Good books on technology
An annotated bibliography

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Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology, by Eric Brende (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005). "It is surely not I who am radical or extreme in my practices. It is the Americans around me" (3). This is what Eric Brende concludes after suspending his PhD studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, with his wife, Mary, joining an Amish community for eighteen months. While the Amish have religious reasons for exercising critical discernment about the use of technology, Eric and Mary Brende's case for continuing to live off the electricity grid and not owning a car is about quality of life. Their life choices have become less about rejecting technology and more about embracing what is life giving: being able to see the fruit of their labor at the end of the day; spending quality time with the people they care about; and living healthy, meaningful lives.

Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions, by Arthur P. Boers (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012). Arthur Boers's *Living into Focus* popularizes the work of Albert Borgmann, a prominent American philosopher of technology. But in Borgmann's own words, Boers has done more than that: he has "taken a theory and made it fruitful" (from the cover). Boers helps us identify aspects of contemporary technologically driven life that divert and stymie our ability to live into focus: systematic distractions, attempts to eliminate human limits, erosion of interpersonal engagements, thinning of relationships, lack of time, and fragmented spaces. More importantly, Boers helps us identify and prioritize practices and commitments that foster awe and inspiration, focal connectedness and orienting power.

iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives, by Craig Detweiler (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014). In *iGods* Detweiler discusses what it means for Christians to practice

an ancient faith that is committed to renewal, and how toward this end we are lured at times to treat technology as a god instead of a gift (207, 225). We are tempted to deify Apple for aesthetics; Amazon for abundance; Google for authority; Facebook for authenticity; and YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram for participation. On the one hand, technology is a faith system with spiritual significance. We must resist assumptions about progress and efficiency: that newer is better, faster is better, and more choice is better. On the other hand, avoiding or ignoring technology is not an option. Christians must both experience God's presence and grace in the wilderness (escaping technology) and witness to God's presence and grace in the city (embracing technology).

God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological Age, by Brad J. Kallenberg (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011). Integrating philosophical, theological, and biblical resources, Kallenberg provides Christians with a way of thinking about how our practices of faith and Christian witness are shaped by technology. He challenges readers not to be "bewitched" by technology but instead to discern ways it may or may not be good news and convey the good news. Time, location, and bodies are all prerequisites for how Christians witness, evangelize, and "gospelize," according to scripture, so when technological values such as efficiency take over, the gospel is hijacked, and technology itself becomes evangelist and savior. The redemption of humans, and even technological powers, is possible only as Christians follow Jesus and embody the good news in the life of the church.

Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology, by Neil Postman (New York: Knopf, 1992). *Technopoly* is indispensable for anyone who wants to trace the intellectual and historical steps by which technology has come to define and dominate Western culture. Postman identifies three broad stages in our culture's relationship with technology. For the vast majority of human history, we have been tool-makers and tool-users. Tools were a part of culture, but religion had authority over human behavior. The second stage is technocracy, in which technology attacks culture, and spiritual and moral concerns take a backseat to material and intellectual concerns. Technopoly, the third stage, destroys tradition, "because holy men and sin, grandmothers and

families, regional loyalties and two-thousand-year-old traditions, are antagonistic to the technocratic way of life" (46).

High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely, by Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004). Can we revere God in worship while using high-tech media? Quentin Schultze thinks we can. But if we are to avoid quick-fix techniques that turn worship into entertainment, we must start with a robust understanding of worship. Schultze understands worship as "a sustained act of union with Christ" in reciting scripture, in song and prayer, which bring us "into the mind, heart and will of Christ" (19). If presentational technology can facilitate union with the triune God without forming our hearts and minds to desire control, and if it truly fosters community and communion, Schultze believes we can consider using it (23–24). This book also addresses some "how to" issues: where to place screens, when to consider not using presentational technologies, what the financial considerations are, how to manage high-tech systems, and how to plan worship so that technology is not distracting.

Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology, by Derek C. Schuurman (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013). Playing a riff from a question Tertullian asked 1800 years ago—"What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?"—Derek Schuurman asks today, "What do bytes have to do with Christian beliefs?" (11). Schuurman believes Christian faith and computer technology are not incompatible. Following Marshall McLuhun, Jacques Ellul, and Neil Postman, Schuurman acknowledges that technology is not neutral (it has an agenda) and that we must talk about institutional *systems,* not just devices. But Schuurman is optimistic about the future of technology-driven life. True to his Reformed tradition, Schuurman places technology within the biblical and theological framework of creation, fall, redemption, and eschatology. Technology is a manifestation of human culture, a gift of creation. Because of the fall, technology obscures our relationship with God and impedes the Christian's "cultural mandate," but by adopting the correct worldview (a matter of the mind) and by living out a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (a matter of the heart), Christians can use computer technology to call the whole world to be a new creation.