

Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

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Editorial

Andy Brubacher Kaethler

Five years ago, at a workshop for pastors on relationships, mental health, and communications technology, those attending were asked to name ways communications technologies enhanced and diminished their quality of life. One pastor spoke appreciatively about being able to Skype almost daily with his young adult daughter who was in Europe participating in a yearlong cross-cultural program.

As it turns out, his daughter was one of the program's last participants. According to *Mennonite Weekly Review* (March 12,

Technology gives and technology takes away. Often, what it gives is immediately discernable. But what it takes away is more difficult to ascertain.

2012), the Intermenno Trainee Program ended in 2010 after almost five decades primarily because participants were less and less able to immerse themselves in a new culture and invest in new relationships. The Internet had made it too easy to be distracted by what was happening back home, thousands of kilometers away.

This story offers a window into the paradox and dilemma of technology: technology gives and technology takes away. Often, what it gives is immediately discernable. But what it takes away is more difficult to ascertain, because changes in practices and values are more subtle and long term, and because the most obvious harm caused by the adoption of newer technologies is to people and places distant from us.

While humans have always made and used tools, it is only within the last few decades that technology has come to so thoroughly permeate our lives and mediate our experiences. In *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Neil Postman urges us to be “two-eyed prophets,” paying attention not only to what technology *does* but also to what it *undoes*. Because what

technology undoes is more difficult to discern, he encourages us to “err on the side of caution.”

Following Postman’s call for a two-eyed approach and for caution, the guiding questions for this issue of *Vision* are: *What biblical, theological, and behavioural issues and factors should the church take into account as it discerns whether and how to use certain technologies, especially communications technologies? How might these technologies be positively and negatively affecting the life and practices of the church?*

Max Kennel helps frame the issues by contending that technology is worthy of the church’s deep critical reflection, because it affects spiritual formation, human attention, and our conception of time.

Four essays consider the use of specific technologies in the life and ministry of the church, two weighted toward recognizing what technology *does*, and two toward what it *undoes*. Hannah Heinzekehr advocates for blogging as witness, because it allows for broad communication of a multiplicity of messages. Dan Schrock compares in-person spiritual direction with direction via letters and e-mail exchanges, the telephone, and video. Steve Nolt

A guiding question for this issue of *Vision* is: What biblical, theological, and behavioural issues and factors should the church take into account as it discerns whether and how to use certain technologies?

relates how some Amish communities who had permitted cell phone use are engaging in rediscernment, now that smart phones are used for so much more than talking. Brendan Fong and Barry Wong recount one youth group’s attempt to be more present to one another by restricting use of phones at youth group events.

Two contributors explore specific practices of the church. Lydia Stoltzfus reflects on how some technologies have altered attitudes and traditions around getting married. Ryan Harker explains how reading the Bible on electronic devices alters our relationship with scripture, and he advocates for reading the Bible as a “focal practice.”

A number of ethical issues simply cannot be disentangled from the use of communications technology. Mikhail Fernandes exposes the dirty social and environmental realities of e-waste. Evan Knappenberger, a veteran, uncovers the inherent connection

between technology and violence. Steve Heinrichs engages Leah Gazan, Niigaan Sinclair, and Adrian Jacobs in a spirited conversation about the role technology has played in oppressing Indigenous peoples in Canada, eroding Indigenous identities and cultures, and harming the land. They also identify Indigenous and Western technologies that build community and affirm life.

My sermon proposes that the embodied presence of God in creation and the incarnation provides a central biblical lens for discerning how the church shares the good news.

Although a variety of perspectives on technology are represented in this issue, it does not give equal time to opposing views on the value of using digital media for the life of faith. What comes through with some consistency is the conviction that our faith requires us to participate in the work of reconciliation and strengthening relationships between humans and God, among humans, and with creation. In our engagement with this work, how we use technology matters.

About the editor

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Technology in the life of faith

A call for critical engagement

Maxwell Kennel

To understand technology's formative power and reflect on its role in the life of faith, it helps to know that the word *technology* is formed by a combination of two Greek words, *techne* and *logos*. In Greek, the word *techne* refers to the use of a tool, or the implementation of a craft or skill, and *logos* refers to a word or conversation about a particular topic, or the concept of reason or logic.¹ The combination of these two words reveals to us what we mean when we talk about technology.

Technology is a combination of a kind of knowing and a kind of making, and technology happens at the crossroads of tool use and human communication. This description of technology comes from the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who suggests that human beings and technology mutually invent each other.² He writes about “the invention of the human,” in the sense that technology is invented by humans and humans themselves are formed by their technology.³ This description shows us how technology includes things that we would not normally think of as being technological, such as writing and language.⁴

The point is that the history of humankind is inextricably linked to the history of technologies, from the beginning of tool use to the present digital age. For Anabaptist groups and other Christians for whom maintaining boundaries around use of technology remains important, it is essential that we grapple with this view of technology. The power of technology, its problems and potential, deserves our intentional reflection.

Technology as spiritual formation

While technology is often taken to refer only to mechanical and instrumental things (a computer or cell phone, for example), contained within the definition of technology is also a statement about how humans communicate and live life. Technology points

to something more significant than mere objects, and it is not necessarily a neutral force in the world.

Although it is tempting to think that we are in charge when we use technology, the opposite tends to be true. We do not simply use and control technology; it also shapes us. And we are formed by technology not just on the level of our day-to-day experience but also on the level of our spirituality, in our relationship with God.

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Particular technologies, from the automobile to the cell phone to the Internet, encourage particular kinds of uses. Technologies are oriented in certain ways, and those ways are not always commensurate with the gospel's ways of being and doing. Part of the life of faith, then, is to adopt a critical stance toward technology, recognizing that too often technology teaches us to want things that do not lead to rich and valuable relationships with others.

Technology can be a help or a hindrance for our personal and communal spiritual formation, directing our desires and affecting our experience of time. For example, the agenda that technology promotes is often characterized by speed and efficiency, by the promise that our lives will be made easier

because we can move and communicate faster and more effectively. These promises are value laden and assume that ease is better than difficulty, and speed is better than slowness. Technologies that emphasize speed and efficiency can prevent us from valuing experiences that take time and energy, that are only rewarding when accomplished slowly and through difficulty.

The loving relationships and the type of community that Christ promotes are not in line with this emphasis on ease and speed. Theologian and philosopher Chris Huebner writes about how effectiveness and speed can become violence and therefore go against the grain of Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition in its espousal of nonviolence. For Huebner, speed is a way that technology promotes a sort of violence.

Through a reading of another French philosopher, Paul Virilio, Huebner argues that "violence has come to organize the very way

we think” and furthermore that “violence is primarily a function of speed.”⁵ The speed of technology stands against the patience needed for Christian faith, in a way similar to how an emphasis on effectiveness can get in the way of faithfulness.

Instead of giving way to the technological impulse to prize speed and effectiveness, in Christian community we should encourage one another to slow down and disconnect from technology in order to invest time in people. We should also expect that community and relationships will not always be easy, and that our efforts will not always be effective. When we release

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ourselves from the pressure of needing to pay attention to a screen, we can become vulnerable to others, we can ground our lives in a particular place and time, and we can we orient ourselves in relationship with others.

What we find in Christian community is a depth and richness that stands in stark contrast to the fragmentation and disconnection that we risk when we look for fulfillment in technology. The church needs to remind itself that on its own, technology is not a place to find meaning and fulfillment. Technology

may or may not be helpful, and we will not always see immediately whether it is beneficial or harmful.

We need to take care that technology does not become another idol or another way of being complicit in the purposes of empire. Media, television, advertisements, and popular films each deserve critical treatment for the ways they form us.

Technology and attention

One major way technology affects us is in the area of our attention; it affects both our attention span and the things that we spend time doing and thinking about. Our attention spans have been retaught and reshaped by the speed of our digital technology and by our instantaneous access to information.

We began by defining technology as the combination of *techne* and *logos*, but another ancient Greek term can also help us understand technology: *pharmakon*, which means both poison and cure, something that both helps and hinders. Google’s search engine,

for example, helps us see technology as *pharmakon*: it increases the availability of valuable information and also diminishes our attention span.

Stiegler diagnoses this problem in contemporary culture by describing our “attention economy.”⁶ Our attention to advertisements and other formative forces—such as cultural narratives about the good life—is now a commodity. As a significant part of the attention economy, technology directs our attention toward

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certain places and therefore away from other places. Companies promoting their products seek our attention. Those who stand to profit by forming our lives toward commercial ends buy and sell advertising space and the human attention that comes with it. In a society inundated by media, what we pay attention to is a valuable commodity for those who gain by getting our attention.

The church should be keenly aware that young people (I write this as a twenty-four-year-old) are being formed by aspects of mass culture that are more compelling and hold attention more effectively than the formative forces of the church.

Technology and time

One example of the conflict in values between technological culture and the religious culture of the church is our experience of time. Technology deeply affects our experience of the passage of time. Even a writing implement such as a pencil is a kind of technology. A consequence of the development of this technology is that humans could create calendars and record the passage of time. In our tracking of the passage of days and weeks and months and years, technology puts us into a mode of being in which we risk focusing more on measurement and consistency than on the quality and depth of our experiences in time.

The Greek distinction between two kinds of time, *chronos* and *kairos*, is helpful here. Where *chronos* is measured and quantitative time, *kairos* is immeasurable and qualitative time. We can illustrate the difference by pointing to the experience of watching the clock as the end of the workday draws near, in contrast to the

experience of worshipful meditation or contemplation. The church needs to take care lest technology's formative power eclipse the formation provided by Christian practices.

Technology tends to encourage people to experience time as *chronos* (in a measurable and predictable way), and in response the church must enact a sort of counter-formation that promotes the experience of *kairos* time, perhaps in the context of worship, prayer, and meditation. If technology is a part of our spiritual formation, then we need to pay attention to how technology conditions our experience of God. If we are to be people who experience God in God's time, then we must cultivate practices of resistance that teach attention to God.

Reflecting on technology

I believe that the church must critically assess the role of technology in the formation of people (young and old, within and outside the church), and then develop approaches to discipleship that are able to counter the negative influences of technology while also reinforcing the positive influences of technology.⁷

Education about and discussion of technology are good first steps in addressing the issue of technology for the church. This education could take the form of teaching congregation members about the negative ways technology can influence their relationships. Specific issues that could be addressed include partisanship in the news media, pornography addiction, changing definitions of friendship (given Facebook), and the role of technology in congregational worship.

I cannot overstate the importance of having explicit conversations about technology in the church. Intentional conversation about the role of technology in our lives can give birth to new practices of attention such as restricting cell phone use in order to facilitate experiences of connection in the present moment, or practicing attentiveness and presence of mind during worship as an act of formation countering the ways technology diminishes our attention spans.

Critical conversations on technology must also address the positive roles that technology can play, especially in the areas of communication. Recognizing the value as well as the limitations of e-mail communication is an important example. Where e-mail

reaches people quickly and efficiently at any time of day, it also risks reducing human and qualitative aspects of communication such as facial expressions and gestures.

The church needs to become attuned to the importance and the ambivalence of technology so that we can be wary of the negative potential of technologies and take advantage of their positive potential. An understanding of technology as *pharmakon*—poison and remedy—reminds us that we are called to be discerning and careful in our acceptance and our rejection of technologies.

As we learn about and negotiate our relationship with technology, my prayer is that we will seek an understanding of our human place in the universe: finite and situated in space and time, yet called to be in relationship with God, who is infinite and outside time and space—all through the incarnation of Christ, who straddles the finite and the infinite, the limited and the limitless.

Notes

¹ The *logos* that is a part of the word *technology* reflects a more general understanding of the Greek term than the more specific Christ-*logos* that is found in John 1:1.

² Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, trans. George Collins and Richard Beardsworth, vol. 1, *The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

³ *Ibid*, 134.

⁴ *Ibid*, 155.

⁵ Chris Huebner, “Patience, Witness, and the Scattered Body of Christ: Yoder and Virilio on Knowledge, Politics, and Speed,” in *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006), 116, 119.

⁶ Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁷ See James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 106–7.

About the author

Maxwell Kennel has served in ministry at Steinmann Mennonite Church and Crosshill Mennonite Church in Ontario, Canada, and recently completed a master’s degree in theological studies at Conrad Grebel University College. His master’s thesis examined the concept of the secular and the seventeenth-century Dutch Collegiant group. He is author of a booklet on continental philosophy, *Dialectics Unbound* (Punctum Books, 2013). Parts of this article were presented as “The *Pharmakon* of Technology for Theology: On the *Chronos/Kairos* Distinction in Bernard Stiegler’s *Technics and Time*, Volume 1,” at the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts conference, Kitchener, Ontario, September 23, 2011. In October 2013 an earlier version of this paper was presented as a working paper for the Mennonite Church Canada Future Directions Task Force (FDTF).

Of posts, a parable, and Pentecost

Using new media to foster faith community

Hannah E. Heinzekehr

This spring, I have been coaching a U12 girls soccer team. This means that every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday this spring, I've spent several hours out on a field with a passel of eleven-year-

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old girls. Getting to know these young women has left me feeling hopeful and at times befuddled. I have been reminded of all the ways that identity is shifting and changing and developing during these particularly fragile, fluid middle school years.

During a recent practice, one of the girls approached me during a water break and said, "I've been feeling lonely lately, and I'm not sure why." We talked for a while about her friends and how she felt like some of them

were changing and leaving her out. In the midst of this conversation, one of her fellow team members came to join us. After listening for a bit, she said, "Oh, I know that feeling. Everyone has those days! When I feel like that, I just take a selfie and post it on Instagram, and all my friends tell me how talented and good I am. That always makes me feel better."

Needless to say, I was taken aback. Whereas what advice or wisdom I had to offer had been centered on probing the context and content of face-to-face interpersonal relationships, my young team member clearly saw online community as a place to be built up and to have her selfhood reinforced by a community of peers.¹

There are at least two possible ways to view this interaction and advice. First, one could say that this girl is a true product of the digital age, a narcissistic millennial who unquestioningly adopts and uses technology to reinforce her sense of self, without thinking about the costs to or implications for her interpersonal relationships and her ability to live in community.

This would be a fairly standard mode of thought, especially among faith communities. In his article in this issue of *Vision*, Maxwell Kennel writes, “What we find in Christian community is a depth and richness that stands in stark contrast to the fragmentation and disconnection that we risk when we look for fulfillment in technology.”² And this idea that technological community is but a shallow shadow version of “true community” is a common trope when faith communities bemoan the fate of their young adults. Indeed, if you were to google millennials and church, you would be inundated with a host of blog posts, opinion pieces, and surveys unpacking the ways that culture, technology, and anti-institutionalism have colluded to produce a generation of young adults who are leaving church in droves and giving up on interpersonal relationships.

But as Christian cultural scholar Diana Butler Bass noted in a 2013 lecture, there is nothing unique about the questions that millennials are raising and the despair that older adults feel about the future of the church and its young adults. Bass said, “Rather than being particularly unique in their generational concerns, millennials have inherited three significant sets of questions that weave throughout American religious history with some regularity. These are questions related to doubt, disestablishment, and diversity.”³ Bass would suggest that these questions are universal across generations and have less to do with the ways technology is unraveling our lives and more to do with what it means to be a young adult sorting out one’s identity, albeit in more public ways for millennials today.

To circle back around to my young soccer player and her advice, one could also note her description of the positive impact of technology in her life. Social networks are a place to go to be affirmed. They can be places where a community of friends reside and where you can seek out encouragement and advice.

Perhaps the real truth about technology lies somewhere between these two interpretive extremes.

What blogging has taught me about doing public theology

As someone who has spent the past three years building a blog platform to reflect on the intersections of feminism, theology, and Mennonite identity, I can say that I have experienced technologi-

cal platforms as a mixed bag: an affirming and wonderful place to create a community of generative ideas, and also a time drain and a place for cynical debates that can get out of hand.

My blog was begun as an assignment for a class on becoming a public scholar. The premise of this class was that traditional scholarship is evolving, and those who want to work in academia in the future will need to promote their work on multiple platforms. For the final project for this class, we were required to carve out a niche and create a blog that highlighted our interests and scholarship. As part of the assignment, we were required to post on the blog every day for one month and to seek out ways to promote it. We were graded on our blog's reach and views, so we could not simply post in private.

I was sure that I would hate blogging, but to my great surprise I found myself invigorated by the response that came to my writing and by the new voices and thoughts that I was coming into contact with through these posts. As I look back over the past

As part of a school assignment, I was required to post on a blog daily for one month. I was sure I would hate blogging, but instead I found myself invigorated by the response and by the new voices and ideas I was coming into contact with.

three years, I can see the ways that I have treated this platform as a thought journal. Since blog posts are often short and sweet, nothing like the papers I was writing as part of my master's program, the exercise allowed me to quickly synthesize thoughts or ideas rolling around in my head and fling them out into the world, where they would be responded to, wrestled with, and shared more broadly than any academic paper I've ever written has been. In many ways, having a blog allowed my voice, and the voices of others who shared their thoughts through posts and comments, to be heard far and wide without

waiting for a publishing house or church body to notice us and select our voices as worth amplifying.

I've also found friends through blogging: people whom I've e-mailed in depth, looked up in person at conferences, and gotten to know through phone and video chat conversations. I've helped other people launch their own blog platforms and amplified the voices of many guest writers, most of them from across Mennonite Church USA.

