDonald's rule that fantasy must obey the laws of the moral world: it must not re-imagine truth, declaring evil to be good or good to be evil. Yet this is exactly what *Fable 2* does. When evil choices lead to the good ending in exactly the same manner that good choices do, evil is not distinguishable from good in any traditional sense. Rather than offering players competing choices between good and evil, such games, though concerned with eucatastrophe, destabilize the distinction between good and evil.

> **Many fantasy role-playing video games blow it! The choices they require of players are not morally significant: they have little effect on the narrative development in the game or they occur within an amoral secondary world.**

RETURNING TO THE PRIMARY WORLD

Do fantastic video games ultimately lead players back to an appreciation of the primary world, as a Christian view of the fantastic imagination claims they must? Some of them may help players enjoy the physical beauty of this world. Certainly, the best role-playing video games can direct players toward a fuller understanding and appreciation of deep-seated moral truths that hold in any world. Having chosen self-sacrifice in an immersive experience of a video game's secondary world, players may gain new insights and greater sympathy toward such choices in the primary world. (Ask most 20- or 30-something males about *Final Fantasy VII* and they are likely to bring up Aeris's sacrificial death as one of their most artistic experiences.) This carry-over effect is possible because the secondary world of the video game exemplifies the moral law that holds in the primary world.

In deciding which fantastic video games to play and which to leave alone, we should examine their presentation of good and evil. Does the game offer choices between good and evil? Do these choices affect both the play experience and the narrative progression of the game? What view of good and evil does the game proffer as a guide for making these choices? This approach allows us to evaluate the moral ordering of the game.

The best way to discern a game's presentation of good and evil is to play at least some of the game for yourself. If you are evaluating the game for children, try taking some evil actions, insofar as the game allows them, and see what happens in the secondary world. For example, when you attack other innocent characters, is your character fined and jailed, ignored, or rewarded? Are moral choices significant? Do good and evil choices lead to the same end, or do they differently shape not only game play but also narrative progression and resolution?

Video games offer us a new mode of involvement in fantastic secondary worlds that is significantly different from literary fantasy. As players become decision makers in the narrative structure of a game, they are less engaged in fleshing out the imaginative world and more involved in creating their own moral characters. Rather than simply dismissing video games, we should carefully consider both the potential of the form and the actual content of individual games. The right sorts of games provide opportunities for significant artistic expression and meaningful engagement of the intellect and will.

NOTES

1 Lars Konzack, "Philosophical Game Design," *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, edited by Bernard Perron and Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2009), 33-44, here citing 33.

2 *Fable* was produced by Lionhead Studios in 2004. The game website (*http://lionhead. com*) describes it as "a ground-breaking role-playing adventure game…in which your every action determines your skills, appearance, and reputation. Create your life story from childhood to death. Grow from an inexperienced adolescent into the most powerful being in the world. Choose the path of righteousness or dedicate your life to evil…. Fable:

Who will you be?" The original *Mass Effect* science-fiction role-playing game was produced by BioWare in 2007. The popularity of these games has led to numerous installments and versions.

3 The literary discussion group known as "The Inklings" met during the 1930s and 40s in Oxford, England. See Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997). For more articles that interpret and apply their Christian ideas on fantastic imagination, see *Inklings of Glory*, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics, 11 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2004), available online at *www.ChristianEthics.ws.*

4 J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), 31-99, here citing 74.

5 Ibid., 73.

6 Ibid., 86.

7 C. S. Lewis, "On Science Fiction," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1966), 59-73, here citing 68.

8 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995; original edition, John Lane Company, 1908), 54.

9 Ibid., 59.

10 Tolkien, 77.

11 C. S. Lewis, "On Stories," in *Of Other Worlds*, 3-21, here citing 15.

12 George MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination" in *The Light Princess and Other Fairy Tales* (Whitehorn, CA: Johannesen Printing and Publishing, 1997), 5-8, here citing 6.

13 John Milbank, in "Fictioning Things: Gift and Narrative," *The Chesterton Review* 31.3-4 (1974), 146-149, emphasizes that the Christian fantastic imagination allows for secondary worlds with different physical laws (leading us to appreciate the contingent nature of our world), but the same moral laws that hold in all worlds.