But I have always had a sense that there is a limit to what this burgeoning community can be. As part of an Anabaptist denomination, I am committed to an ecclesiology that emphasizes local incarnational communities as the center of our faith life. If one were to ask the question whether you could be an Anabaptist alone, the answer, in my mind, would be no. The most recent systematic articulation of Mennonite beliefs, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995), states, “We believe that the

In the wake of so many arguments decrying technologies’ ruinous effects on our faith and our relationships, I’d suggest that technology might be a tool for communicating in positive and perhaps even biblical ways.

church as the body of Christ is the visible manifestation of Jesus Christ. The church is called to live and minister as Christ lived and ministered in the world. . . . The church exists as a community of believers in the local congregation, as a community of congregations, and as the worldwide community of faith.”⁴

At its best, this Mennonite focus on discerning local communities has meant that members of congregations develop deep caring relationships with one another, and many members of the church are committed

to being active participants in the life, work, and decision-making processes of the church. But at its worst, Anabaptist emphasis on nonconformity and tight communities has been interpreted as exclusive or as an unattainable ideal we never can truly live out.

How then are we to understand the implications of these new technologies, which create communities that function in ways so very different from the ways we’ve understood church and learning communities to function? What is gained and what is lost through the use of these new media?

I believe that we must be cautious adopters, thinking through the ways each new technology that we take on shapes and forms us. But in the wake of so many arguments decrying technologies’ ruinous effects on our faith and our relationships, I would like to suggest that in fact technology might be a tool for communicating in broadly positive and perhaps even biblical ways. To explore this idea further, I want to look at two examples: the biblical parable of the sower told by Jesus and the implications of Pentecost for our communication and communities.

Jesus and the parable of the sower

Mennonites have historically centered our work and witness on the narrative of Jesus Christ. While we hold the whole biblical story to be instructive, Jesus is the lens through which we interpret scripture. Therefore, as Anabaptists, we should seek to model our communication after Jesus as well.

In his book *Speaking into the Air*, communication theorist John Durham Peters contrasts the mode of communication that we see in Jesus's parable of the sower with Plato's vision of communication in the *Phaedrus*. Whereas Plato praises dialogue that grows out of specific love between two intimately connected people, Peters suggests that the parable of the sower praises broad dissemination as the privileged mode of communication.

If the parable of the sower offers us a glimpse into Jesus's preferred method for evangelism, we should be grateful for technology, which allows us to broadcast our message farther than ever before.

In this parable, a gardener goes out and sows seeds indiscriminately. Some of them are choked out by weeds; others fall on rocky soil and can't take root; others are eaten by birds; and some take root and grow tall, strong, and healthy. The gardener is not primarily concerned with controlling the delivery of each seed individually but rather sows seeds far and wide in the hopes that some will take root and grow. Peters writes, "The parable of the sower celebrates broadcasting as an equitable

mode of communication that leaves the harvest of meaning to the will and capacity of the recipient."⁵

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Pentecost and a multiplicity of messages

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1–4, NRSV)

According to the Pew Research Forum, Pentecostal movements are some of the fastest-growing segments of Christianity around the world. And although it could be argued that Anabaptists have perhaps focused more on the narrative of Jesus as the center of their theology, we do emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit. Our confession of faith says, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of God, who dwelled in Jesus Christ, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of our redemption and of the redemption of creation.”⁶

And indeed, as Mennonite Church USA continues to diversify,⁷ it may be that the emphasis we place on the Holy Spirit and the gifts that it brings will continue to grow. When I was completing my master’s thesis, I interviewed Pastor Grace Pam of Los Angeles Faith Chapel, who said, “We were drawn to Anabaptist theology because it agrees with Pentecostal theology. Baptism is for those who have accepted Jesus Christ, so for adults and not a child, and the Spirit intercedes on our behalf daily.”⁸

But Anabaptists have done surprisingly little writing and thinking about Pentecost, one of the preeminent communication moments in the Bible and the moment when the Holy Spirit is sent to the disciples. In this passage from Acts, we see that the Spirit enables communication in multiple forms and in multiple languages. As we read this passage, we can imagine a cacophony of voices scrambled on top of one another. No one can understand all that is being said, but everyone can receive some message that is accessible to them. In a similar way, technology today allows us to carve out niches and to create communities who rally around specific mission and value sets. In many ways, this has been the case for as long as we have had self-selected church communities, but it is perhaps made more obvious by the multiplicity of options that technology offers us.

But instead of understanding these broad-reaching, sometimes incongruous messages as problematic, perhaps we should understand technology as simply another way that God’s good news can be translated and carried. Michael Welker explores the meanings of Pentecost in the book of Acts and makes two overarching observations: first, that “the miracle of understanding occurs not through a unified voice or language but through the cacophony of

many tongues and languages,” and second, that the Spirit finds ways to create new communities that are based on preserving “radical diversity.”⁹ While the thread of God’s good news remains consistent throughout, the ways this message is interpreted, expressed, and heard are radically different.

Although we need to be aware of the implications of technology as we adopt it, I would like to suggest that new media forms have made it possible for unique voices to pick up and interpret theology and faith practices in new ways. Perhaps this is the continuation of the Spirit’s work of transforming our words and witness so that all who seek may find something of value to connect with.

Notes

¹ There are clearly times when social media use is not, in fact, affirming. Bullying on social media is a real problem that could be a subject for another piece.

² Maxwell Kennel, “Technology and the Church,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 8.

³ Diana Butler Bass, “Leaving Church? Generation Next and the Future of Faith,” The Capps Lecture in Christian Theology, November 1, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/120102913>.

⁴ “The Church of Jesus,” Article 9 in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), <http://mennoniteusa.org/confession-of-faith/the-church-of-jesus/>.

⁵ John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 52.

⁶ “Holy Spirit,” Article 3 in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, <http://mennoniteusa.org/confession-of-faith/holy-spirit/>.

⁷ The most recent survey of Mennonites by sociologist Conrad Kanagy indicated that the only areas of growth within Mennonite Church USA today are among racial/ethnic and urban congregations. For more, read Kanagy’s *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007).

⁸ Grace Pam, interview by Hannah Heinzekehr on LA Faith Chapel, December 9, 2011.

⁹ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 235.

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Using technologies in spiritual direction

Daniel P. Schrock

This article considers how various technologies shape the church's ministry of spiritual direction, a ministry that arguably goes back to Jesus himself. While most directors and directees have preferred to work through face-to-face meetings, they have also used technologies to continue the direction relationship even when the two parties are separated by great distances. After summarizing the preferred mode of in-person direction, I will consider three technologies for spiritual direction in the historical order in which they appeared: letter writing, phone calls, and

While most spiritual directors and directees have preferred to work through face-to-face meetings, they have also used technologies to continue the direction relationship when the two parties are separated by great distances.

video calls. Seen in this historical light, video calls are merely the most recent example of ways people have used technology for spiritual direction.

In-person direction

The model for face-to-face, in-person spiritual direction is inspired by Jesus, who employed informal, on-the-fly direction in the course of embodying the coming rule of God. His conversation with Martha and Mary illustrates the discerning spirit directors try to employ (Luke 10:38–42), and his conversation with two disciples on the way to Emmaus depicts

the skill of reframing that directors sometimes use with directees (Luke 24:13–35). Such interactions need no communications technology, because the parties are in close physical proximity.

In the third century, spiritual direction among the desert fathers and mothers retained this face-to-face character. People who wanted direction from these fathers and mothers traveled from their homes into the desert to seek “a word” that might lead to more authenticity in their life with God. This word (which,

according to the stories, was often one or more pithy sentences) was spoken in a context of intimate conversation in an ascetic surrounding.

Directors and directees still prefer in-person direction. They typically meet in a quiet place, free of interruptions, and sit in chairs facing each other. The room might have a candle, a cross, a painting, a sculpture, or other visual reminders of the presence of the triune God. The conversation is intimate and confidential, and it uses no communications technology.

The advantages of in-person direction are significant. The two people not only speak and listen to each other; they also look into each other's eyes, catch the inflections in each other's voice,

In in-person direction, people not only speak and listen to each other; they also look into each other's eyes, catch the inflections in each other's voice, notice the micro-expressions crossing each other's face, and read each other's body language.

notice the micro-expressions crossing each other's face, and read each other's body language. With proper attentiveness, they can pick up nuances of feeling and desire, hope and discouragement. They may receive hints of the ineffable, detect susurrations of the divine, and hear clues of spiritual possibility. The director can gather more information about the directee than in any other mode of direction.

In-person direction resembles the incarnation of God in Christ which stresses the peculiarities of the particular: God was in this particular person who lived, taught, died, and rose again in first-century Palestine. Since

face-to-face contact was the usual mode of his ministry, face-to-face contact has also been the preferred mode of spiritual direction. Using an array of skills and sensibilities, the director attends to how the triune God is incarnate in this unique person's life. In turn, the directee hopes the triune God is incarnate in this particular director. The presence of God in one calls out to the presence of God in the other.

Direction by letter and e-mail

In-person spiritual direction has not always been possible, particularly when directors and directees live too far away for personal visits. Thus arose offering spiritual direction through letters.

Scripture itself offers examples of conducting spiritual guidance by letter. Luke-Acts was written for Theophilus (“lover of God”; Luke 1:1–4, Acts 1:1). Whether Theophilus was a real or imagined Christian, Luke-Acts was written to guide the spiritual formation of its readers. Epistolary letters of the New Testament have a similar purpose: to shape the perceptions, aspirations, and behaviors of readers. Paul’s letter to Philemon is an outstanding example of ingenious spiritual direction about a prickly topic of

One might suppose that direction by letter or e-mail message is less intimate than in-person direction. Yet certain writers have a remarkable ability to convey warmth and to craft sentences in a way that gently plumbs the work of the Spirit.

social justice—slavery—that was to bedevil the church for centuries. These letters illustrate spiritual guidance by technologies of the written word, which the church now regards as inspired.

Direction by letter soon became common. In the thirteenth century, the Italian Clare of Assisi wrote letters to her directee, Agnes of Prague; four of these letters still exist.¹ In the fourteenth century, an anonymous English director wrote two treatises for a junior monk; they were called *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling*, and their writer’s aim was to guide the junior monk’s spiritual

development.² In sixteenth-century Spain, John of the Cross occasionally offered direction by letter.³ In seventeenth-century France, Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal formed a spiritual friendship lasting nineteen years that was conducted mostly by letter.⁴

Offering direction by e-mail is a modern variant of this long tradition. Rather than using pen and paper, director and directee use computers and the Internet. The salient feature of using letters and e-mail messages is that the two people do not see each other face-to-face. Communication happens through words on the page or screen. One might suppose that this mode of direction is less intimate than in-person direction. Yet certain writers have a remarkable ability to convey warmth and to craft sentences in a way that gently plumbs the work of the Holy Spirit. Such writers can become effective directors. Moreover some directors and directees might find in-person direction hard—perhaps because they cannot think quickly in the moment or because speech in

general is challenging—but would thrive with the more contemplative pace of direction by writing.

A major disadvantage of this mode of direction is that neither party can access the other's facial micro-expressions, vocal inflections, and body language. The amount of information a director receives is greatly diminished. She might miss cues that would be obvious if the two people were sitting together. For good or ill, words become weightier, because they are all the director and directee have. If the words are clear and sensitively crafted, they may become gifts to savor. If they are murky and ill-chosen, they may confuse or wound.

An advantage of direction by written word is that each person can slow down. Slower communication creates possibilities for greater reflection and contemplative awareness of God's movements. In our fast-paced culture, slowing down enhances the possibility that direction will get to the heart of the matter. In letters and e-mail messages, one can linger over the words, rereading them, letting them sink into one's soul, and listening beyond them to the Holy Spirit's prompts. This is, of course, precisely what scripture itself allows.

Phone calls

The telephone offers another technology for spiritual direction.

Directors and directees may meet by phone, whether the call uses

Direction by phone requires its own rhythm. The parties quickly discover how easy it is to inadvertently interrupt each other. And interpreting the meaning of silence is harder in the absence of visual cues.

landlines, cell towers, or Internet packet processing. A director who chooses to receive supervision from another director may also use the phone as the technology of choice. Telephone technology allows two people who live thousands of miles apart to meet inexpensively.

Direction and supervision by phone requires its own rhythm. The parties quickly discover how easy it is to interrupt each other inadvertently. With faces hidden, it can be hard to tell when the other person has finished speaking. A related difficulty is that

interpreting the meaning of silence is harder, because there are no visual clues to signal what is stirring in the other person. Is the

other person taking notes and simply needing more time to finish? Weighing what to say next? Struggling with some emotion? On the edge of a deeper awareness that needs silence to mature? Discerning what is happening in the silence is more difficult over the phone, though not impossible.

As long as director and directee refrain from surreptitiously engaging in multitasking behaviors, direction by phone can boost the concentration of both parties, sometimes even beyond that of in-person direction. One focuses on the sounds and meanings of the words, because one has nothing else. There are no facial expressions, no messages from the other's body. With a narrower field of communicated information, the two parties can heighten their focus on what remains.

Phone calls also allow participants to move. Director and directee can walk around the room during sessions. Pacing the floor and changing postures engage the body in a way that is not possible when director and directee sit for a whole hour, and in the context of the sedentary lifestyle that many North Americans have, movement provides a welcome relief from sitting. If a director or directee happens to be sleepy, walking may sharpen his mind and further focus her concentration.

Video calls

The video call as a mode of direction is vulnerable to technical difficulties. If the technology does not work properly, both parties quickly get frustrated. Beyond the question whether Webcams, microphones, computers, and Internet connections are working properly lies the reality that operator error can halt everything. To illustrate with just one piece of this technological apparatus: either person can foul up a simple thing like the volume setting on the computer's microphone. I've sometimes waited ten or fifteen minutes while a directee struggled to find out why his computer wasn't working properly. It took several attempts and phone calls to solve the problem.

Technical glitches quickly erase any contemplative spirit the parties bring to direction. Even after all problems are resolved, one or both may feel lingering frustration with technology that did not work smoothly. It might take ten or twenty minutes for the emotional noise to ebb away so they can approach the kind of

contemplative listening required for direction to flourish. The director can help shift the focus away from frustrating technical issues by suggesting that they begin the session by praying.

Technical issues aside, direction by video call approximates, but does not match, in-person direction. The two can see each other, face-to-face, though filtered through a screen. Even so, in video calling the body language is less clear. The resolution on the screen may not be detailed enough for detecting facial micro-expressions. Generally only the upper portion of the body is visible. One cannot see the other person's feet and legs. Many of

During video calls an inattentive director can become slightly desensitized to the heartfelt struggles and joys a directee is experiencing, because the technological apparatus may insert a feeling of distance.

us talk with our hands, and often they are not visible on the screen. The personal touch is less pronounced in video calls. The director cannot shake hands with the directee or offer the hospitality of a beverage. The other person's voice and image are disassembled into packets, transmitted through cables, and artificially reconstituted into speakers and onto a screen. Direction is less incarnational.

During video calls an inattentive director can become slightly desensitized to the heartfelt struggles and joys a directee is experiencing, because the technological

apparatus may insert a feeling of distance. Though a director can also become internally distant when the directee is sitting in the same room, the technology of video calls may increase a temptation to let psychological distance creep into the relationship. If one does not attend to it, this distancing can be deadly for effective direction. A self-aware director will seek competent supervision for the internal processes that create this distance.

An advantage of direction by video call is that it can, like writing and phone calls, even out an unequal distribution of directors and people who want direction. In Mennonite Church USA, 75 percent of 131 spiritual directors listed in the denominational directory live in five states: Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas. The remaining thirty-two directors are spread out among sixteen additional states. Mennonites in other states, or in a state where the Mennonite directors are far away, may not have any Mennonite directors within driving distance.⁵

Mennonite Church Canada faces a similar situation. Of seventeen spiritual directors, twelve live in Ontario and five in Manitoba, generally in urban areas.⁶ Mennonites who live in other provinces and in rural areas of Ontario and Manitoba may not have Mennonite directors within driving distance. Video calling therefore makes it possible for people anywhere in these countries to receive spiritual direction from a Mennonite director anywhere else in the country, provided both have the right technology.

Video calls further allow directors and directees from differing geographies and cultural contexts to work together. Students of Christian spirituality have long recognized that the geography in which people live shapes their spiritual outlook and expression.⁷ Suppose a director from Kansas meets via video calls with a directee in New York City. These two people are embedded in markedly different geographies and cultural contexts. At first the differences might complicate communication and make it harder to understand subtle differences in assumptions and worldviews arising from their varying social locations. Yet over time such a direction relationship can also foster intercultural learning.

An advantage of direction by video call is that it can, like writing and phone calls, even out an unequal distribution of directors and people who want direction.

A third strength of using video calls for direction is that it can reduce one's use of fossil fuels. For several years I drove two-and-a-half hours each way to receive direction. It took me the better part of a day every month to receive direction, and I burned an unconscionable amount of gas getting there and back. In such a context, choosing direction

by video call becomes an act of creation care.

A fourth strength is that homebound directees can meet with the director of their choice. For people with disabilities that inhibit mobility, direction by video calls can be a gift of God.

Conclusion

Although spiritual direction has most often occurred with both people in the same room, for centuries directors and directees have used other technologies so direction can happen when in-person meetings are difficult or impossible. Video calls are only the most recent form. Each technology—writing, phone, and

video—has certain strengths and weaknesses that thoughtful directors will assess when selecting the best option for the context at hand.

Technologies invariably shape the communication they enable. Writing, phone calls, and video conversations each heighten certain aspects of communication while weakening or eliminating others. Directors and directees will want to continue evaluating how technologies affect their working relationship.

Notes

¹ *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady (New York: Paulist, 1982), 189–206.

² *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. A. C. Spearing (London: Penguin, 2001).

³ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 735–64.

⁴ Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 44–50.

⁵ Mennonite Church USA Leadership Development, compilers, “Mennonite Spiritual Directors List, February 2015,” http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Feb2015_SpiritualDirectorsList.pdf. These figures do not include four directors who live in Australia, Indonesia, and Japan.

⁶ Mennonite Church Canada Christian Formation, compilers, “Mennonite Spiritual Directors List—Canada, November 2014,” <http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/19971/2014-11-MCCCanada-SpiritualDirectorsList.pdf>.

⁷ Examples of this awareness include Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); and Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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“You hold the whole world in your hand”

Cell phones and discernment in Amish churches

Steven M. Nolt

“I don’t have a cell phone. I really don’t want any part of it, for myself or my family.” The forty-something Amish man who passed this judgment on mobile telephony was no Luddite. He’s a patent-holding inventor and successful entrepreneur who operates a manufacturing shop with state-of-the-art machining equipment. Nevertheless, his otherwise soft-spoken demeanor gives way to passionate concern about the perils posed by cell phones, espe-

Amish dissent from the mechanical mainstream is not an all-or-nothing proposition. It reflects complex patterns of discernment that have produced neither a flight from technology nor an uncritical equation of *new* and *improved*.

cially smart phones or any phones that include data plans and Internet access.¹

Someone else in his position would be hard pressed to imagine life without a mobile phone. Indeed, more than 90 percent of residents of the United States—and virtually all adults his age and younger—have cell phones, and last year 67 percent of them told Pew Center researchers that they “find themselves checking their phone for messages . . . even when they don’t notice their phone ringing or vibrating.”²

The fact that an Amish man would keep at arm’s length a device the rest of the world³

regards as indispensable may strike observers as unsurprising since popular media portray the Amish as shunning all technology. But as the example of the technologically sophisticated entrepreneur suggests, Amish dissent from the mechanical mainstream is not a straightforward all-or-nothing proposition. Instead, it reflects complex patterns of discernment that have produced neither a flight from technology nor an uncritical equation of *new* and *improved*.⁴ In recent years, cell phones have received a great deal of discussion in Amish circles, and they offer a lively example of contemporary discernment among these old order Christians.

We should note that it is hazardous to generalize about “the” Amish. More than 300,000 horse-and-buggy-driving Amish live across thirty-one US states and in eastern Canada, and their nearly 2,200 church districts (congregations) vary somewhat in their practices.⁵ Nevertheless, several deep assumptions center Amish thinking when it comes to adopting, adapting, or rejecting technologies, including cell phones.

“We are more bound to human limits”

A recent advertisement for a phone data plan captured mainstream society’s prevailing sentiments with its pitch line: “I need to upload all of it. I need—no, I have the *right* to be unlimited!”⁶ In contrast, Amish faith accepts human limitation as an expression of humility and as essential to being a follower of Jesus, who exemplified a spirit of self-limiting submission and obedience. Amish people believe that giving up self to God, to the church, and to others is a mark of Christian faithfulness.⁷ Limits on technology both reflect and nurture this understanding. Asked why his

A broad acceptance of human limitation means that Amish people are less concerned with maximizing efficiency and productivity—the metrics with which most modern folks measure a technology’s value. Instead, they focus on a technology’s social ethic.

church sees motorized transportation as problematic, an Amish bishop replied, “We are more bound to human limits. Man was not designed to work twenty-four hours a day. When the horse gets tired, you have to stop. You can’t go all day like [you can] with a car or a tractor.”⁸

A broad acceptance of limits means that Amish people are less concerned with maximizing efficiency and productivity—the metrics with which most modern folks measure a technology’s value. Instead, they focus on a technology’s social ethic. “The use of the automobile is hardly wrong in itself,” one publication explains, “but the free use of it will certainly lead us where we don’t want to

go. The social effect on the American family has been profound, with members heading off in all directions and leading essentially separate lives.”⁹ Similarly, public utility electricity is problematic not because electricity itself is wrong, but because, as an unlimited power source, its presence in every room of a house an-

nounces that the homeowner is ready to plug in anything and that a decision to embrace new devices is a foregone conclusion.¹⁰

Instead, as a consumer community the Amish believe that moral discernment comes first and that power arrangements—batteries for clocks, naphtha gas for lamps, propane for refrigerators, and so on—can follow later for those things deemed worthwhile.

There are few technologies that all Amish consider categorically out of bounds.¹¹ Instead, Amish churches generally focus on how to limit what they see as the primary peril posed by technology: its ability to make individuals self-reliant and independent. To curb this tendency, Amish frequently draw a distinction between access and ownership. A store owner might lease a building with electric lights but not install such lighting in her own home, or a man might hire a non-Amish driver to take him somewhere in a car. By foregoing ownership, they give up control

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and are indebted to another. Rather than being a kind of technological hypocrisy, the use/ownership distinction reveals a deeply consistent concern to limit individual autonomy.¹²

Finally, their assumptions about technology are revealed in the way the Amish deploy technology across the social landscape.

Amish schools are the most technologically restricted realms. A clock, heating stove, and hand pump for water are all the technology most schools have. Amish schools isolate children from technology and convey the message that advanced technology is not important. Homes are less restricted than schools but are still devoid of most of the

consumer technologies North Americans take for granted, because the home is the center of family life and a key environment in which children are being formed.¹³ The fact that Amish homes are also the sites of Sunday worship, weddings, and funerals also makes them inappropriate places for the intrusion and noise that emanate from radios, computers, air conditioners, and the like. The farther one moves away from the home—out into the barn, a shop, or a distant construction site, the looser the restrictions on

technology become. For example, a church that prohibits a woodworker from using power tools in his home-based shop might allow a contractor to use a wider array of equipment when building houses for outsiders.

Amish-style discernment

The locus of technology discernment in Amish life is usually the local church district, an ecclesial body comprising roughly sixteen to twenty households, with plural leadership that typically includes a bishop, two associate ministers, and a deacon. Bishops cannot make decisions for the church, but they can affect the pace of change.¹⁴

In a formal sense, each church district takes up such questions twice a year when, prior to their district's semiannual communion service, members review the district's *Ordnung* (church order), which, among other things, includes agreed-on parameters for using, owning, and deploying technology.¹⁵ The actual *process* of discernment in Amish churches is less formal. It involves informal discussion, sensitivity to tradition, an eye to the opinions of neighboring church districts, and a dose of everyday practicality. The burden of proof is always on change, but since the formal discussion of church order that precedes communion usually centers on reaffirming longstanding custom, there is considerable scope for tinkering in areas that have little or no body of accompanying tradition, and for finessing distinctions within old rubrics. For example, a district might reaffirm a taboo on in-home telephones without being specific about just how far from the home a community phone must be located (the end of the lane? in a shop by the house?). The result is a good deal of dynamic experimentation that might result in gradual acceptance, or in which individuals who push the boundaries for several months or years may eventually be called on to pull back their practices.

What about cell phones?

Economic concerns are implicit in many of the examples above. Even if Amish businessmen and businesswomen are not driven to maximize efficiency and productivity, neither are they entirely unconcerned about such matters. In recent years a growing number of Amish businesspeople argued that phones were becom-

ing essential to their livelihood, especially during and after the 2009 recession, when competition for customer service shot up. They also contended that cell phones were simply a variation on a longstanding Amish tradition (in most places) of business landlines.

Telephone technology has had a checkered Amish history. For example, in the early 1900s Amish households in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, installed home telephones, but then collectively disconnected their service in 1910 after a series of conflicts arose that were rooted in gossip spread over the lines.¹⁶

Amish households in Lancaster County had installed home telephones, but then collectively disconnected their service in 1910 after a series of conflicts arose that were rooted in gossip spread over the lines.

Telephones, the church decided, decontextualize communication by shutting out a host of nonverbal cues, dress, body language, and silence that came through face-to-face conversations. Still, it seemed obvious that phone access could be useful in some cases, so families joined together to put up community phone booths at the end of farm lanes or on fence rows, to be shared by multiple households. In time, businesspeople moved their phones closer to their shops, although many still lived with limitations their non-Amish competitors would never countenance.¹⁷ For

example, some Amish retail advertisements inform customers of “Best time to call, 6:30–7:00 a.m.,” since that is when the owner stands by an outdoor phone; otherwise a caller would get an answering service.¹⁸

In the early 1990s Amish building contractors began flirting with cell phones. Constructing new homes in developments that did not yet have landline utilities in place, carpenters turned to cell phones, which were emerging as an economically practical option. One Amish man explained this gradual pattern of acceptance with a metaphor from the world of software: landline phones under certain circumstances had been deemed okay, “and so cell phones kind of became ‘okay 2.0.’”¹⁹

Had cell phones remained simply mobile versions of traditional telephony, they likely would have seen gradually greater acceptance across much of the Amish world.²⁰ But what happened was that cell phones moved into new technological territory, with

texting and camera capabilities, and then, especially after 2007, with fast and reliable Internet access. These features changed the nature of the debate in many Amish communities. There had long been rumblings of dissent from those who saw cell phones breaking down the traditional home/work dichotomy because, as mobile devices, they were easily brought into the house in the evening and not turned off. The addition of the Internet, however, rather than making cell phones a more appealingly efficient technology, caused alarm. The Internet was an established taboo because of its general worldliness and its association with television, cinema, and video games, and now it seemed to have found a backdoor into the home.

Cell phone supporters argued that the devices were business tools, they were used away from the home, and they could be shared by several subcontractors on a single site—all features of traditional parameters for landlines. Critics—including some

Doubling down on what he saw as the central spiritual problem raised by cell phones, an Amish businessman identified the fundamentally private and isolating nature of the Internet as accessed through a personal device.

businesspeople, such as the entrepreneur in our introduction—insisted that these characteristics were surface similarities and that Internet connectivity qualitatively changed the discussion.

One window into the current conversation comes from a 2014 presentation to a group of teens and young adults in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Amish settlement. Parents there knew that many of the young people had cell phones—in fact, so did a good number of the parents.²¹ The parents asked an Amish businessman who had once used a cell phone for work, but then gave it up, to speak to the hazards of Internet-connected phones. Although he began by saying that “I’m not here to take sides,” he listed a host of phone-inflamed problems from “the immoral chatter of social media” to easily accessible Internet pornography.²² Conceding that “there is nothing on the Internet that has not been with humans for thousands of years,” he asserted that “the difference here today is that the cell phone and the Internet brings all this together in one little device. You hold the whole world in your hand and you can put it in your pocket.” Given human nature,

that convenience “makes the development of compulsive behaviors and bad habits so, so very much easier and so much more likely,” especially with features that promote anonymity.

Doubling down on what he saw as the central spiritual problem raised by cell phones, he identified the fundamentally private and isolating nature of the Internet as accessed through a personal device. “It would be easy now to just say to you ‘Keep the Lord in your heart and make good choices and all will be well.’ But the issue goes deeper.” Drawing on basic Amish anthropology and ecclesiology, he explained that individuals are unable to make consistently good choices on their own. That’s why collective discernment is a spiritual necessity, and that is why the Internet-connected cell phone is so problematic: the technology dismantles discernment by privatizing choices and rendering them invisible.

One of the marks of America is its individualism. . . . Yet the Bible was written to communities about communities. It was meant to be lived and expressed as a people not a person. According to scripture each individual has something vital for the whole community. It is one of the oldest schemes of . . . Satan to isolate people [because] he knows that isolation will cut us off from the wisdom that multiple perspectives bring.

Given Amish understanding of high-context community, the World Wide Web was not a place of connection but a source of atomization.²³

Technology to the rescue?

Discerning cell phone use is by no means resolved in most Amish circles. Connoisseurs of irony may appreciate that, in some quarters, new technology has helped resolve the cell phone quandary. In recent months on visits to places in Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, I have encountered church districts that have decided to accept wireless phone technology, commonly known as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). Those who had cell phones—and there were some in each place—have gotten rid of them and instead obtained a VoIP box offered by a company such

as Verizon or AT&T, which carries phone calls over the airways to an otherwise old-fashioned cordless telephone. Like a cell phone, a home wireless phone is mobile: the black box receiver can be hooked up to a battery (instead of plugged into the wall) and transported with a landline-type phone to a job site or from desk to desk in a small business. Unlike a cell phone, however, VoIP does not allow texting, video, or data plans.²⁴

The VoIP option illustrates one outcome of Amish technological discernment: it is a collective decision that required some people to give up their cell phones while conceding that conventional phones might more easily slip into homes, though the VoIP boxes and cordless phones are much larger than cell phones, less able to be hidden, and thus less private. Significantly, this outcome also separated cultural conversations about telephones from those about the Internet and insisted that each technology needed to be weighed on its own merits. The fact that a cellular technology

The Amish cell phone discussion is a reminder that even in a church community primed to be skeptical of technology's claims, discerning technology is still necessary, ongoing, and not easily resolved.

(VoIP) offered a way forward does not bother the Amish, because their goal was not technological "purity" but rather a particular expression of community.

For those of us who live in much more individually oriented contexts, the Amish cell phone discussion is a reminder that even in a church community primed to be skeptical of technology's claims, discerning technology is still necessary, ongoing, and not easily resolved. Satisfying outcomes emerge from deep accountability in a fairly local context, managed by informal discussion alongside a keen awareness that even small, local decisions ripple outward and across time with consequences that finite humans cannot imagine. The result becomes: Go slow, think about others, and check with the church. Here, as in so many areas of life, the values of humility and the acceptance of limits may be among the most profound aspects of Amish witness.

Notes

¹ Interview, S. F. S., Arthur, IL, March 26, 2015.

² [Http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/).

³ North America actually lags a bit in cell phone penetration, compared to most other parts of the world, and even World Bank–designated “poorest countries” have 89.4 cell phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants; see <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2>.

⁴ More extended discussion of Amish and technology can be found in Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, and Steven M. Nolt, *The Amish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 312–34.

⁵ Amish churches trace their roots to the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, and more specifically to the reforming efforts, in the 1690s, of an Anabaptist convert named Jakob Ammann, who lived in Switzerland and then the Alsace region of what is today eastern France. On the emergence of an “old order” Amish movement in North America in the mid-1800s, see the concise explanation in chapter 8 of Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988). Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, details the considerable variation in practice among today’s Amish. Diverse practices and localism complicate even how to define who should be counted as Amish. Most academic studies have adopted the parameters of an Amish historian in Aylmer, Ontario, who includes those who forbid automobile ownership, use the name “Amish,” and adhere to the 1632 Dortrecht Confession of Faith. Part of being “old order” is maintaining a highly congregational polity; the Amish have no national bureaucracy, conferences, headquarters, or think tanks to offer definitive statements or standards. Instead, oral tradition and concern to remain “in fellowship” with neighboring Amish congregations provide a sort of social ballast in lieu of the organizational structures, institutions, budgets, and professional staff on which most Western denominations rely. In 2015 virtually all the Canadian Amish live in Ontario; there is a new, small settlement in New Brunswick.

⁶ Sprint “I am unlimited” advertisement, 2013, available at <https://youtu.be/GCUO3-yq3eg>.

⁷ The German dialect term for this sort of “giving up” is *uffgevvu*. For more on how this concept is at the heart of Amish spirituality, see Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 31–89.

⁸ Interview, S. D. S., Arthur, IL, March 26, 2015.

⁹ *1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life* (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishers, 1992), 141.

¹⁰ For a thoughtful discussion of how electricity, as a *public utility* rather than as a power source per se, changed how North Americans thought about and engaged technology, see Nicholas Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

¹¹ Examples would include television, or things deeply symbolic of modernity, such as airplane travel (for almost all groups).

¹² A variation on the use/ownership principle surfaces in cases of Amish and non-Amish business partners. If the non-Amish partners have a 51 percent stake, the company might operate well outside the *Ordnung*—but again, the Amish partner has had to give up significant control.

¹³ Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, “Technological Diversity and Cultural Change among Contemporary Amish Groups,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88 (January 2014): 5–22, examines differences between highly traditional and more change-minded Amish groups, with an eye to home and family life, and highlights the importance of the home in Amish thinking about the proper deployment of technology.

¹⁴ In effect, a bishop manages the agenda of district's members meetings and therefore can, if he wishes, affect the pace of change either by delaying formal ratification of something new or by ignoring creeping innovation. Although church leaders are male, each baptized man and woman has an equal vote, and anecdotal evidence points in some cases to the decisive role of women's opinions.

¹⁵ With rare exceptions, *Ordnung* is an exclusively oral tradition, not a written code to be read or studied. See Kraybill, Nolt, and Weaver-Zuercher, *The Amish Way*, 53–58, 125–26.

¹⁶ Diane Zimmerman Umble, *Holding the Line: The Telephone in Old Order Mennonite and Amish Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 107–18. Zimmerman Umble includes more detail from Pennsylvania and Iowa. For broad context, see Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Zimmerman Umble, *Holding the Line*, 143–59.