14 Tolkien, 73.

15 Ibid., 95.

16 Admittedly, our choices within video games are always constrained (e.g., we cannot do with video-game trees all that we could do with real ones) and sometimes insignificant (e.g., when the game narrative discloses, in the end, the overall irrelevance of our choices). Fantastic video games guide us to appreciate the primary world only to the extent that their secondary worlds require us to make wide-ranging and significant choices according to the moral law that governs all worlds.

17 The *Elder Scrolls* game series by Bethesda Softworks began in 1994 (*www.elderscrolls. com*).

18 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II.I, Q 50, A 5, translated by the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, 1912-1936; New York: Benziger, 1947-1948).

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Putting Ourselves Out There: Making Our Virtual Lives Virtuous

BY AMY R. GRIZZLE KANE

What will we say on our Facebook walls? Will we build up or tear down? Will our blogs and tweets inspire hope or transmit hatred? Will we speak up when we witness online hurt to others or will we look away?

Everybody is Facebook fighting. Well, maybe not everybody, but many of us are increasingly choosing to air our grievances by having what Seinfeld might call a Facebook festivus.[1] A recent New York Times article explores Facebook fighting as a new cyber social reality many of us are forced to confront in our instant-access, technology-crazed world. A husband said of his wife on Facebook, "How is it my birthday is only one day, but my wife's birthday is a whole week?" Most of us see the humor in a good-natured Facebook jab; however, according to the article, "Whether through nagging wall posts or antagonistic changes to their 'relationship status,' the social networking site is proving to be as good for broadcasting marital discord as it is for sharing vacation photos."[2]

How many of us even think twice about posting frustration online about our relatives, boss, coworkers, or classmates? It may be as innocent a jab as a ludicrous vacation picture, but it is worth asking ourselves, as Christians, what are we putting out there for the world to see?

Digital technologies invite us to put ourselves out there for the world's viewing pleasure, and criticism, like never before. With Skype video conferencing we can 'see' and talk with family and friends across the world as if they were sharing the well-loved couch and sipping a glass of sweet iced tea in our living room. Facebook connects us; Twitter keeps us up to date; and

YouTube tells us to "broadcast yourself." The funny and the awkward, the good and the bad about ourselves—we put it all out there in cyberspace… well, because we can.

Our personal human struggles have never been more widely visible to the public. It is a two-sided coin. Sharing our virtual lives can make finding common ground and crafting a shared identity with other people easier and more meaningful. Or, it can simply reveal our pain to strangers and hold it before our faces as in an unbreakable mirror. Our failures become virtual realities we cannot escape.

We should not dismiss Facebook and the new social media simply as novelties for techno-savvy young people with too much time on their hands, even if some of us do long for the good old days of chatting with friends over a cup of coffee instead of instant messaging with them. For better or worse, the new social media are a powerful force in our world. As members of the Body of Christ, the Church, we cannot ignore our calling to be a transforming influence in the world, without being of it. The Apostle Paul's instructions to the Christians in ancient Rome, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2), is relevant teaching for us.

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In September 2010, a young violinist who was a freshman at Rutgers University ended his life by jumping from the George Washington Bridge after his roommate broadcast online a secretly filmed, hurtful video. Just a few years earlier, an eighth grader committed suicide after learning an Internet romance was a cruel joke.[3] Cyberbullying, while a relatively modern term, cannot be dismissed as a virtual problem—it is a very real and present challenge confronting young people we know.

A friend of mine recently experienced online identity theft, a relatively new cyber social reality that can turn lives upside down in a heartbeat. Information about her bank accounts, her family, her pharmacy, and even her veterinarian were all compromised and used to illegally solicit a prescription for narcotics in her name. Not only was the situation a time-consuming hassle to repair, but it also left my friend feeling violated and fearful.

Another friend recently lost his wife to a Facebook affair—she and an old flame had reconnected online and she left her family and marriage to start over.

The idea of publicly airing our grievances with others is not just a modern concept: gossip is as old as dirt, and the pain and humiliation that it rains on lives it timeless. Likewise, slander, bullying, theft, and extramarital affairs are age-old problems that today are multiplied by adding the word "cyber" in front of them. That is our hard, shared, human reality. Does this mean that as Christians we should pull the plug on new information technologies?