¹⁸ See advertisements in various business directories. Even as Amish businesses rely more and more on telephone service, their dependence on voicemail sets their use of the phone apart; see <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2015/06/10/412866432/businesses-are-hanging-up-on-voice-mail-to-dial-in-productivity>.

¹⁹ Interview, B. S. R., Narvon, PA, February 10, 2015.

²⁰ Again, one must be careful about making generalizations. In some Amish communities—the one around Shipshewana, Indiana, for example—cell phones have been fairly common for at least a decade, and non-Amish neighbors are likely to believe that “all Amish” now have cell phones, based on their observation of this particular corner of Amish society. But in large swaths of the Amish world, cell phones have never been used (and, I would aver, likely won't be for some time). Members of the ultra-conservative “Swartzentruber” Amish in upstate New York, for example, do not directly use conventional landlines, let alone cell phones. Swartzentruber Amish there ask Karen Johnson-Weiner, professor of anthropology, State University of New York at Potsdam, and other non-Amish neighbors to make phone calls on their behalf, because they will not speak directly into a phone themselves.

²¹ Another dynamic in discussions of technology is the fact that, as an Anabaptist church, the Amish do not regard children as members accountable to the church until those children request baptism, usually between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. As a result, in some Amish communities, teens possess things that are not allowed for their parents. Upon baptism, teens are to give up these things, but the influence of the Internet during impressionable adolescent years has been a source of concern for parents in those communities where significant deviance from church *Ordnung* on the part of unbaptized teens is tolerated. See discussion in the second edition of Richard A. Stevick, *Growing Up Amish: The Rumspringa Years* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

²² Summary and quotations that follow are drawn from a fifteen-page handwritten document, rough but complete notes, prepared and used by the speaker. Another brief piece on cell phones from an Amish periodical is “The World Is Watching,” *Family Life*, May 2013, 12.

²³ In a conversation not focused on cell phones, an Amish person who used the Internet extensively when working for a non-Amish employer offered this critique: “People talk about the Internet being a democratic force, but that's baloney. It's anarchy. In a democracy, people get together to decide how to live together. In an anarchy, it's every man for himself, and that's the Internet”; interview, B. S. R., Narvon, PA, February 10, 2015.

²⁴ A somewhat similar outcome has jelled in some Amish communities where opposition to the Internet remains strong but the practical desire for business computing (word processing, spreadsheets, tax preparation programs, payroll software, and the like) is strong. There is at least one Amish-owned IT company building computers (Intel i7 processors, one terabyte hard drive, etc.) that have a DSL line for e-mail but no Internet, audio, or video capability. Amish clients run the computers with batteries charged via solar or diesel generation, or with public utility electricity if they are leasing in a non-Amish industrial park. In some progressive pockets of the Amish world, businesses have signed up for Internet service along with a third-party accountability system and filtering software that sharply limits the Internet to uses such as scheduling shipping or checking a supplier's Web page.

About the author

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How a “phone chateau” helped our youth group

Brendan Fong and Barry Wong

About six years ago, adult leaders of our youth group started to notice that phones—especially so-called smart phones—were becoming a problem in our group. Some youth would be physically present at youth group events, but socially and emotionally they were with friends somewhere else. On a practical level this was a problem, because when leaders gave instructions, the youth who were on their phones did not know what was going on, and they could not fully engage in activities, or they would distract others who wanted to be involved.

We wanted our youth group to be a place where we could experience how being friends with Jesus means being friends with each other, as part of one group. But when some pulled out phones, it tended to fragment us.

But the use of phones was also disruptive on a deeper level. We wanted our youth group to be a place where we could experience how being friends with Jesus means being friends with each other, as part of one group. We also wanted the walls that nor-

mally divide us to be broken down. But when some of us pulled out our phones, it tended to reinforce those walls and fragment us.

Our Friday night youth group is diverse socioeconomically and racially. The youth participate in different school groups, and some of them grew up in the church while others just attend our youth nights. It was our desire that they all experience the presence of God and the presence of each other. We wanted a place where all would feel welcomed and loved. But instead of helping us focus on those who were physically present, the phones prevented us from experiencing real relationships with each other. Small groups of youth would huddle around their gadgets, while others felt excluded because they did not have smart phones.

At first, adult leaders asked the students who were using their phones to put them away. Usually, within ten minutes the phones

would be out again. Some youth just couldn't control their need to be digitally connected. We needed to do something else, but we didn't want to single people out (that happens at school, and it doesn't work), we didn't want to focus on bad behavior, and we didn't want to be punitive.

We came up with the idea of the “phone chateau”—a place where our phones could go on a spa vacation while we were getting to know Jesus and each other. It was just a box we passed around to collect everyone’s phones.

We wanted instead to focus on the joys and benefits of face-to-face relationships and on the idea that to really get to know Jesus, we really need to get to know each other. So we came up with the idea of the “phone chateau”—a place where our phones could go on a spa vacation while we were getting to know Jesus and each other. The phone chateau was just a box we passed around to

collect everyone's phones. During youth group, the phone chateau would remain in a place that was visible to everyone, so no one needed to worry that their phone would be stolen or lost.

Reactions

The responses of the youth varied. Some understood at a basic level why we did this. Others found it awkward and uncomfortable to give up their phones, even for an hour or two. Some lied and said they had left their phones at home. After one youth made multiple trips to the bathroom in a short span of time, we caught on to what was going on. Many kept reaching into their pockets for their phantom phones. One youth had such a strong visceral response to being separated from his phone that he started sweating. One time we even saw him “air-texting” (pretend texting). At the time, we couldn't help but laugh at what we were seeing. Only later did we realize what a powerful—addictive—hold Web connections and online social networks had on the lives of these youth.

Interacting with the people you are with helps build respect for each other. As an adult, I (Barry) can react negatively to youths who are constantly looking at their phones when I'm trying to get their attention, but if I can see the addiction, the power of the phone over them, or that what they are searching for on that phone can only be filled by Jesus and his people, then I can have

compassion for them. Instead of being stopped by their behavior, I can find a way forward to a trusting and respectful relationship with them.

What was incredible was that after four or five months the youths who initially struggled the most were the first to look for the phone chateau. It did not stop them from coming!

Success?

We used the phone chateau for about three years. After youth group took a break, we kind of forgot to bring it out at the first re-gathering. When we realized that we had forgotten it, we noticed that youth were not whipping their phones out. It had become normal that the people physically present with us were, at that moment, more important than the people in our pockets.

Over the years another thing had changed. The adult leaders had gotten better at leading the group by including youth as partners in being hospitable to strangers. The older youth were encouraged to get to know new youth and to show hospitality. When the focus is on someone else, there is little room or desire to peek into your device, and new youth didn't feel the need to reach for the familiarity of their phone friends.

These subtle but intentional changes in helping youth show hospitality to strangers account for some of the success, but there was also cultural change in our group. In company with the people you care for and the people who love you, youth group became *fun*. You don't want to be with your pocket friends then, because you have friends and will-be-friends right there with you. We came to experience how "connecting" and "sharing" on Facebook could not compare with the real-life connection we experienced at youth group. Without our phones, we were more present to each other and more present to God.

Recently two youth who were not originally from our church gave their testimony. They are very different: one is intellectual and reflective, the other more free-spirited. Both of them used the word *family* to describe Redeemer Community Church, and they contrasted it to other communities they are a part of. One of these youth had years earlier resisted giving up his phone at youth group, and he had struggled with not having instant virtual access to his friends. Today he wants to be involved with helping

younger kids feel welcomed when they come. He realizes that a phone is no substitute for the love and care of a church family, and he wants to share that love and care with other youth.

Youth don't *need* to live their lives through gadgets

It is true that phones are an important part of daily life for many teens, and many would have a hard time giving them up. Phones connect us with the people we want to be with and the things we want to do. High school students help each other with homework using Facebook and other social media. But when we look at the overall effect phones have on us, we realize that it's mostly spectacle. It's mostly about entertainment. It feeds on us, not we on it. And precisely because it can be so fun, it can have power over us.

Youth need to learn that we can have fun and relationships without phones, fun that is joyful and relationships that are deep and enduring. It's kind of like when you go to a movie theater and you are reminded that there is a time and place for phones, but the theater is not the time or place. Our youth group is aware now

Once you have a place where phones are not crucial for being together (and where, in fact, they hurt being together), the effects of that experience can't help but seep into other parts of your life.

that there are *lots* of places, not just movie theaters, where phones don't belong, because experiencing the love and care of Jesus through attentive friends is all we need.

Seepage

We'd like to say that the phone chateau experiment led us to start many other intentional practices, but it has not triggered other things in a super-radical way. But once you have a place where phones are not crucial for being together (and where, in fact, they *hurt*

being together), the effects of that experience can't help but seep into other parts of your life.

Reflecting on our experience with the phone chateau has helped me (Brendan) appreciate some of the rules and limits my parents put in place that I thought were dumb when I was younger. (I hope my parents don't read this. Well, I guess they probably know it already). For example, I was not allowed to have a real phone, a smart phone that could connect to the Web, until I was in high school. I respect and trust my parents' rules

now, even if I don't always agree with them, because I know they love me and ultimately they respect me.

More recently, our pastor asked our whole church not to use electronic devices during our Sunday worship service and our Wednesday night Bible study. He talked about why it is important not to use gadgets in church and why it is important to read scripture from the Bible, a book, not off an iPad or smart phone. Reading scripture from a gadget can be distracting when an alert comes in and your mind wanders from God's word. So much of our lives are taken up with these things. But when you hold a Bible, you are aware bodily that you are reading from and part of a great big story of God's love that is very old but goes far into the future.

Technology has invaded our lives, but our hope is to have our church experiences of worship and Bible study and family seep in to help all of us—including our youth—recover some of what's been lost.

About the authors

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Mythical weddings or parabolic ones?

Pitfalls and possibilities in a technological age

Lydia Stoltzfus

Grandma Kathryn loved to reminisce about Grandpa, and I could sit and listen to her for hours. I guess that's what happens when you put together a love-struck—and recently engaged—

A shift in meaning happens when the wedding industry becomes the leading authority for our practice. A celebration that centers on the uniqueness of the couple takes our focus away from their covenant with God.

granddaughter and a grandmother whose love for her husband never waned. Grandpa had died almost three decades earlier. Thinking of heaven, Grandma would say, "That's a long time to wait to see your husband again!"

To me, Grandma and Grandpa's wedding sounded like a simple affair. They were married in her parents' home on Thanksgiving Day, 1946. Grandma had bought a long white dress for sixteen dollars and then snipped off the train to make it appropriate for a Mennonite wedding. The preparations had been simple; in the absence of premarital

counseling, the pastor had to ask which suit-clad young man was the groom! After the ceremony and Thanksgiving dinner, the guests sent the couple off to Florida for their honeymoon.

When I started planning my own wedding almost seventy years later, I hoped to keep it less than extravagant, though I knew I wouldn't match the simplicity of Grandma's wedding. Perhaps I could at least emulate her stress-free attitude, as many sources assured me that careful planning would enable me to do. I had the help of many resources Grandma lacked: wedding budget spreadsheets, online planning guides, 24-7 shopping at my fingertips for dresses and decorations, and Pinterest and theKnot.com to organize it all. My tools were products of advances in technology—social media and how-to Web sites—which promised to help me save time and money while throwing the personalized, unforgettable party of a lifetime.

And yet, as a Christ follower, I hoped our wedding would be more worshipful than unique, more Christ centered than couple centered. Given the individualized and competitive slant of social media promotions and wedding advertisements, technology seemed to be steering me in the wrong direction. Perhaps that understanding itself identifies part of the problem: we let technology speak authoritatively, and couples become the central (and often bewildered) decision makers for this covenantal practice. We could do better if we allow the church to influence and form this practice, even in a countercultural way that discerns the place of technology within weddings as a helper, not the authority.

The wedding industry as technology

My grandparents' wedding may reflect a simpler time, but it was not free of the technologies of the wedding industry. Even their simple ceremony reveals traces of the increasing attention and money being spent on a couple's special day, a trend that was picking up steam in their post-World War II era. Grandma wore a white dress, and they had a reception meal and wedding photo, all elements that were uncommon only decades earlier.

Most significantly, my grandparents celebrated their marriage with a private ceremony for family and friends. In earlier years, most couples in their Mennonite community had simply walked to the front of the church at the end of the Sunday morning service to be married. "There wasn't anything special just for the two of them," Kathryn explained. Her own parents' 1915 wedding had taken place at the pastor's home over the lunch hour, with two witnesses attending. By comparison, Kathryn and Wilmer's wedding was quite the event, influenced by an emerging sector of the economy: the wedding industry.

Rebecca Mead defines the wedding industry, which had its beginnings in the 1920s and 30s, as "the infrastructure of service providers and businesses, ranging from individual entrepreneurs to massive corporations, that seek to provide the bride and groom with the accoutrements of the wedding day."¹ Historically, weddings had been civil ceremonies of mutual public consent before moving under church jurisdiction in the late Middle Ages in Christian Europe.² By the twentieth century, weddings attracted more economic attention in the United States, as bridal advertise-

ments promoted beautiful nuptial events and families' spending rose to create them. Following World War II, bridal magazines endorsed lavish formal weddings as rewards for wartime sacrifices

When the Knot announced the results of its survey identifying \$31,213 as the average cost of a wedding, it served the wedding industry by normalizing excessive spending for one special day.

and praised extravagance as supporting democracy through investment in the capitalist economy.³ By the 1950s the wedding industry was a strong influence on many engaged couples' wedding plans.

As technology advanced, the industry adapted, relying on magazines, billboards, television, and Web sites to maximize its influence and profits surrounding the wedding day. Couples getting married relied on the industry, altogether spending more than \$70 billion each year.⁴ When the Knot announced

the results of its 2014 survey on wedding spending, identifying \$31,213 as the average cost of a wedding, it served the industry by normalizing excessive spending for one special day.⁵

Perhaps even more significant than the amount of money spent on weddings is the shift in meaning that happens when the wedding industry becomes the leading authority for this ecclesial practice. The industry promotes society's ideals of perfection, opulence, and competition. The celebration centers on the uniqueness of the couple rather than their covenant with God. Most disheartening, the wedding industry promotes the illusion that one can find fulfillment in a perfect wedding, which guarantees a perfect marriage.

An opportunity for formation in Christian community

In the larger society in North America, wedding and marriage preparation is moving outside the realm of the church. The wedding industry holds much more sway over most couples than do the church community and its ministers. Yet, within our communities of believers, we can savor the counter-formative opportunities weddings provide when thoughtfully practiced within church life. While we may not wholeheartedly embrace all that technology offers for marriage celebrations, we can accept the gifts that help us more faithfully serve God on our—and more often on others'—wedding days.

For believers, Christian community is essential to weddings. The community not only witnesses the wedding but also promises to support and encourage the marriage for a lifetime. While the wedding industry promotes individuality at weddings, focusing on the couple's unique story, tastes, and commitments, the church offers a communal covenant. The bride and groom do not enter a covenant alone, or solely with God. Instead, they enter a triangular covenant with God and the community, which all partners witness and promise to uphold.⁶ Weddings call those gathered to

Instead of focusing on the couple's unique story, tastes, and commitments, the church offers a communal covenant between couple, community, and God, which all partners witness and promise to uphold.

consider the meaning of covenantal relationships, to strengthen current ones, and to encourage future commitments. The church pushes beyond technology's individualistic focus when it involves the whole gathered congregation as a covenantal community.

Situating weddings within community life offers us the opportunity to help and encourage one another. Within the despair of Ecclesiastes, the author finds hope in companionship. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

For if they fall, one will lift the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help" (4:9–10, NRSV).

These verses remind us of our commitment to one another: if one falls, if a couple falls, their mentors, church, and friends should be there to help them up. But if we isolate ourselves or abandon each other, we might find ourselves alone when we fall, without another to lift us up.

Hebrews 10:24–25a furthers the call to encourage: "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." Having just explained Christ's sacrifice, the author now asks believers to respond to God's love by showing more love and encouragement. Again, the message is for the whole community, but it reminds us of the importance of living out marriage in a continuing faith community. Marriage is a context for discipleship, a place where couples invite and expect the Christian community to help them better reflect God's image in their relationship. In providing occasions to remember the call

to help and encourage one another, weddings can witness to deep commitments and abiding relationships, countering technology's pull to individualism and isolation.

Examining our treasures

Surrounded by technology's images of the ideal life, we may not realize how much our desires and practices point toward society's vision unless we consciously seek to redirect them. Jesus encourages us to turn our desires toward heaven, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). For Jesus, the way we live, what we treasure, and where we spend our money are issues of the heart, and not matters to be ignored for the sake of one glamorous day. Steve Thorngate agrees that money and theology are connected, insisting that "downsizing the wedding industry's emphasis on a two-character fairy tale is a theological issue."⁷ It's about focusing on Christ and worship rather than on wedding splendor. While commercialized weddings glorify the newlyweds, worshipful weddings point our desires toward God's glorification.

Weddings are still a time to celebrate! Jesus added to the celebration at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11) and told parables about wedding banquets as images of God's kingdom (Matt. 22 and Luke 14). But going to extremes in celebrating hardly seems aligned with biblical concern for social justice. Making the wedding day a day to forgo ethical consumption does not fit the biblical model. In the wedding banquet parable recorded in Luke's Gospel, Jesus calls guests to humility and tells hosts to invite those who cannot repay them. As in Matthew 6:19–21, Jesus asks believers to set aside the treasures and honors of this world and focus instead on the rewards of the resurrection (Luke 14:14).