Not if we are called to be the light of the world in Jesus' name, shining in the darkness for all to see. The new technologies are not simply places of moral danger, they are opportunities for witness and blessing others. Here we need to remember the Apostle's teaching: "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:9-10).

We cannot leave our Christian identity at church on Sunday mornings—we are to be the love of God to the world just as Christ loved us. Our call to "be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord" as we "rejoice in hope, [are] patient in suffering, persevere in prayer" and "extend hospitality to strangers" (Romans 12:11-13) does not end when we sit down in front of a computer screen any more than it ends when we walk out of the sanctuary and into our homes, schools, and workplaces. God's grace and cyberspace do not have to be mutually exclusive; as God's people even when we are online, we can help make virtual reality a virtuous reality in Jesus' name.

Online social media can be a wonderful resource to stay connected with friends and family across the miles. Those who travel oversees for business, missionary work, or military service can stay in touch with loved ones in wonderful and life-giving ways. Church families are tweeting and blogging about the ways God is at work in the life of their congregation and community. Senior and young adults alike are using e-book readers to read several versions of the Bible on one device that makes the print as large as readers need it to be.

I even met my husband through an online dating service. If anyone had asked me whether I expected to discover the husband I had been praying for in this way, I would have laughed heartily in their face. I guess God heard me laughing. I had been as skeptical about impersonal online relationships as anyone. After more than enough in-person blind-dates-gone-wrong, the straw that broke the camel's back came when a dinner date asked me, an ordained minister, "So…you, like, pray and stuff?" Check, please! Some friends encouraged me to try eHarmony. It was a long process full of ups and downs, but eventually I was "matched" with "Sean from Bellaire, Texas" and we married in April, 2010. I was reminded that God works in wonderfully unexpected ways that far outweigh my understanding.[4]

I am not on eHarmony's payroll. I am not advocating that online dating is for everyone or that it is a quick fix for anyone who is lonely. It is not. With every technological privilege we need to use common sense guidelines and responsible moderation. Whether in cyberspace or real space, Paul's exhortation to each of us is the same: do not "think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but…think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" (Romans 12:3). As God's children, we must not bury our heads in the sand, pretending the moral dangers of

technology do not exist; nor should we let virtual evils be perpetuated by ignoring our virtuous reality as Christians to be light in the darkness to a fallen world both on and offline.

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To know and to be known—this desire lies within the depths of our being. It is why we cherish a compliment or smile when someone notices and likes our quirks, our gifts, and our wonderful God-created randomness.

We have many outlets for airing our grievances or for sharing with others who we are created to be. Which one will we choose? What will we say on our Facebook walls? Will we build up or tear down? Will our blogs and tweets inspire hope or transmit hatred? Will we speak up when we witness online hurt to others or will we look away?

No matter the online outlets we pursue, we can never let the transmission of megabytes of information be a substitute for nurturing our relationship with God or with each other, face to face, in real time. To be known, we also must invest the time to know. God calls to us to put ourselves out there, to share God's grace with one another and the world. How will we respond?

NOTES

1 The Festivus was celebrated in *Seinfeld* episode 166, "The Strike" (first NBC broadcast, December 18, 1997). Seinfeld's friend, George Costanza, recalls that his father instituted the alternate year-end holiday—"a Festivus for the rest of us"—for the airing of disappointment and grievances.

2 Douglas Quenqua, "I Need to Vent. Hello, Facebook," *New York Times*, May 17, 2010, *www.nytimes.com/2010/03/18/fashion/18facebook.html* (accessed September 15, 2010).

3 Amy Ellis Nutt, "Rutgers student's suicide shows dire consequence, ease of bullying in digital age," *The Star-Ledger* (Newark, NJ), September 30, 2010, *www.nj.com/news/index. ssf/2010/09/rutgers_suicide_shows_dire_con.html* (accessed September 30, 2010).

4 Amy Grizzle, "Online dating can be a match, even for a clergywoman," *Associated Baptist Press,* February 12, 2010, *www.abpnews.com/content/view/4835/9/* (accessed September 30, 2010).

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Living Virtuously in the Virtual Age

BY JASON BYASSEE

At least three kinds of books are written to pass judgment on the new digital technologies—the scolds, the cheerleaders, and the in-between books that neither damn nor bless. While the latter books are harder to stereotype, harder to write, and harder to read, they are much more likely to tell the truth.

There are at least three kinds of books that are written to pass judgment on any important new development in human affairs. First, there are the scolds: "This new thing is evil!" they cry, with a sandwich board on their chests and a bullhorn in hand, screeching for passersby to repent. Then there are the cheerleaders (forgive a gendered stereotype). They chant, in some sort of rhyme with unending perkiness, "OK! We, like, totally love this!" Then there are the in-between books that neither damn nor bless. Such books are harder to stereotype, harder to write, harder to read, but much more likely to tell the truth.

In this batch, Quentin J. Schultze's *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, 256 pp., $22.00) is the scold. Digital technology is a threat to democracy, to our souls, to dappled things and puppy dogs, and to all things decent people should hold dear. The book's argument is clear, its writing lively and full of zingers, and it finally overshoots. The new *Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 224 pp., $19.95), a collection of essays edited by Craig Detweiler, cheerleads. God is present, quasi-sacramentally, in such media as Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGS), and if you or I aren't playing, well, like, we're totally not with it, and our

Facebook friends are going to tweet about how '1.0' we are. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser's *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York, Basic Books, 2008, 400 pp., $16.95) is the balanced book, as it examines what life is like for those who have no memory of life before the digital divide (circa mid-90's). It is also the boring one. Perhaps the two young lawyers, one at Harvard and the other at St. Gallen in Switzerland, pine to testify before Congress; I can just imagine the tone of their testimony: "Yes, digital culture has these defects concomitant to these flaws, nevertheless legislators ought not be overly zealous…." Anyone in the chamber is checking their Blackberry; the four viewers still left on C-SPAN are already dozing.

<div align="center">❖</div>

We will start with the cheerleading. Detweiler now directs the Center for Entertainment, Media, and Culture at Pepperdine University after having done similar work at Fuller Theological Seminary. I have written elsewhere with respectful disagreement about his characterization of divine presence in film, appreciating the effort to find traces of the divine outside the Church but disagreeing with his conclusion, so if I write irreverently here it is out of no personal animus. While Detweiler has worked at evangelical institutions, the collection he introduces and concludes here falls so hard into liberal Protestantism it almost reads like unintentional satire. "Jesus dared to descend into our everyday situations and struggles. He seems like the type of person who would come alongside a group of gamers, grab a controller, and join the fun" (p. 16). Notice the move: we like something, therefore God must like it too, since all we know about God is that he is at least as nice a guy as we are. We see here the total evisceration of what we *do* know about Jesus: that he is the Messiah of Israel, shaped in the mold of Israel's scriptures and worship, whom Christians worship as the enfleshed Word of God and Lord of the Church. For Detweiler and friends, he is just another schlub on the couch with a controller.

It gets worse. "We want to talk about God as experienced and revealed in, around, and through video games" (p. 9). It would be sacramental theology — if there were any evidence that these authors possess any sacramental theology. "'Til Disconnection Do We Part: The Initiation and Wedding Rite in *Second Life*," an essay by Jason Shim, argues that wedding rites between players in the popular computer-generated parallel world "can be as real and meaningful as those enacted in one's First Life" (p. 150). For in *Second Life*, one can be intentional in "thoughtful negotiation of one's worldview" (whereas, presumably, in real life, one cannot). If such full-blown Gnostic championing of a fake world at the expense of God's creation does not worry you, try this paean to gaming passed on by a child interviewed by one Daniel White Hodge, "I know [God's] there, I can feel him in games like *Halo 3* sitting next to me just being happy for me…. I get lost in the game. Sometimes

you can go all day and not even realize it, but, in all that, I know that God's still there, it's kinda funny that way" (p. 174). And here I used to wonder why God was too busy to answer the prayers of those raped or maimed or dying in civil wars in Sudan or Congo—he was smiling like a friendly idiot as a gamer's sidekick. Several authors gush that gaming can solve age-old theological riddles, like free will versus predestination (games show that it is both!), or whether there is only one way to God (there is more than one way to win a game—so pluralism wins!). Gamers can also understand death and resurrection—they die and revive on screen all day.