Extravagant weddings that flaunt wealth, uniqueness, and beauty go beyond extending the gift of hospitality to include pride and competition. And our economic choices have grave effects on our neighbors near and far, when we ignore the unhealthy conditions in which dressmakers, miners, and farmworkers labor, and the inadequacy of the compensation they receive for their work. Instead, we are called to "satisfy the needs of the afflicted" (Isa. 58:10) and align our practices with the social

justice the biblical prophets envision. We can choose local artisans and vendors in our celebrations and gift-giving, and we can seek to buy non-local items responsibly. We can give back to the community by donating leftover food, sharing gifts, and reducing waste. Though the possibilities for witness are numerous, a focusing step is to consider how our practices affect God's children and creation. Here, technology may aid our strivings. Sometimes it is to blame for directing our desires toward earthly treasures, but technological resources can also help us refocus on God's kingdom—if we point them in that direction.

Parabolic weddings

For those searching for truth and honesty, a wedding is not the most likely place to find it. Weddings often project a mythical image of life where human relationships are perfect, wealth is abundant, and your community is an audience to impress and

We consider the binary opposites of joy and pain, joining together and tearing apart, healthy relationships and disastrous ones. The myth is that these opposites can be resolved with a hefty dose of romantic love.

entertain. John Dominic Crossan describes myths as structures that resolve disturbing binary opposites by selecting the dominant to rule.⁸ In weddings, we consider the binary opposites of joy and pain, joining together and tearing apart, healthy relationships and disastrous ones. The myth then is that these opposites can be resolved with a hefty dose of romantic love: on the wedding day, joyful beginnings trump painful endings.

In contrast to the wedding industry's mythical approach, the church's practice can bring hope by offering parabolic weddings. By

reinstating life's contradictions and paradoxes, parables shake up the calm that myths falsely create. Parabolic weddings hold the tension between binary opposites, inviting us to recognize the paradox that marriage is difficult and hardships lie ahead, *and* marriage is delightful and much joy lies ahead. The awe of living into the parable is that we can confidently step into this paradox, relying on the strength and faithfulness of God who enters the covenant with us.

The whole community has the opportunity to join in the making of a parabolic wedding. Counseling beforehand can focus

on a lifelong commitment rather than a single day's activities. Our conversations with engaged friends can go deeper than asking about wedding colors and themes to seeking ways to support the couple spiritually and relationally. A parabolic wedding can draw

Parabolic weddings hold the tension between binary opposites, inviting us to recognize the paradox that marriage is difficult and hardships lie ahead, and marriage is delightful and much joy lies ahead.

in the paradox that marriage is a risky step to take, yet these two have decided to take that risk. They enter that paradox because of their faith in God's grace, the greatest paradox of all—that God in Christ would die for those who hate him. We can share God's grace in the wedding's sermon and proclaim it through scripture and song. We add to the parable by acknowledging truths, whether in vows that recognize the sad times that will come along with the good or in blessings that encourage forgiveness and commitment in the face of sin

and disappointment. Altogether, a wedding that brings hope in the midst of technologies' myths is one that already seeks to fulfill the purpose of marriage: to draw us and others closer to Christ. As C. S. Lewis said, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw [people] into Christ."⁹ Parabolic weddings join the church's aim as they reflect God's grace in the paradox of forgiving, committed relationships.

A good use of time

In the months before my wedding, the way I spent my time became a critical interaction between wedding preparations and technology. Whenever I bemoaned the murk of wedding planning, my confidants swiftly directed me toward a host of wedding Web sites that promised to save me time and creative energy. It quickly became apparent however, that instead of saving time, online searches soaked up my time. The searches, like the possibilities, seemed endless.

Even though technology made my wedding searches faster and my organization more efficient, I wondered whether I was spending my time faithfully. The most important investment of our engagement period was strengthening relationships—our spiritual life together, our bonds with family and mentors, and especially our connection to God. Even if technology could make our

wedding planning more efficient, we needed to consider how we could use that time most faithfully.

Technology also enables us to erase the limits of time and place, expanding our witness by allowing someone at a distance to listen in or watch the wedding later. In a way, our faith community is enlarged through extending the ceremony to those not physically present, but I wonder if we lose some of the value of personal contact and bearing witness to the covenant. We yearn for deep involvement in each other's lives, expressed in vows on this wedding day and continuing beyond it. While technology may aid our connection, it cannot replace the joy of abiding with our brothers and sisters in the steps of our Christian journey.

That yearning for deep personal connection, for sitting together face-to-face, was what made me rue the hours spent in wedding planning. My engagement time narrowed to a central focus when I learned that my beloved grandmother was in the last stage of her life. Suddenly, my priorities came into focus. Savoring our relationship and gleaning my grandmother's wisdom were much more important than spending time selecting dresses and decorations.

Yet I also needed to attend to the opportunities in this covenant-making day, opportunities to join in celebration with our faith community, to share hope in the awesomeness of God's grace, and to strengthen our commitments. In some ways, technology helps bring these opportunities to life. We can use technology to stay in touch with people or to gather ideas about being better global neighbors in our wedding celebrations. At the same time, we need to be aware of the formative power of technology's images.

We are easily entangled in the lavish and romanticized culture of the wedding industry and unknowingly let our desires be directed by its images and its mantra that the wedding day is all about us. While the church may cautiously embrace technology's gifts for our wedding celebrations, we must pay careful attention to how we direct our desires and focus for that covenant day. On our wedding day, as in every day along our journey, we must focus on God whose grace gives us hope for our commitments and whose faithfulness strengthens us to keep them.

Notes

¹ Rebecca Mead, *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 5.

² Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 202.

³ Vicki Howard, "The Bridal Business," *OAH Magazine of History* 24, no. 1 (January 2010), 52–53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵ Sabrina Toppa, "This is how Much an Average Wedding Now Costs in America," <http://time.com/3743699/average-wedding-cost-america-marriage/>.

⁶ Dave Bergen, "Theology of Christian Marriage," in *Weddings: Ideas and Resources from Mennonite Church Canada*, ed. Karen Martens Zimmerly (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Church Canada, 2004), 7.

⁷ Steve Thorngate, "Church(y) Weddings: When Worship is the Main Event," *The Christian Century* (May 28, 2014), 26.

⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975), 51–52.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, "Is Christianity Hard or Easy?" in *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 195. Greg Smalley and Erin Smalley made this connection between the purposes of marriage and Christianity in their book, *Before You Plan Your Wedding . . . Plan Your Marriage* (New York: Howard Books, 2008), 51.

About the author

Lydia (Nofziger) Stoltzfus graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, in 2015 with a master's of divinity in biblical studies. She and her new husband, Nathan, live in Columbus, Ohio, where they enjoy participating in the ministries of Linworth Road Church.

Reading the Bible in a technopoly

Ryan D. Harker

"Please get out your Bible, if you have one," said my professor. Obediently reaching for my Greek New Testament, I was surprised to notice two students near me reaching for their phones. At some point the word of God written had become electronic.

This is not an isolated case. Most of us in the Western world engage life through screens. We live digitally mediated lives. We increasingly get our news, entertainment, education, and even our spouses on screens. The ubiquity of the screen is difficult to exaggerate. Neil Postman suggests that Western culture is best described as a *technopoly*, a culture that "seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology."¹

Most of us in the Western world engage life through screens. We live digitally mediated lives. We increasingly get our news, entertainment, education, and even our spouses on screens.

Like Johannes Gutenberg's introduction of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century, the proliferation of digital technology in the last twenty years has effected a profound cultural transformation. But to be what Postman calls "two-eyed prophets" who can see both the good and the bad in a given situation, we must be courageous enough to ask difficult questions of our technological situation, to wonder about the implications of our cultural submission to the power of technology. This is especially true for the church, because our location in a technopoly has unexamined and perhaps adverse consequences for the life and mission of the church, particularly for the way we read the Bible and incarnate its story—that is, the way we imagine our very humanity.

The Bible can give us the eyes and the imagination to be two-eyed prophets. The first step is to acknowledge the degree to which technology has severely limited and altered the ways we

engage with the Bible and its world. When we read the Bible as a *device*, it ceases to be a *focal* power and a focal presence in our lives.²

The problem of technopoly

The human being in a technopoly is an individual who is condemned by limits. But in this picture, technology offers the solution, our salvation: the promise that we can become “unlimited,” just as we deserve.³ New technologies continually enhance our ability to overcome our limits. The seemingly small changes

To be “two-eyed prophets” who can see both the good and the bad in a given situation, we must be courageous enough to wonder about the implications of our cultural submission to the power of technology.

that occur each time we adopt a new technology add up—surprisingly quickly and silently—to major changes in culture and to our world, for better or for worse.⁴

As a student and teacher of the Bible, I have observed that a culture heavily shaped by digital technology looks on the rural, agrarian, enchanted (think demons, angels, spirits) world of the Bible as naive and primitive, and even as a lower form of human evolution. Technologically mediated life leads to “the rapid dissolution of much that is

associated with traditional beliefs” and instead “requires the development of a new kind of social order.”⁵

The key to understanding technology’s effect on a culture is to recognize with Postman that “it is a mistake to suppose that any technological innovation has a one-sided effect.”⁶ In other words, the notion that a certain new technology might make life “better”—by making us smarter, more efficient, more attractive, healthier—is only one side of the cultural equation. The other side is that new technologies also displace old ones by competing for our time, attention, money, and worship, as well as for the very way we view and experience the world.⁷

The Bible is an immensely valuable tool in a technopoly, however, because it can reshape our understanding of human well-being. In a culture in which we are formed to trust technology to overcome our limits, immersing ourselves in the biblical narrative, like digging our hands into a garden or tending livestock, reminds us that we are limited and irrevocably embodied.

And our human limits are gifts of God, not curses to be overcome with the newest device.

When Christians read scripture, we are offered an “invitation to enter into the world” of the Bible, “to adopt a perspective from within the narrative.” Accepting this invitation requires us “to de-center our own self-interests so as to be addressed by the text as ‘other,’ to allow it to engage us in creative discourse, to take the risk of being shaped, indeed transformed in the encounter.”⁸ Reading the Bible, allowing it to form us, we reimagine the world and our place in it. In fact, a central reason why we read scripture is “so that we may not settle easily for any other notion of life, forgetting who we are and the understanding of life that we have confessed and embraced. Informed by the Bible, we are invited to live in faithful response to this faithful covenant partner.”⁹ Reading the Bible in an interpretive community is a counter-formational practice in a culture that would have us settle for a life lived and mediated by screens.

The Bible and the device paradigm

In order to enter the world of the Bible and experience its formational and transformational community-shaping power, we need to disengage from what Albert Borgmann calls the “device paradigm.”

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The notion of the device paradigm makes clear that when our lives are saturated with devices that mediate our everyday experiences, these technologies are not simply neutral tools we do things with; they rule our everyday lives by shaping our patterns of behavior and our social and moral orientation.¹⁰ Borgmann suggests that “technology may be thought of as a force or an approach to reality that is all-pervasive.”¹¹

Within the device paradigm, as in technopoly, the highest good is the consumption of products and commodities—technological ones. The dominant narrative within technopoly is one of “progress without limits, rights without responsibilities, and technology without cost.”¹² In this narrative, technology is the thought-world that we assume; it dictates the ways people perceive reality.¹³

Whether we use the language of device paradigm or technopoly, it is clear that technology changes how we think, what we care about, what we perceive as good and moral, how we eat, how we entertain ourselves, and how we learn. The world saturated and mediated by technology is a different world than the world of the Bible. But what is most striking for those of us in the church is that technology has fundamentally altered the ways we worship, conceive of God, engage the world around us, and understand who we are as human beings. Most to the point of this essay, though: this paradigm has changed the way we read the Bible. As L. Gregory Jones puts it, “American Christians have largely lost a rich familiarity with ruled patterns for reading and embodying Scripture, the kind of familiarity that shapes people’s lives and, at its best, enlivens a scriptural imagination.”¹⁴

In a technological culture it is common to treat the Bible as one of many devices that we use. When the Bible is treated as a device, it makes no demand “on our skill, strength, or attention, and it is less demanding the less it makes its presence felt.”¹⁵ Rather than immersing ourselves in the Bible as sourcebook for our lives and our imaginations, letting the narrative of God’s life with God’s people form us, we unskillfully treat the Bible as a means to an end. This is especially evident in the way we use the Bible as a means to the end of winning whatever ideological war we wish to fight, about the age of the earth, the historicity of the flood or the creation story, homosexuality, and oddly enough, even biblical authority. Of course, this is not to say that the Bible does not speak to these issues but only to say that when we use it as a device within the device paradigm, although we may talk about the Bible frequently, it is from a disengaged, attention-deficient standpoint. In other words, the Bible ceases to be a living text that demands our dedicated attention, determined skill, engaged faithfulness, and sustained patience.

Disengaging from the device paradigm

The good news is that with intention, focus, and care, we can disengage from this technological mindset and rediscover the Bible as a focal, socially and morally orienting presence in our lives. There are three key steps in disengaging from the device paradigm in order to reclaim the Bible as a world-shaping reality

in our lives: distinguishing between things and devices, using focal things more and devices less, and making focal practices central in our daily lives.

Foundational to Borgmann's theory of technology is the distinction between *things* and *devices*. A device makes no demand on the skill, strength, or attention of its user.¹⁶ A "good" device is easy to use, fast, safe, and portable. A thing, on the other hand, "has an intelligible and accessible character and calls forth skilled and active human engagement."¹⁷ A violin and a piano are things; an iPod is a device. Both can be used to procure music, but playing a musical instrument demands our skill, strength, and attention, while playing an mp3 player requires almost nothing of us. For Borgmann, "things constitute commanding reality," while "devices procure disposable reality."¹⁸ In other words, things

Albert Borgmann calls us to remember and engage in "focal practices" that reorient us to the demands and the limits of our human existence, removing the hold that technology has on our imaginations.

ground us in real, limited reality while devices distance us from the created order. For Borgmann, devices breed consumption by means of disinterested disengagement; things breed contentment by means of engagement.

To counteract the consumption that devices breed, Borgmann calls us to remember and engage in "focal practices" that reorient us to the demands and the limits of our human existence, removing the hold that technology has on our imaginations. Focal practices are those that demand our alle-

giance, skill, patience, and dedication. They are the rituals, practices, and techniques through which we engage with what Borgmann calls "focal things." Borgmann explores the contrast between devices and the focal things that call forth our focal practices. While devices disperse, uproot, and invite disengagement and the loss of skill, focal things unite, ground, and demand skill and engagement.

The Bible as focal thing

The community that is grounded in the biblical text is a community that lives in what Borgmann calls the "culture of the word," where the word is "the traditional medium of world appropriation."¹⁹ Within this culture, people orient themselves by means of

the appropriation of stories, myths, and narratives. But it takes practice to appropriate such things, because “the things that used to center these practices” do not have the tangibility that we might expect from focal things. Still, “they were things just the same, commanding and illuminating realities, tales, plays, and texts.”²⁰ As members of these communities, we are grounded in and by these focal things that literally form the world.

The Bible is one such focal thing. It demands patience, endurance, skill, and the resoluteness of regular practice—a *focal practice*. The Bible provides the very “conceptual language” that Christians require to conceive of and live in the world as God made it. This language is foreign to us and is not readily translated. Instead, one must en-flesh the foreign language of Christianity.²¹ In other words, one must be vigorously engaged in the focal practice of learning the language of Christianity by communally engaging with the Bible.

Churches cannot know this language without an intimate knowledge of the world and language of the Bible, which is precisely the world and the language into which individuals are invited to participate when the church evangelizes or “gospelizes.” And this is the world and the language that the church has the responsibility to embody, to incarnate before a watching world. Brad Kallenberg summarizes this position beautifully:

*In order for those being gospelized to master the Christian conceptual language, they must be immersed into a community of believers (and their practices) for whom this conceptual language is the first conceptual language. Members of this community become trainers rather than translators of the Gospel. In other words, instead of translating the Gospel into modernese, the gospelizing community seeks to raise the fluency of potential converts to such a level that they can hear the Gospel on its own terms. Thus the gospelizer is at heart a language coach.*²²

As modern people fully formed by the device paradigm, Christians must take care to be trained by the Bible. Knowing the Bible, and thus the conceptual language of Christianity, takes patience with the ambiguities of the text and with oneself as one

inherits the text, courage to immerse oneself in a dangerous and life-changing narrative, skill to learn to read it faithfully and with humble conviction, and dedication to engage the text regularly—that is, to refuse to lose heart when it becomes difficult. Unlike a device, the Bible, as a thing, is an end that cannot be separated from its means, and it is never merely a means to the procurement of something else. Reading the Bible with dedication forms us to be good readers of the Bible; it “gospelizes” us. The Bible is a demanding book, and the church must learn to affirm this fact again, lest we continue to treat it as if it were less than a focal thing, less than *the* focal thing of our ecclesial life.

Knowing the Bible takes patience with the ambiguities of the text, courage to immerse oneself in a life-changing narrative, skill to learn to read it faithfully and with humble conviction, and dedication to engage it regularly.