> Quentin Schultze is surely right to reject what he rejects—the "radical selfism" cultivated by digital culture. He is also right in some of his solutions: the sort of wisdom that makes good living possible surely comes at a price, through discipline.

If this is the way to find God in technology, I suggest we unplug and make for the hills. There are hard questions to ask of gaming culture, especially since it rakes in more money than movies now (some $50 billion a year is no small amount of change). There are interesting parallels between some games and stories of faith, especially in games that ask the user to play God. One can find parallels of the sort Detweiler and others identify, as one can find between Christianity and any other story. But those are extraneous abstractions, ones that push us no deeper into the mystery of faith, but simply add religious topping to the self-titillation we were engaging in anyway. My own marginal notes in this volume include this, one of many despairing comments: "I'd like to kill myself now." In a gaming universe that would be fine, I would just revive with the push of a button. It would be a bit tougher in the real world. And for the fleshed Son of God to submit to the ungentle hands of his murderers cost a bit more. So too should our discipleship.

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Quentin J. Schultze's *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* is a needed stiff drink after a draft of such unadulterated saccharine. This professor of communications at Calvin College worries that technology "divert[s] my attention from the central concerns of life…to relatively trivial pursuits" (p. 13). And he wants his balance back. For the Web promotes a sort of "promiscuous knowing," a surfing on the top of things that he characterizes as "informationism" (p. 22). It is no accident that pornography has long been a driver of digital innova-

tion, for the Web itself promotes "pseudo-intimacy" (p. 12). This is not the sort of knowing that can make the knower a better or wiser person. It rather obliterates such human fundaments as time and space. It promotes individualism and pushes its users into aping celebrities. The Web creates, in short, precisely the sort of Gnostic religion that Christians have long said can get you damned (that is, after all, what heresy does), and which Detweiler and friends celebrate.

As I said, Schultze overshoots in places. Lots of the ills named above and expostulated on at length in the book are sins of our culture generally, begun in the Enlightenment and spread out and thickened in modernity. The sort of instrumentalization of knowledge that happens online, supplanting face-to-face communal knowing, did not begin with the Internet. Arguably it began in the garden. Technology functions here, as with many technophobes, as a sort of substitute for original sin.

Schultze is surely right to reject what he rejects—the "radical selfism" (p. 17) cultivated by digital culture (and just think, publishing in 2002 he had no inkling of Facebook!). He is also right in some of his proposed solutions: St. Benedict and medieval monks advocated reading great books exceedingly slowly, chewing over words and phrases like a cow over its cud. The sort of wisdom that makes good living possible surely comes only at a price and through discipline. And yet Schultze's prescription has a bit of poison in it as well. His primary solution is something he calls "revealed religion": "We cannot discover virtue in raw information, only in time-honored moral practices that flow from people's faithful commitments" (p. 46). I agree. Yet I, like Schultze, am a Christian. I am not sure there is something called "revealed religion" to which I adhere. I am rather baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, hoping for his return. A pitch for religion *in general* reminds me of a professor's quip about the "chapel to all faiths" at Vanderbilt Divinity School: "So if you want to offer a human sacrifice to Molech, go right ahead." If any religion will do, then why not Detweiler's happy Gnosticism? Schultze would do better to explore the particular riches of his own school's Reformed heritage over against the neo-gnosticism that is upon us than to try to broaden his appeal to all religion that is "revealed." For it is that very move to broaden that eventually has Detweiler and friends worshipping their joysticks.

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Finally, Palfrey and Gasser are the voice of moderation in all its correct dullness. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* means to explain to digital immigrants (who remember what CD's, newspapers, and folding maps were like) how to think about those for whom information has always been accessible online and easily manipulable. This one

is helpful if you do not know what a mashup is (where you take a speech or song and rearrange it to your liking) or do not know the history of Napster and little old ladies being sued out of existence by the recording industry. The book is at its best when describing digital overload: in 2007 there was more information posted online than has ever been published in books. A lot more: three million times more. Those of you who think your blog might change the world, think again: 120,000 new blogs are launched *every day*.

Born Digital's greatest virtue is its refusal to hyper-ventilate. Sure there is a digital overload out there, but there are digital solutions to that, like search engines and RSS feeds. Sure, kids are under some threat because of the Internet, but not any more than they are in real life. Indeed notions of privacy are under some assault as companies record more about us than we would ever like made public. Sure there is more Internet activism in politics, but "the participatory acts are not fundamentally altered in the process" (p. 260), and governments use the same Web to monitor its citizens as those citizens use to speak out against tyranny. In each of these highly-publicized cases the authors raise an alarm only to squelch it: legislation is almost never the answer (except against violent video games). Neither is laissez faire inactivity. A "blended" approach, headed by parents and teachers proactively engaging their kids about their Internet use, is the way forward toward the richness offered by the Web without the pitfalls. See? Commonsensical, boring, and true. Book the authors for your next panel on the future of the Web.

The most interesting moments in *Born Digital*—the ones that touch on theology—are quite fleeting. Palfrey and Gasser quote one Harvard student: as opposed to print publications that reliably start and stop, "on the Internet…there's no beginning and no end" (p. 185). I have heard that somewhere before. Digital natives are so wired that their understanding of identity is changing. They can have as many fake selves as time allows, but however many avatars they have, their "true" self is more set in cyber-stone than ever. Once one could pack up and move off to another continent and start over. No more. Google is changing our very notions of the continuity of human identity, both in terms of how we understand ourselves and how

others understand us. Claims like that cry out for theological commentary from a people who think baptism changes our identity far more than digital innovation ever could.

Palfrey and Gasser's snoozer of an appeal to take a breath might be just what we need, as we constantly freak out over the new technologies coming down the pike seemingly every time we hit refresh on our email. We are still sinners, God is still good, and the gates of hell still will not prevail against the Church. Detweiler wants to rewire the Church for a sort of salvation-by-gaming; Schultze to rewire it to prevent a kind of techno-damnation. The "answer" is somewhere in the middle. *Born Digital's* suggestion to calm down is a good first step. Now if we can just find the second.

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Virtual Reality Comes to Church

BY L. ROGER OWENS

Confronted with new information technologies, congregations face the choice of adopting them wholesale, rejecting them, or thoughtfully adapting them. The books reviewed here aim to open our eyes to the powerful ways that technology can shape and misshape our discipleship.

T he prolific writer Wendell Berry, in a little essay called "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer" (1987), lays out the standards he uses to judge whether to adopt a new technology.† His writing with a pen and paper and his relationship with his wife who types and edits his work should not, in his judgment, be disrupted by an expensive, electric energy dependent piece of technology that will not produce demonstrably better writing results. Berry chooses the way of rejection.

Congregations and people of faith face the kind of choice Berry had to make. Confronted with new information technologies, people of faith and church leaders have to make choices: Will we adopt this new technology wholesale? Will we reject it? Or will we thoughtfully adapt it? These questions are not easy to answer, and many of us are not equipped with the knowledge or wisdom to make informed choices. The following four books aim to help us understand better the ways new digital technologies can both form and deform our lives so that in our use of them we can be wise rather than foolish.

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Shane Hipps has written a wonderful book, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, 208 pp., $16.99). A former advertising specialist for Porsche, Hipps was an expert on selling

new technology to the public. But then he read the work of Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) — the man who taught us that "the medium is the message" — and discovered that technological innovations are not neutral. They shape the users in hidden and sometimes damaging ways. Since as a culture we are largely blind to the ways technological media shape our lives, Hipps wrote this book with a single purpose: to help us restore "an intentional relationship to our technologies" (p. 150) so that we can use technologies without being used by them.

The first thing Hipps does is help us understand what technology is. Taking his cue from McLuhan, he argues that technologies are essentially extensions of human powers. For example, the telephone extends the human powers of speech and hearing. There is a hidden danger, though, with extensive technologies: when pushed to an extreme, every technology "will reverse on itself, revealing unintended consequences" (p. 37). In order to adopt and adapt technology well, we must acquire the wisdom to not only see how a new technology extends human powers, but also discern its potential to "reverse" — to misshape and distort human life and faith.