Conclusion

In a technological world, the proper use of the Bible amounts to a rejection of the mindset of technopoly and the device paradigm simply because it brings into being for its adherents, if they will let it, a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17); it attests to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the “Author of life, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 3:15). As Jones writes: the church must develop “habits of effective and faithful reading and embodiment of Scripture.”²³ One important step toward the development of habits of effective and faithful reading and embodiment of scripture is understanding deep engagement of the Bible as a focal practice, as *the* focal practice at the center of our ecclesial life.

Notes

¹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 71.

² “Device” and “focal” are terms and concepts used by Albert Borgmann in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

³ For an example, see the recent Virgin Mobile commercial “Retrain Your Brain” Advertisement: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjZ0rXSXeBA>.

⁴ See Postman, *Technopoly*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 130.

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2003), 15.

¹⁰ Borgmann, *Technology*, 105.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Postman, *Technopoly*, 179.

¹³ Borgmann, *Technology*, 21.

¹⁴ L. Gregory Jones, “Embodying Scripture in the Community of Faith,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen Davis and Richard Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 145. My italics.

¹⁵ Borgmann, *Technology*, 42.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 90.

¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Brad Kallenberg, *God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 57.

²² Ibid., 61.

²³ Jones, “Embodying Scripture,” 146.

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E-Waste: A justice issue we'd rather ignore

Mikhail Fernandes

We live in a technology-driven society. Technology has brought convenience into our lives and has led to advancements in medicine, industry, and communications. It bridges parts of the world that have never been bridged before. Most of our churches use technology to spread the Christian message and to conduct Sunday services.

It is unconscionable for Christians to talk about how electronic communications help us share God's love and justice without acknowledging that the production and disposal of these technologies harm the most vulnerable citizens of this world and the earth itself.

But it is inconsistent and unconscionable for Christians to talk only about how electronic communications technologies help us connect with each other and share the gospel, the message of God's love and justice, without acknowledging that the production and disposal of these same technologies directly harm the most vulnerable citizens of this world and the earth itself.

In our two-eyed consideration of our use of technology we must include the fact that while technology itself is improving, the lives of the majority of those who extract metals and minerals from the earth for our devices and the lives of those who process electronic waste (often shortened to *e-waste*) are not improving. And our environment is groaning as the mining of metals and minerals used to make electronics and the disposal of those electronics produce toxic waste that pollutes the land, the waters, and the air.

Justice issues in the production of electronics

In this essay I will not address at length the social and environmental justice issues associated with the *production* of electronic technologies. It will suffice here to note that each computer or iPhone requires more than sixty minerals and metals. Many of

these—including mercury, lead, arsenic, and chromium—are hazardous to human and ecological health, and the conditions in which they are mined in Africa, Asia, and South America are often deplorable.

For example, two-thirds of the world's deposit of coltan (short for columbite–tantalite) is in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Here, children are abducted by rebel militias and forced to mine coltan. Children are exploited to fund militia violence, often against their own families. In one of the provinces of the DRC, Katanga, eighty children a year die in coltan mines. Other conflict minerals from the DRC used in electronics include gold, tin, and tungsten. Although major electronics manufacturers such as Apple are working to reduce the conflict minerals in their products, demand for rare minerals increases.

How much e-waste do we export?

While some attention has been given to ethical sourcing of minerals and to ethical production of electronic devices, much less attention has been given to *disposing* of these components of technologies once we have deemed them obsolete. As globalization and the demand for the best in technology continue to grow, e-waste will play a key role in the development of emerging economies.

The United States generates more than 3.4 million tons of e-waste annually, according to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates in 2012.¹ This most recent report shows that we discard 142,000 computers and more than 416,000 mobile devices every day. The National Safety Council estimates that nearly 250 million computers will be considered obsolete within the next five years and mobile devices will be disposed at a rate of 130 million per year. The United States generates more e-waste than any other nation in the world. The US does have certified e-waste management sites that dispose of e-waste domestically, but the US is still the biggest exporter of e-waste. Where does all this stuff go?

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (commonly called the Basel convention) is an international treaty implemented to monitor, control, and ultimately reduce the transfer of

hazardous waste between nations, and specifically to prevent transfer of hazardous waste from wealthier, more developed countries to poorer, less developed countries.

The US and Haiti were the only two countries to have failed to ratify the convention. As a result, an estimated 50 to 80 percent of all the e-waste produced in the US is exported to developing countries in violation of this international law.

The true cost of processing exported e-waste is borne by the poor in developing countries who process this waste without safety equipment. This is a major health hazard and a hazard to the environment.

Canada too continues to export some e-waste, through a loophole in Canadian regulations and an irregular interpretation of the convention whereby “nonfunctioning but intact” electronic components are not considered e-waste.² The true cost of processing exported e-waste is borne by the poor in developing countries who process this waste without safety equipment. This is a major health hazard and a hazard to the environment.

One of the barriers to processing and recycling e-waste in North America is that it is expensive to do locally but trade in toxic electronics components can be lucrative. E-waste disposal in the US is managed by private electronic recyclers. In many cases the recyclers send their waste off to the highest bidder in developing countries in Africa or Asia, where environmental protections and health codes are weak. For example, to recycle one computer in the US costs approximately \$20, but in India it costs just \$2.³ The US recycling company makes the profit while the health of the poor and the environment of the developing country suffer.

Where our e-waste goes

Popular destinations for e-waste include Guiyu, China; Karachi, Pakistan; Delhi, India; Accra, Ghana; and Lagos, Nigeria.

In the Agbogbloshie “recycling community,” a swampy suburb of Accra, the 40,000-plus inhabitants work in recycling and live among piles of toxic ash. These recyclers, like underprivileged recyclers in other developing countries, process e-waste with their bare hands and without any protective gear. To remove the various valuable metals in e-waste, such as gold, silver, and copper, the workers melt and burn circuit boards to strip off

computer chips. In the process they inhale extremely hazardous elements such as lead, mercury, and cadmium. To get metals out of microchips and wires, they dip them into large tubs of acid. When the acid is depleted, the workers often pour it into streams or open sewers. Women sometime use cooking pots in these processes—the same pots in which they then prepare supper.

In Guiyu, 60,000 recyclers process 100 truckloads of discarded electronics daily. Eighty percent of Guiyu's children suffer from lead poisoning.⁴ Guiyu's soil has been saturated with lead, chromium, tin, and other heavy metals, leaving it too poisoned to grow crops. Masses of ash and plastic waste are dumped at the edge of the Lianjiang River. Discarded electronics lie in pools of toxins that leach into the groundwater, making the water undrinkable, to the extent that water must be shipped in from elsewhere.

This is not only a health tragedy for the developing world; it is also a loss of economic assets for industrialized countries such as the US. The cumulative e-waste by Americans who dump their phones contains more than \$60,000,000 worth of gold and silver every year. For every 1,000,000 cell phones that are recycled, 35,274 pounds of copper, 772 pounds of silver, 75 pounds of gold, and 33 pounds of palladium can be recovered.⁵

Becoming accountable for the consequences

Anabaptist tradition stresses commitment to principles of peace and justice. If we are users of technology, we must also consider the consequences of the production and disposal of technology.

Our perceived need for technology has blinded us to the reality of e-waste. E-waste is a modern-day environmental peace and justice issue that must be taken seriously. We cannot simply take into account the benefits of electronic technologies and what they do for us without being accountable also for what happens to these very technologies when we consider them obsolete. The calculus we have used to justify consuming them has not included consideration of the serious environmental harm done by our use and disposal of them, but this needs to change.

More important, e-waste is an issue of *social* peace and justice. The hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men who process e-waste are included among “the least of these.” Jesus said,

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40, NRSV). Christians and the church must care about the people in other parts of the world who handle and recycle our gadgets when we have disposed of them. Their lives are directly affected by our decisions around the consumption of electronic technology.

We live in a throwaway culture, and we are conveniently ignorant about where our e-waste goes. E-waste is increasing at

We cannot simply take into account the benefits of electronic technologies and what they do for us without being accountable also for what happens to these very technologies when we consider them obsolete.

such a drastic rate that it's becoming uncontrollable. When we insist on the latest and best in technology, the expense is borne by our neighbors in developing countries. In other words, others bear the costs of our greed.

Developing empathy for e-waste workers

One social issue related to e-waste is the attitude of NIMBY: “Not In My Back Yard.” But behind every product we throw away is a child in a developing country who has to deal with our e-waste. The best way to address the

seriousness of this situation is to learn the skill of empathy. If we were to empathize with e-waste workers, we might be able to give up our willful ignorance about e-waste. If people began paying the actual costs of products—including the human costs—we would not be in the situation we are in today. This is the question: Are we prepared to pay the extra cost of a product, if it means saving lives and the environment?

The Psalmist writes:

*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it.
Let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
Let all creation rejoice before the LORD
before the LORD, for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth. (Ps. 96:11–13)*

The heavens do not rejoice when we put at risk the health and the very lives of the most vulnerable in our world so that those of us with means can consume electronic technologies. The fields are not jubilant and trees do not sing for joy when land, water, and air are laced with toxic waste. Pretending that we consume without consequences is neither righteous nor faithful.

Practical ways to address the e-waste problem

What might it take to sing a *new* song in the midst of the social and environmental crises of e-waste? Here are some practical suggestions for how Christians and the church can respond.

One way Christians could start to address these problems is by imagining hazardous toxic waste in our own water supplies, in our own backyards, and in our own bodies. We could visualize members of our own extended family being involved in various aspects of the production and disposal of electronic technologies. Which sons, grandsons, and nephews would we want to see crawling down narrow shafts to mine coltan? Which mothers and grandmothers would we want to see using cookware to melt plastics and metals or for acid baths? Which daughters, granddaughters, and nieces would we wish to see living with lead poisoning or inhaling toxic fumes daily from smoldering piles of plastics and metals? If we would not wish for hazardous elements in our own ecosystems and in the bodies of our family members, why would we tolerate it for others'?

Another response is to encourage our governments to ratify *and follow* the Basel convention and to establish more eSteward certified recycling companies in the US and Canada. These companies would benefit local economies by saving millions of dollars in precious metals revenue and by creating jobs. North America would rely less on the trade of precious metals with other countries, lessening trade in conflict minerals. We would also save energy used to procure metals. For example, recycling aluminum saves 90 percent of the energy needed to mine new aluminum.

A third—obvious—response is simply to consume less. We could drastically reduce the number of electronic items we buy, while simultaneously maximizing the use and life of each item we own. The EPA estimates that two-thirds of electronics discarded in the US are still in working order. We can reduce our perceived

need for gadgets by regularly choosing lower-tech or older-tech means of communicating. We may even discover that communication that requires more investment of time and energy is also more rewarding.

Fourth, when you discard a piece of electronic technology, ensure that it is being properly recycled. This can be a hassle,

When you discard a piece of electronic technology, ensure that it is being properly recycled. Being informed consumers and signaling to manufacturers and retailers that we care about e-waste is one relatively easy way to encourage change.

since many 1-800 numbers provided by manufacturers with information on local recyclers are no longer in service, or the information provided is out of date. Being informed consumers and signaling to manufacturers and retailers that we care about e-waste is one relatively easy way to encourage change.

The psalmist's first call is to "sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth" (Ps. 96:1). When it comes to the social and environmental impact of e-waste, a "new song" is one where the health and well-being of the most vulnerable people in this world and the earth itself are of much greater

importance than ease of communication or having the latest gadget.

Notes

¹ Electronics TakeBack Coalition, "Facts and Figures on E-Waste and Recycling," (n.d.), <http://www.electronicstakeback.com/resources/>.

² "Electronic Waste by country," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_waste_by_country.

³ E-waste project, (n.d.). "The impact of improper e-waste recycling," <http://e-wasteproject.blogspot.com/>.

⁴ Xia Huo, Lin Peng, Xijin Xu, Liangkai Zheng, Bo Qiu, Zongli Qi, Bao Zhang, Dai Han, Zhongxian Piao, "Elevated Blood Lead Levels of Chilgren in Guiyu, and Electronic Waste Recycling Town in China," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115, no. 7 (July 2007): 1113–17.

⁵ "11 Facts about E-Waste," <https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-e-waste>.

About the author

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Violence, technology, and the powers

E. K. Knappenberger

Bartholomew von Ahlefeldt was a European nobleman who in the mid-1550s offered sanctuary to Menno Simons and his followers, risking diplomatic fallout with neighboring rulers and compromising his standing in the social hierarchy. In his youth, von Ahlefeldt had been an officer in the Dutch army and witnessed the execution of some of Menno's followers. He became convinced that these Anabaptists were harmless and unjustly persecuted, and he allowed them to settle on his large estate.¹ His

It was not until some of his parishioners were killed in an armed uprising that Menno Simons left the priesthood. His also was a nonviolent awakening to new gospel awareness, born of gruesome spectacle.

support and shielding was key to their long-term survival and prosperity, helping to ensure the fledgling movement's longevity and vibrancy.

Von Ahlefeldt's conversion to protecting Anabaptists was one of conscience, and experiential. No doubt, witnessing the violence of imperial religion in action helped the good nobleman move into a new religious and social paradigm: he must have realized the truth of nonviolence and opened himself to new gospel awareness. Menno had had a

similar experience: it was not until some of his parishioners were killed in an armed uprising that he left the priesthood.² His also was a nonviolent awakening to new gospel awareness, born of gruesome spectacle. I suspect that if we were to look closely, we would see that much of the early Anabaptist religious revival was triggered by such experiences. This is one reason why the eschatological realities of Anabaptists and military veterans are inextricably entangled.³

Tieleman Jansz van Braght later capitalized on this phenomenon of experiential conversion in publishing the *Martyrs Mirror*, "a bloody spectacle"⁴ evoking the kind of violence that still

propels book sales and religious revivals. Many of van Braght's disturbing and gory illustrations of Christian martyrs through the centuries continue to inform the identity of Anabaptists worldwide. My point is that in the religious and cultural struggles of the church there is a long history of use of technology to induce traumatic awareness. A contemporary example is Mel Gibson's terrifying *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). For all the profits and the converts that have been extracted using these technological means, we lack basic understanding of the mechanism behind their success: the experiential, traumatic conversions associated with being witness to or participant in violence, and the opening of an awareness of gospel nonviolence.

In this brief essay, I will offer first a phenomenological reflection on the nature of technology and its relationship to violence, and then a theological reflection drawing on Walter Wink's work on the powers.

Technology and violence

One morning in mid-2006, at Forward Operating Base Taji, Iraq, I moved from night-shift guard duty to start my day job as an operational intelligence analyst. One of my functions in that capacity was watching and analyzing captured media material—digital videos of executions, attacks, and other grisly crimes. It was one of the myriad disturbing aspects of participating in the occupation of Iraq, and it was traumatic in a way categorically different from the other prominent traumas of that war: incoming mortars, small arms fire, and improvised explosive devices. Phenomenologically—which is to say, on the level of our understanding—such violence is made possible through a combination of the existential vacuousness of materialism⁵ and the morally neutral⁶ omnipresence of technology. I hope here to explore the second of these conditions a little.

As I entered the brigade intelligence office that day, my military colleagues on the night shift were (quite unprofessionally) using our office monitor for a screening of the bloody (and bloody awful) horror flick *Saw II*.⁷ *Saw II* is one of those movies best described as over the top, but not ironic or silly like *Evil Dead*.⁸ It tries too hard to take itself seriously and, unlike the original *Saw*,⁹ fails to establish the minimum notional qualification for consider-

ation in the serious horror genre: engaging and frightening viewers more than making them laugh, or yawn in distraction, or leave in revulsion because of gratuitous bloodshed. *Saw II* overdoes the formulaic genre-reinforcing tactics at the expense of emotional engagement in plot, mystery, or character, and the result is a confusing mash-up of medieval torture scenes sans reflective or emotional value. As the night shift finished the movie, there was a general sense of relief, but also a kind of dull yearning to see something real—so we went back to our job of analyzing insurgent propaganda videos featuring the very real suffering of fellow humans being mutilated and murdered.

What struck me about this juxtaposition of imagery was the fact that none of my colleagues seemed to share my interest in contrasting understandings of two different paradigms of violent media and their underlying epistemological foundations—how we create and respond to violent media—or in comparing respective

Watching raw video footage of the beheading of a hostage is a straightforward and stomach-churning endeavor. But Hollywood violence—concocted for the purpose of emotional manipulation—is hardly able to elicit a sincere human reaction.

cultural values. While there is a clear connection in the social-psychological research between violent stimuli and the frustration-aggression complex,¹⁰ the connections between fictive violence and actual violence run much deeper, but exploring this was not something the other soldiers were interested in.

Watching the unenhanced, raw video footage of the beheading of a hostage is a straightforward and stomach-churning endeavor; the more one watches, the more it seems to settle into the psyche, disrupting things within. But overwrought, expensive, fake Hollywood violence—concocted for the specific purpose of emotional manipulation—

is hardly able even to elicit a sincere human reaction after the initial shock of the first viewing. (This is also the *raison d'être* for *Saw II–VIII* as well as *Saw 3d: The Final Chapter*.) There are other salient factors in this comparison: the half-hearted irony of a horror business that knows its place in the hierarchy of the entertainment industry; the reinscription of politico-religious ideology onto the palimpsest of the real-life subject of filmed torture; the objectifying of the subjective experience of real-life horror.

What matters most about the experience of viewing violence through technology is what we tell ourselves about that violence. If a normal person, paying ten dollars for the experience of watching *Saw II*, were suddenly to realize that the violence being projected onto the silver screen was in fact real, the experience of watching it would immediately change from one of titillating consumption to one of revulsion and terror. Consider, for example, James Holmes's costumed massacre at a screening of *Dark Knight Rises* in Aurora, Colorado: moviegoers initially thought that Holmes, dressed as the Joker, was playing some kind of bad prank or engaging in a promotional gimmick—which redoubled the terror effect when they grasped the reality of the situation. One of the most traumatic things about witnessing actual violence after being raised on Hollywood movies is the absence of an existential mediator: there is no attendant illusory fictionality to mediate the reality of the act itself—the subjects are actually being murdered there in front of us, again and again, and our apprehension of their very real terror is not diminished by repeated viewings.

There is an immediate need in Anabaptist theology to articulate a philosophical and biblical accounting of the fact of violence, the different kinds of violence. There is also a distinct need in Anabaptism for the development of trauma-awareness theory,

There is a distinct need in Anabaptism for the development of trauma-awareness theory, as well as a new understanding of how trauma and technology relate to the Anabaptist concept of *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness).

as well as a new understanding of how trauma and technology relate to the Anabaptist concept of *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness). This, more than ethnic or behavioral purity, is the central task in Anabaptism: to heal the putrid sore of the violence inherent in our technology, in our worldly governments, in our static awareness, in our nonrelational systems, in vacuous materialism, and in the sacrificial blood-atonement theology the Christian church perpetuates. This project—the articulation of these new ideas—will spell salvation

for the veterans, the war weary, the disenchanted—and for the believers church. More importantly, it is the central purpose of Christ's commission in human history.

Redeeming the powers

In Walter Wink's compelling analysis of systems of violence,¹¹ he asserts that the powers of this world will be redeemed by God. The list of the powers included in this redemption is substantial. Awaiting transformation are human cultural institutions, governments, and technologies. Ostensibly this includes militaries, cities, economies, and churches. There is some good scriptural evidence to support these claims, with the ultimate promise aligning the Old Testament prophetic vision to Jesus's eschatology and that of John's Revelation: that God will dwell in the "New Jerusalem" and be "with us." But what do we make of the New Jerusalem in the age of Cosmopolis?¹²

Surely the idea of all the peoples of earth worshiping the beast of Revelation is given new meaning in the era of global capitalism, instant access, and connectivity. While the personification of the city—the woman of Babylon—dominates the kings of the earth and gets drunk on the blood of innocence, the beast personifies Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's capital-e "Empire" of globalism mixed with neo-liberal economics.¹³ Finally, the dragon that gives the beast its power is, as Ted Grimsrud asserts,¹⁴ violence itself, which alone will be excised from human awareness and cast into a lake of fire.

To give this interpretation more validity, we can turn to Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, which lays out a critique of urbanity from a scriptural perspective. To Ellul, the city—starting with and especially including Babel—is an institution with its own spirit and a place where God is not allowed to be. (Ellul says that this is signified in the very name *Bab-El*: the gate keeping God out.¹⁵) All the spiritual descendants of the city live in open rebellion against God, and yet God decides in the end—through the interventions of the prophets and in the person of the Christ—to dwell there anyway. This is particularly salient in today's world, in the cultural projects conceived in modernity, especially those with universal or transcendent aims,¹⁶ which are only possible through the artifice of city life, industrial agriculture, and systemic violence.

Technology plays a key role in the rebelliousness of human cultural awareness. According to the Jewish historian Josephus,¹⁷ Cain invented agriculture, scarring the earth in order to force

more from it. This was a result of his greed and his failure to trust in pastoralism.¹⁸ Cain's children taught people to rob and murder as a kind of innovation, and they invented idolatry as a way to control their subjects.¹⁹ In the spirit of human rebellion, technology is both an idolatry—taking the place of life-through-faith—and a means of overcoming God.

The tower of Babel was, according to Josephus, a waterproof raised platform where the citizenry could wait out another epic flood, avoiding the consequences of God's wrath a second time.

The trauma of violence can turn into sour psychopathologies if not properly understood, or it can be redeemed in the spirit of Christ. It should be the work of believers to inspire this second option.

Interestingly, the problem of linguistic drift can be seen as the natural consequence of self-imposed alienation: when cultures are isolated for periods of time, their language naturally evolves more quickly. Thus, what the Genesis account attributes to God's wrath is actually a mere consequence of human misdeed. And it goes without saying that these misdeeds are facilitated hand-in-hand with technology.

We cannot simply blame our technology for the violence it amplifies. In Heideggerian

speculative philosophy, technology plays a special role. The human being exists in relation with his tools, neither one being separate from the other. We have co-evolved along with our language and our other technology, at an ever-quickenning and frightening pace. We cannot guess the consequences of our innovations, and we can only hope to co-create our environments to a degree. In other words, technology will not save us from ourselves but will only reflect the spiritual and cultural flaws already present in our hearts. This philosophical understanding should inform our collective religious lives, and together with Anabaptist peace theology, can be leveraged to redeem institutions, governments, awarenesses, and powers.

Conclusion

Often when I have felt sickened by violence of various kinds, it has been the beginning of a process of positive spiritual change in my life. I believe that this is exactly what happened at key moments in the lives of Menno Simons, Bartholomew von Ahlefeldt,

and Tieleman van Braght. The trauma of violence can turn into sour psychopathologies if not properly understood, or it can be redeemed in the spirit of Christ through the teachings of *Gelassenheit*. It should be the work of believers to inspire this second option as much as possible. This redemption must encompass the insidious violence facilitated by and evolving with technology and entertainment.

The world today is as violent as it was in 1550—or in 33—CE, though the violence comes in a different form. No matter how we conspire to hide from ourselves our own violence—from industrial farming to third-world sweatshops to nuclear proliferation—our technology, our government, and our churches still desperately need redemption from it. Let us pray together that the Holy Spirit may move in its mysterious way to redeem our powers from violence, to save us from times of trial (though even these might also move us toward Jesus’s teachings of nonviolence), and to deliver us from (our own) evil. Amen.

Notes

¹ John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1942), 204. See also H. van der Smitten, Christian Hege, and Cornelius Krahn, “Ahlfeldt Family,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1955, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Ahlfeldt_family&oldid=132208.

² Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe*, 189–92.

³ See Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Church USA Peace & Justice Support Network’s “Returning Veterans. Returning Hope” Sunday School curriculum, <https://mcc.org/media/resources/1719>.

⁴ Thieleman J. van Braght, compiler, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, From the Time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1660*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987).

⁵ I like Theodor Adorno’s take in *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury, 1973): that materialism suffers from a problem of the image; that epistemology is laughed off in the materialist (reductionist) understanding and this creates a problem of thought-image, of virtuality (204). Nancey C. Murphy and Christian Early invoke Ludwig Wittgenstein in answer to this same problem, in an attempt to develop a nonreductionist materialism, which I also like. For more on this, see the first several chapters of Murphy’s *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶ It is seen as morally neutral in the paradigm of modernity, but not so in object-oriented ontology, or the Deleuzian, Foucaultian, Nietzschean, or conservative-Anabaptist systems.

⁷ *Saw II*, directed by Darren Lynn Bousman (2005), also of *SAW III* (2006) and *SAW IV* (2007) fame.

⁸ *Evil Dead*, directed by Sam Raimi (1981). See also *Evil Dead II* (1987).

⁹ *Saw*, directed by James Wan (2004).

¹⁰ See, for example, the research of Philip Zimbardo and Stanley Milgram.

¹¹ Especially Wink's trilogy on the powers: *Naming the Powers* (1984), *Unmasking the Powers* (1986), and *Engaging the Powers* (1992).

¹² "Cosmopolis" refers to the project of modernity; see Stephin Toulmin's book of the same name.

¹³ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Ted Grimsrud, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Self-Study Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998).

¹⁵ See Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 15–20.

¹⁶ See, for example, the Oxford English Dictionary, a project to stop linguistic drift and recover an essentialistic language as an attempt to transcend the limitations of human cultural awareness. See Russell Frazier's *The Language of Adam*.

¹⁷ Josephus, though a Roman apologist, also preserves something of a historical portrait of the oral tradition of first-century CE Jewish theology.

¹⁸ God disdains Cain's sacrifice of vegetables not because of God's preference for animal sacrifice but because of the motives behind Cain's agriculture.

¹⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:2:2.

About the author

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Being in relationship

An Indigenous conversation on technology

Adrian Jacobs, Leah Gazan, Niigaan Sinclair, with Steve Heinrichs

Adrian Jacobs is Cayuga (Six Nations) and is Keeper of the Circle at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. Leah Gazan is Woodmountain Lakota, a grassroots mobilizer and teacher in the Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg. Niigaan Sinclair is Anishinaabe (Peguis First Nation), an activist and the head of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. Steve Heinrichs, a white settler and the director of Indigenous relations for Menno-nite Church Canada, got together with them to talk about technology. What follows is an excerpt of their conversation. The unedited transcript is available from Intótemak.

The word **technology** conjures up a lot of different images, definitions, and feelings. When I say the word, what comes to your mind—an image, a gut response, a story?

Leah Gazan: I consider myself a bit of a Luddite, because I prefer ways of interacting that don't use current technology like texting, social media, and e-mail. I think technology can interfere with having meaningful, intimate, and close relationships. It seems like people are not talking face-to-face as much as they used to. If it's overused, technology has the potential to push against the importance of relationships.

Adrian Jacobs: I came across this young native student in Saskatchewan who didn't do all the usual Twitter stuff: she just tweeted what was on her mind about Indigenous nationhood, the Treaties, and connection to the land. And she had a couple of thousand followers just because of what she said. It reminded me of Martin Luther King, who utilized about seven ideas and just repeated them over and over again. So I thought, I'm going to try to look at Twitter as a way to talk about a certain set of ideas, to

try to build a consensus of ideas. I looked at the 140 characters of Twitter as being a proverb, not a cliché. People started following me. And when I was travelling to gatherings like the Edmonton Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I used it to say, “I’d like to meet some folks.” And we met. And some of us started talking about Bill C-51 and the Canadian government’s attempts to censure Indigenous activists. In Caledonia, my home territory, their way of shutting us down around our land claim was to isolate us. But when we were all together, in connection and in relationship, they wouldn’t arrest us. So Twitter helped facilitate connections and build our network to protect ourselves from Bill C-51.

Steve Heinrichs: A story that comes to my mind is one that elder Stan McKay tells. A trapper in northeastern Manitoba would take his extended family out to their winter camp each year. They would return to the village in the spring to sell their furs. One year when he returned, the fur trader convinced him to buy some new metal traps. He purchased a couple dozen and took them with him to the trap line the next winter. When his family came the next spring, they had more furs than ever before. The trapper bought some tobacco and paddled out into the lake. He placed half his traps in a bag, offered tobacco to the lake, and dropped the bag into the water. The trapper got rid of that technology, because he knew it wasn’t sustainable.

Adrian: That’s a Luddite response.

Leah: But that story makes sense when you look at resource extraction. A lot of our leadership is buying into this neoliberal model of advancement. But if we want to build local economies that are sustainable, they would reflect traditional ways rather than the colonial technological ways of efficiency, mass production, and speed.

Niigaan Sinclair: But technology isn’t just that. Ultimately it’s about engaging life and solving problems.

Leah: Yet it’s immersed in a whole bunch of values, and competing values.

Niigaan: Sure, but let’s look at an indigenous sense of technology. Let’s consider the “shaking tent” ceremony. If you want to know

the future, such as how your family down the river is doing, but you can't get there without difficulty, you perform a ceremony that seeks to know those things, and you receive that information. People use shaking tent all the time to make major decisions, because it gives them information on how to engage creation. This is an example of an innovative Indigenous technology.

Leah: See, I would disagree with that. I think that's a Western view of ceremony, not a good example of technology. When I think of ceremonies, I think of something greater than technology or advancement as it is understood in the West. How is shaking tent a technology?

Niigaan: Because technology is about innovation: taking something and changing it, not for the better or the worse, just changing it. A drum is a good example. You learn one way to make the drum, but then you realize that a different way of making it gives a different sound. Both drums are useful.

We are in a deep spiritual crisis that was brought on by colonialism. In Indigenous ways of knowing, everything is living. Western technological ways of knowing see everything as things and objects.

Leah: But the drum is much more than an artifact, a physical thing. It's something spiritual.

Niigaan: Yes, the drum isn't simply physical. It's a spiritual entity, a being. But in an Indigenous sense, technology engages real beings and real relationships. Think of the tar

sands and Warren Cariou's great graphic novel [forthcoming] about how the oil extraction there is not simply a technological invention but a being that is destroying physical, spiritual, and cultural parts of creation.

Leah: I think we are in a deep spiritual crisis that was brought on by colonialism. In Indigenous ways of knowing, everything is living. Our ceremonies are living entities. Western technological ways of knowing see everything as things and objects. That way of knowing removes us from the spirit. I can't accept that me speaking to my ancestors is a technology; that's about relationships and the heart. When we view ceremony as technology, it distorts the way we see the world and one another. We focus on the thing rather than the relationship.

What are some misperceptions and stereotypes around Indigenous peoples and their relationship with technology of which readers should be aware? And how have these been leveraged?

Niigaan: Technology as a term is wrapped up in modern power. Technology is not just computers; it is innovation. The biggest argument against Indigenous peoples is that we had no invention.

The biggest argument against Indigenous peoples is that we had no invention. But we always had technology. We have the longest running science project on the continent.

Meanwhile we contributed the most innovative boat ever seen in the world, the most innovative organic agricultural techniques, the most innovative techniques in astronomy. We were scientists first and foremost, because we had to know how to feed ourselves, make a home, and create a relationship with the land. Technology, in the Western sense, is wrapped in nineteenth-century Victorian understandings of invention that portray

Europeans as geniuses and Indigenous peoples

as savages. But we always had technology. We are the most technological beings that have existed in North America, and we have the longest running science project on the continent.

That being said, I agree with Leah that technology can fracture relationships. Technological innovation is driven in large part by capitalism, and it is valued insofar as it can help people rape and pillage the land. This is proof that modern approaches to technology have run amok and are divorced from an Indigenous sense of how to live a sustainable life. The ways Indigenous peoples use technology are an extension of things we have done for thousands of years that helped us live in mutuality and reciprocity with all beings around us. So you look at the canoe, which came out of thousands of years of technique, experimentation, and innovation. Europeans encountered the canoe and started travelling the world with it. But that canoe was developed to create relationships with those down the river and with the fish and the currents. Now Indigenous peoples are using cell phones to extend relationships. So there are ways of using, appropriating, and innovating with technology in Cree, Anishinaabe, Indigenous ways.

Leah: Misconceptions around Indigenous technology have to do with the power of appropriation wielded by colonial society.

There are so many technologies, like the tent, that we don't get credit for. Views of technology are also bound up with cultural ideas of what constitutes sophistication. Local practices are actually sustainable. So yes, there are lots of misperceptions, and a deep disregard for the longstanding ways Indigenous peoples have related to the land.

Canada has a history of cultural genocide, and its drive to assimilate Indigenous peoples has not come to an end. Treaty obligations remain unfulfilled, and theft of native lands continues. Is there a relationship between those realities and the ways of modern technology?

Niigaan: There has been no more significant technological method of divorcing Indigenous peoples from our lands than

Writing has been the most significant technological method of divorcing Indigenous peoples from our lands. Non-Indigenous people used writing, wrapped up with power and institutions and the rule of law, to make claims of legality.

writing. Indigenous peoples had writing, but it was perhaps unrecognizable to Europeans in their cultural and social milieu. But that didn't mean it wasn't an Indigenous technology. Ceremony is technology. Songs are technology. Writing is technology. To pin these things to a "Western view," as perhaps was done earlier, is to make the classic mistake of seeing Europeans as the centre of all things, when we as Indigenous peoples have our own ways of being that are on a par with—and I daresay, even exceed—European invention. The problem arises when one group imposes its understanding on another,

as Europeans did with writing, using their squiggly lines as an expression of power that removed Indigenous peoples from their land and their resources and even their bodies. Now we call this "capitalism" and a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality, as if all writing were valued in the same way. It isn't. We still have to go to courts to prove our land claims, our cultural claims, our historical claims, and we have to use European methods of writing to do it. Meanwhile, our writing on sand, earth, and parchment, on birch bark and animal hide are denied, devalued, and obscured as much as our "oral traditions" are. We must see beyond what we have inherited.

Adrian: We disappear by just not being afforded space to participate in the technologies of the dominant society. At Caledonia, for example, there were people who lived right across the road from the native community who knew nothing of our history. A Six Nations education Side Table said, “We need to educate everybody about the land claim history.” Led by the superintendent of education at Six Nations, they brought a proposal forward to the Grand Erie District School Board to include Six Nations history of the land along the Grand River in the high school curriculum. The school board said “No. It’s too controversial.” They didn’t want to stir up feelings. We disappeared simply by not being given space. In Ottawa, the Parliament building is stacked full of books accounting violation after violation against Indigenous peoples, and it doesn’t go anywhere. Store it, and keep it out of the public eye.