Along the way, Hipps gives many examples of the ways technological innovations have shaped the practice of the Christian faith in unintended and often deleterious ways. The printing press extended the ability to communicate the gospel. Yet print technologies transform the faith from an epic story, displayed in stained glass windows and participated in sacramentally, into propositional formulas that can be printed on tracts and handed out in bus stations. A naïve approach to technology says, "The message stays the same — technology is just used to communicate it more effectively." But clearly, the message changes as well. For Hipps, wise use of technology must anticipate ways the medium will change the message.

Hipps celebrates the way that computer technologies and the Internet are creating a new visual, right-brained culture. The hegemony of the printed word is coming to an end. This will allow for the restoration of lost aspects of Christian faith and practice — namely Christianity's epic, visual, and sacramental dimensions. But Hipps fears that digital technology may have untoward consequences for faith: we might be exchanging the tyranny of the left-brain for the tyranny of the right-brain. We need logical, left-brain muscles to understand the Bible, but "our digital diet sedates the left-brain, leaving it in a state of hypnotic stupor" (p. 147). Even though we might be reading more than ever because of the Internet, digital media is changing *how* we read. This medium will change the message as well.

Best of all, Hipps's treatment of technology is grounded theologically in his conviction that the Church is God's own technology — the medium through which God makes the gospel available to the world. The gospel is not simply a proposition to be believed that can be tweeted in 142 characters or less. Rather, it is the gift of a people whose life together — the medium — is its own message.

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If the key virtue of Hipps's book lies in his use of a wide-angle lens to help us see broadly technology's potential to shape and misshape the life of faith, the next three books use a narrow lens, each one examining a particular innovation digital technology has made possible.

Of the three, Quentin J. Schultze's *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004, 112 pp., $14.00) sets the standard for theologically informed and yet practical examinations of technology in the Church. When many congregations are spending enormous sums of money to refit their sanctuaries with computers, screens, and projectors, Schultze steps back and asks: What can guide our application of this technology? How can we know when and why to "upgrade" our worship to make it technologically "up-to-date"?

In an astonishingly short period of time, half a billion people have joined the social network on Facebook. Jesse Rice helps people of faith negotiate online social networks wisely by understanding their appeal and their hidden dangers.

His answer is a kind of liturgical *phronesis*, a worship-shaped wisdom. Before we launch into a pro-and-con discussion of presentational technologies in worship, we need to know what worship is and what it is for. Worship, according to Schultze, is a dialogue between the Creator and the creature; it is initiated by God and we respond with praise and thanksgiving. Thus, worship is an activity that is good in itself.

Worship as an intrinsically good activity means that worship media—whether books or projectors—must be evaluated on their ability to facilitate the worshipers' worshiping well. Can they improve our praise? The ability of presentational technologies to mimic contemporary entertainment culture, produce emotional responses, and attract the unchurched are beside the point because these are extrinsic purposes to which worship is often put. Understanding the *true* reason for worship can guide our application of new technologies.

I am largely in agreement with Schultze. His "yes-but" approach to technology and his willingness to adapt technology to the Church's purposes rather than blindly accepting it is wise. I wish he had included a chapter on indigenous worship to balance his emphasis on tradition as a guide to using technology. There are more people under thirty-five than ever with no reli-

gious affiliation, and faith communities that are going to reach these people will have to discover how worship can be congruent with the media that are so much a part of their lives. Worship at its best has always been able to incorporate, even if it has to tame, the artifacts that make up a culture. Now those artifacts happen to be high-tech, and our worship planning cannot ignore this. If Schultze had not dismissed the evangelistic potential of worship as extrinsic, his approach might have seemed a little more receptive and less skeptical. For this reason, the book will be very useful for established churches, like my own, considering the introduction of presentational technologies, but it will be of little use to new-church planters who are planning worship from the ground up.

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In an astonishingly short period of time, half a billion people have joined the social network on Facebook. The point of Jesse Rice's *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009, 240 pp., $12.99) is not to retell the story of Facebook's meteoric rise, but to help people of faith negotiate online social networks wisely by understanding their appeal and their hidden dangers. Rice agrees with Hipps that every new technology that extends human powers—in the case of Facebook, the power to connect with others—also has hidden consequences. Christian users of Facebook, Rice suggests, should know these consequences if we are going to use Facebook for our purposes rather than allowing it to use us.