Leah: Our oral knowledges were rejected in favor of written technologies used in institutions like residential schools where they tried to destroy our cultures, languages, and deep connections with our lands and territories. And today we see the colonial

The government is forcing us to buy into extractive technologies and aggressive resource development. The way technology is wielded by colonial powers disrupts relationships and produces cultural genocide.

government imposing technological relationships with our lands that once again force us into assimilation. The current conservative government is starving us out by cutting funding to essential services to force us to buy into extractive technologies and aggressive resource development. The way that technology is wielded by colonial powers disrupts relationships with the land and, if a traditional way of life is not protected, has the potential to result in cultural genocide. For example, I was out at Grassy Narrows First Nation this past month, fasting on the block-

ade that was set up to prevent clear-cut logging that has resulted in mercury poisoning of their waters. The aggressive colonial technology to clear-cut forests has disrupted traditional fishing, hunting, and relationships with the surrounding waterways and lands. If this practice is not stopped, it will eventually lead to the complete disruption of the cultural practices used by the peoples of Grassy Narrows for hunting, trapping, and ceremonial practices.

In the past the state said, “This land is not being farmed, it isn’t being improved, so there is no legal claim on it, and thus we settlers can take it.” What technical language does the state use today to justify this disruption and dispossession?

Niigaan: The government uses “get with the program” language. I went up to Opaskwayak Cree Nation when I was seven or eight years old. I remember going to people’s houses and there were no televisions in their homes, mostly because they were poor. Now you go there and every house has a satellite dish. That’s the get-with-the-program kind of movement, and it’s everywhere. It sounds like this: “Why can’t you people get with the present? Get off the land, get a computer, watch TV.” There’s nothing wrong with these things, but capitalism needs endless consumption to fuel profit. That’s just not an Indigenous sense of sustainability. Today I also see this in the education department and in popular media. The get-with-the-program message is used to drive economic and resource extraction agendas. So when we think of Grassy Narrows First Nation and their issue with deforestation and with mercury poisoning from factories, the biggest argument I hear from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous leaders is: “Well, there’s just no other way to create an economy. So you gotta do it. You have to exploit it.” It’s like Calvin Helin dangerously recommends in his book (*Dances with Dependency*): “You’ve got it, so use it.” Create the pipeline. Why? Because you can, you have to. The world is going in that direction. But there are also those voices, more and more of them, saying, “No, that’s not the answer.”

Leah: It’s buying into that neoliberal definition of success, which is rooted in money and wealth. It’s a spiritual crisis, a poverty of spirit. When I was at Grassy, I had to keep a fire going for four days, twenty-four hours each day, because I didn’t have a fire-keeper. And I managed it. Now that fire is a technology, giving me light and warmth and protection, feeding my spirit. But does it interfere with my relationship with the land? No. But the mercury poisoning—caused by forest corporations’ clear-cutting—does, and a pipeline does. Those are bad technologies. Maybe not even technology, just stupidity. And the fire, I would say it is a being. It’s not just a physical thing. It’s not a mere object or thing. I have a relationship with it.

What practices do you or others in your community have that help guide—or restrain—your relationship with technology?

Niigaan: Life begets life. Things that respect, honour, and cherish life are what guide my action in the world. I learned that both from Anishinaabe traditions and from my mother, who was raised Catholic. Her biggest teaching was, “You never impose yourself on other people, because then you hurt them, you hurt the relationship, and end things.” And the teaching of Christ is “Life begets life. Give life to beget life.” So does this technology give life? Does money? Do the tar sands?

It’s difficult trying to navigate this world being a rejectionist, because creation is full of contradictions. I use oil. I use a car. I use a phone. I’m trying to do less damage in the way I use these things. The electricity that powers the light that is on in this room right now comes from dams in the north that are destroying the lives of Indigenous communities. But you do the best you can. We live these contradictions every day of our lives, whether we are Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

Leah: We use technology all the time. But as far as exploitative technology is concerned, because I’ve been taught certain teachings in the ceremonies around the land, and because my role as a woman, as a water-carrier, is to care for the land, I have chosen to abstain from various opportunities that are funded by dangerous and destructive technologies. Because for me to take that would be a contradiction of who I am as an Indigenous woman and my role to protect waters. My cultural and spiritual values certainly guide me in how I think about this stuff. So even though I do text and use Facebook, I prefer the phone and face-to-face conversations to technologies that distance us one from another. Although everybody drives a car—and that’s considered normal—that doesn’t make it okay. That’s just rationalizing destructive behavior that’s based on insecurities and an empty spirit. When I’m in ceremony with women, I am reminded how profoundly innovative and life-giving things that have been defined as not-technology are in terms of keeping our communities going.

Some North American communities, like the Amish, have longstanding, collective ways of discerning whether to embrace,

experiment with, or reject various technologies. Do you know of Indigenous communities that practice something like this?

Leah: That's the great debate in our communities right now. You have those who want to honour and protect our traditional relationships with the land and what some call "resources." And then you have the neoliberal push toward unsustainable extractive methods, because some have embraced colonial definitions of wealth, which is linked with technologies of efficiency and speed (and not patience, gentleness, and balance).

Adrian: The Haudenosaunee creation story speaks of Sapling, the good twin, and Flint, the one who messes things up. That messing

Communities in specific places have the most intimate understanding of the land and their relationships. We need to honour the knowledge that's in those places.

up is associated with domination of creation. The elders always warned about those who would come and try to make them dominate the world. That's the colonial way. Whereas our people practiced fifty-year rotations of our hunting and gathering areas in order to give those relations rest, the way of domination tries to extract with utmost efficiency. Even good Mennonites I know, who have pretty good relationships with the land, are

driven to get as much out of the land as possible, out of every square inch. They treat it like a slave, not a fellow person. There's no gifting back. Jewish tradition says that agricultural techniques must give place to Sabbath rest. They were not to harvest the corners. There's no place for that today.

It isn't helpful to put our Indigenous communities into oppositional categories of "sell-outs" or "Luddites." Communities and elders in specific places have the most intimate understanding of the land and their relationships. We need to honour the knowledge that's in those places. In my community, the people draw on traditional stories—of Sapling, for example—because those relatives from the past helped us learn how to grow corns, beans, and squash together. That was a technological innovation and a spiritual gift. That technological tradition informs the people of that place. We need to honour that, and come alongside folks as allies, sharing our information and gifts and technologies, as they discern contemporary realities and challenges in those places.

The good news is embodied

A sermon on creation, incarnation, and technology

Andy Brubacher Kaethler

My younger daughter, Hannah, prefers the status quo. She is open to change only if the new thing catches her attention right away. About when Hannah was learning to read, she preferred to watch videos rather than do activities that took some effort. One day, after repeated requests to watch Franklin, or The Magic School Bus, or Veggie Tales (all good children's videos), and repeated dismissals of my suggestions to read, craft, play piano, or play with a friend instead, I decided to do a little bit of subversive "field research" with her.¹

For the next month, whenever she said she wanted to watch a video, I would ask her how she was feeling at that moment. Her responses invariably included phrases such as, "I'm bored,"

"There's nothing to do," or "I'm tired."

Sometimes I would allow her to watch a video, and when it was finished I would again ask her how she was feeling. Without fail, her responses were the same. She was bored, tired, uninspired, and just wanted to watch another video.

Other times I would say, "Let's go for a walk in the neighbourhood. I need a break from what I'm doing." We would observe the flowers and the birds, or discuss friendships and school and church. When we returned home from a thirty-minute walk, I would again ask her how she was feeling. Now she

would reply, "I'm feeling better. I think I'll go read" (or craft, or play outside . . .).

At the end of the month's experiment I asked Hannah if she noticed that after watching a video she still felt crappy but that after going for a walk she felt more alive and inspired. She said she

Electronic media abstract us from time, place, and bodies, whereas embodied activities such as walking and talking engage our bodies in time and place in a way that is emotionally, socially, and physically grounding.

hadn't noticed but reflected that it was true. This experiment did not change her preference for the status quo, but it did increase her receptivity to suggestions that she try more embodied activities.

There is something deceptively alluring about the use of electronic technology. Electronic media temporarily abstract us from time, place, and bodies, whereas—as Hannah discovered—embodied activities such as walking and talking together engage our bodies in time and place in a way that is emotionally, socially, and physically grounding and orienting. For psychological and sociological reasons, and also for spiritual and theological ones, we—like Hannah—can benefit from paying attention to the effects of using electronic media.

Creation: Time, place, and bodies are gifts of the garden

The Bible is an indispensable resource for Christians who are asking questions about what it means to be human, one of God's creatures, and about what difference it makes in our daily lives when we acknowledge and embrace God as our Creator. The psalmist frames the question to God this way: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" Then the psalmist observes:

*Yet you have made them a little lower than God
[or than the divine beings or angels],
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet, . . .
O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
(Ps. 8:4–6, 9, NRSV)*

God created humans between heavenly beings and the rest of the created order. This is indeed a place of privilege for humanity, but more importantly, it is a place of responsibility and accountability. We are accountable to God, "our Sovereign," for the well-being of creation. The works of God's hands are important to God and therefore must be important to humans.

The opening chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1–3, also provide key insights for our questions. First, we observe that God created

the entire world, humans included, in and through *time* (Gen. 1:3–5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:2–3). God creates time, and then each of the first six days represents an act of creation. Time is not an obstacle to God; it is, on the contrary, a central means by which God forms the world and humanity.

Second, God creates the entire world, humans included, in *place*. The garden of Eden is not a generic place; it represents a particular place (Gen. 2:8–9, 18–19), the ground from which God begins creating and fostering relationships between Creator, human and nonhuman creatures, and creation.

Third, God creates woman and man with *bodies*. Being physical is part of what distinguishes humans from God (we were made in the *image* of God), while some of our physical capacities distinguish us from other creatures (Gen. 1:20–27).

Being created in time, in place, and in bodies is an essential aspect of the gift of creation. As human creatures, our God-given limits—our being bound by time, place, and bodies—are not presented in the Bible as a result of the fall or of leaving the garden; in no way are they a problem to be overcome. But one might argue that when we human creatures treat time, place, and

Our being bound by time, place, and bodies is not presented in the Bible as a result of the fall; in no way is it a problem to be overcome. Our use of technology is often in rebellion against these God-gifted limits.

bodies as limitations to be overcome, we are being rebellious and arrogant. Our use of technology is often in rebellion against these God-gifted limits. The Internet is appealing precisely because when we are on it, time, place, and bodies are largely irrelevant: information is instantaneous, place is inconsequential, and bodies are immaterial.

An example from the Bible that illustrates a human tendency to express rebellion through technology is the story of the construction of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11).

Using new technologies of brick making and sophisticated language, the people sought to build a tower that would overcome their limitedness in place by giving them a perch near the heavens, so they could see and be seen from places far and wide. It would overcome their limitedness in time by memorializing themselves for all time. And this super-body, a tower with imposing physical presence, would overcome their bodily limits.

Incarnation: God's chosen medium for sharing good news

Why can't we just see technology as a natural expression of our being human? We were given minds and language and the ability to make and use tools. We are social creatures, and technology can be used to strengthen social bonds. Many technologies are based on and simply extend human capacities: glasses extend the function of our eyes, bicycles and cars are an extension of our legs, phones are an extension of our mouths and ears, computers are an extension of our brains, etc. Certainly this logic makes sense now, when we associate technology almost exclusively with progress and efficiency.

But the incarnation takes us back to the logic of creation. In Jesus Christ, God reaffirms the goodness of time, place, and bodies. It is neither accidental nor incidental that Jesus was born at the end of the Second Temple period, during the proliferation of Jewish sects and preceding the destruction of the temple under Roman occupation. God's timing is intentional for spreading the good news of peace and reconciliation during this time of division and oppression. It is neither accidental nor incidental that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a town representing kingship in the line of David, and that he was raised in Nazareth, a two-bit village in Galilee far from the religious center at Jerusalem. It is neither accidental nor incidental that Jesus was born to Mary, an unmarried peasant girl chosen by God to be the *theotokos*—the God-bearer—and the bearer of the good news (Luke 1:26–38, 46–56; 2:1–7). That Jesus was born with a body and lived in a particular place for a particular time is of great consequence.

But God takes it one step further. In the incarnation we find not only that God reaffirms the goodness of being created in time, in place, and in bodies; we also find that these are God's chosen form of communication. Marshall McLuhan famously insisted that “the medium is message.” The message or content of communication cannot be isolated from the medium or form by which it is communicated. The medium significantly alters the reception of the message, and the medium itself worthy of study.² In this view, Jesus is both the good news (the message) and the bearer of the good news (the medium). In Jesus, the message of the good news cannot be separated from the medium of the incarnate, embodied person.

The necessary coherence of medium and message in the good news and in Jesus Christ is at odds with the assertion made by Rick Warren, author of the “purpose driven church” books, that the message and the method (medium) are distinct: “Our message must never change, but the way we deliver that message must be constantly updated to reach each new generation.”³ In Warren’s view, it does not matter that one generation prefers to read the Bible as a book, and another prefers to read it on a Kindle.

But Christians such as Shane Hipps, following McLuhan, observe that when you change the medium, you change the

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message. When you change the *way* the good news is shared, you change the good news *itself*. While the invention of the printing press made the Bible more accessible, it also changed the kind of faith people sought and found: it became radically individualistic, objective, abstract, and rational.⁴ Digital media give people easier and quicker access to the Bible, but these media fragment individual passages from the larger narrative, they disembody the Word, and they showcase

the medium itself as spectacle, to the point that we may cease to reflect either the medium or the message behind it.

Consider the difference of meaning in the word *friend* in Jesus’s statement “I have called you friends” (John 15:15), and in the act of friending someone on Facebook. Consider the difference of meaning in the word *follow* in Jesus’s call to “follow me” (Luke 5:27; 18:22; John 8:12; 21:19), and in the act of following someone on Twitter. When we friend and follow people on the Internet, time and place and bodies are rendered irrelevant, but Jesus’s invitation to be his friend and follow him must be lived out in particular times, particular places, and with our whole bodies.

To proclaim that Jesus is the “Word [who] became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14) is not simply to claim a historical fact that allows us to embrace the “progress” of more efficient and effective means today. The Word made flesh is an ontological reality (the way things are), and an eschatological reality (the way things will be), and the one and only missional strategy. The incarnation is God’s intentional and enduring plan for the salva-

tion of all people, 2000 years ago, today, and until the return of the Messiah.

The church: Embodying the good news today, in this place

If Jesus is our Lord and Savior, and if we take seriously the incarnation as ontological, eschatological, missional reality, an attempt to use *virtual reality* will be revealed as an insufficient and de-formative medium or method to communicate the deeply embodied, time- and place-bound work of God in and through Jesus to bring hope, peace, and reconciliation to this world that is God's. One only need consult a dictionary to be reminded that the word *virtual* means "artificial," "near enough," "imitation," and "efficient."

The problem is not simply that the *virtual* is not real. The problem is that virtual reality *changes* what constitutes reality.

There is no virtual or efficient way to live and communicate the good news of peace in this world, justice for all, and reconciliation between humans and their Creator, between humans and their fellow creatures, or between humans and the earth.

Online communities may in fact constitute community, but when our relationships are primarily digitally mediated, what counts as community becomes disconnected from time, place, and bodies. Facebook changes the reality of friendship. Twitter changes what it means to follow. There is nothing virtual about Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection, and there is nothing virtual about Jesus's invitation to follow him. Virtual relationships distort and denigrate, turning a gift from God into a cheap, commodified experience with a disembodied other.

To be a member of the church as the body of Christ is to commit oneself to a community

of believers who together witness to those who have not yet fully encountered Christ in their lives and who participate in God's reconciling work in this world. This is difficult work. There is no virtual or efficient way to live and communicate the good news of peace in this world, justice for all, and reconciliation between humans and their Creator, between humans and their fellow creatures, or between humans and the earth. This work requires patience, kindness, self-control, strength, and forbearance (among other fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23), Christian

virtues that are eroded by the medium of virtual reality, which fosters impatience, snap decision making, choosing the path of least resistance, and suspicion.

"I hate people less and I sleep better"

Let's return to Hannah. Fast-forward six or seven years. Hannah was "relieved" of the privilege of using her iPod for six weeks this past fall when she broke one of our family's household expectations regarding social media. Three weeks after her iPod was returned to her, her parents noticed that she was not using it again. When asked why not, she replied, "Because I hate people less and I sleep better without it." Out of the mouths of babes!

In the intervening years, many conversations at home about technology and relationships have given Hannah a framework and language for processing her use of technology. She was able to apply these lessons when she had disengaged from the nonstop social, emotional, and physical demands digital technology placed on her. Her parents also noticed that during her iPod vacation she read more, played piano more, and generally liked herself more. Hannah has now resumed connecting with friends on a device, but she spends much less time on it, does not bring it into her bedroom, values times spent physically with friends, and continues to read and play piano more.

Prayer

In the Gospel of John, just before Jesus is arrested and crucified, he prays to his Father for the disciples:

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the

*truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world,
I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify
myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. (John
17:6–8, 15–19)*

This prayer is for all who accept Jesus's call to friendship and to follow him, that we may obey God's word and be sanctified by the truth that was incarnated in Jesus, as we reveal the good news in particular times and places through our embodied presence. Amen.

Notes

¹ I use this story with Hannah's permission.

² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), vii–xi, 23–35.

³ Rick Warren, "Reaching a Changing World with God's Unchanging Word," April 1, 2015, <http://churchleadergazette.com/reaching-a-changing-world-with-gods-unchanging-word-by-rick-warren/>.

⁴ Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 53–60.

About the author

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Good books on technology

An annotated bibliography

Andy Brubacher Kaethler

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.