Rice attributes Facebook's rapid rise in popularity to a theological principle—all of us are looking for a home. There are a number of ways Facebook promises to fulfill the need for a home. He lists several homelike qualities of Facebook, like "home is where we can 'just be ourselves'" (p. 82). For many, the connections one makes on Facebook are filling the need for a home in a restless world.

But what are the hidden consequences, Rice wonders, of finding "home" in online community? There are a number, and they are worth paying attention to. Rice has a background in psychology, so it is no surprise that the many hidden consequence he points to are psychological. When we are hyperconnected, we feel powerless; we have increased anxiety; we begin to feel like the world is our audience and we are on stage; we are tempted to fashion our identities out of nothing; we become unable to pay attention to "what's now" and focus only on "what's new"; we suffer from a lack of real relationships; we live with increasingly fuzzy relational boundaries. His list goes on.

Perhaps most significantly, according to Rice, the illusion of real connection that Facebook offers has the potential to keep us from the kind of relationships we most desire: real relationships with real people in real community—not a virtual home, but a real one. When we have found our home online, what will make us keep looking for our home in God through the Body of Christ, the Church?

Rice's conclusions are not startling. I am not surprised by the psychological consequences of being hypeconnected. But it is good to have them documented. And it is even better to have his helpful suggestions on how to live with Facebook without letting Facebook take over our lives. Rice suggests ways we can engage Facebook with intentionality, humility, and authenticity. That way we will not lose our real selves beneath the masks of our online profiles.

People of faith cannot, if we want to be faithful witnesses to the God who redeemed the real world in Jesus, follow the simple path of rejecting new technologies. But uncritical adoption might be worse.

While the previous three books show us ways we can adapt new digital technologies to worthwhile human ends by engaging them with intentionality and suspicion, Douglas Estes's *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, 256 pp., $16.99) does nothing of the sort. The book promises to be an examination of the possibility of virtual churches, and so I expected a nuanced treatment. But Estes is a cheerleader. He thinks virtual churches are real churches. He thinks the virtual world is a real world. And he thinks the gospel can be transmitted from one avatar to another. His book is a 250-page apology for virtual churches.

To the question, "Does a virtual church offer real community?" Estes only asserts, again and again, that he has met people who testify to more authentic community in a virtual church than in a real church. But assertions are not arguments. Estes needs to engage Hipps's arguments, because he has no sensitivity to the hidden consequences of letting people think church can happen in a virtual world. When people are allowed to play church in the virtual world and led to think it is the real thing, they might be missing salvation itself.

His discussions of Holy Communion and Baptism in virtual churches prove the point. That Estes can even entertain the possibility of these sacraments being participated in by meditating on an image of the sacrament on the computer screen, or that they might be "outsourced" to real churches, shows the impossibility of this form of virtual connection being church. It also shows that he has little sympathy for an understanding of the Church as God's embodied community in the world, as anything more than the transmitter of a particular message.

Hipps is right, the medium is the message. And if the Church, God's enfleshed people in the world, whose life together is a sign and foretaste

of God's kingdom, is God's medium, then in a virtual church the gospel itself has been erased. These baptized bodies that live and play, work and pray together are God's message: in Jesus a new humanity is possible. Indeed it is more than possible, it is a reality. But it is a flesh and blood reality, not a virtual one.

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Wendell Berry said he was not going to buy a computer. He has an intentional relationship with technology. He knows when and why he will adopt technological innovations. Rejection, even for him, is not the only path. And if these books show anything, it is that people of faith cannot, if we want to be faithful witnesses to the God who redeemed the real world in Jesus, follow the simple path of rejection. But uncritical adoption might be worse. What we need, and what Hipps, Schultze, and Rice help us discover, is gospel wisdom, a way of navigating life in the world that is shaped by the life of this world's incarnate Lord. Such wisdom can open our eyes to the powerful ways technology can shape and misshape our discipleship. And only with eyes so opened can we be with our technologies both wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

NOTE
† Wendell Berry, "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer," *What Are People For?* (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1990), 170-177.

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