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Foreword

To a visitor from earlier in this century, the single most eye-catching feature of modern life would be the overwhelming presence of unimaginable technologies in every area of human life. Medical, transportation, and communication technologies alone have revolutionized modern culture and brought enormous benefits. Innumerable other technologies bring a wide range of conveniences to modern life undreamed of even fifty years ago. We live in a technological culture.

Christians, always finding themselves at the juncture of the old age and the age to come, must constantly be discerning the signs of the times. Being the people of God in a technological culture raises critical and complex questions for the contemporary church.

Is technological progress the same as human progress? Is technology a morally neutral tool no better or worse than the ends it serves? Do technological means "overrun the ends," unconsciously limiting human vision and predisposing human action? To what extent is the maker of the machine morally and spiritually altered by the machine?

The essays in this issue of *Christian Studies* address the nature and significance of technology in the world and in the church.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

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The Lure of Millennium 2000
What Is at Stake for the Christian Believer?

Allan J. McNicol

Only if you just arrived from Mars would you, by now, not have an opinion on the Y2K hullabaloo. Mercifully, I come today with no new claim to knowledge or particular expertise on that matter.[1]

I am told that my computer is Y2K compliant. I will not be taking a flight on December 31. And since, by the grace of God, I will have a significant decade-entering birthday a week before the change of the millennium, the near arrival of that particular milestone in my life looms with as much importance to me as that other change in the calendar.

Nevertheless, for Christian believers, the most significant fact in human history is the event of Jesus. Jaroslav Pelikan calls it the "turning point of history."[2] And the fact that we now mark two thousand years since Jesus' coming is a matter that surely warrants some reflection. Also, it just so happens that the term "millennium" is also a concept that spawns its own particular cluster of issues and creates its own field of story within Christianity. The term, of course, is drawn from several references in Revelation 20 where it speaks about the reign of Christ for *mille annum* (Latin) one thousand

[1]An abbreviated form of this article has been presented in various forums over the past twelve months. Notes and documentation have been added to the text of the oral presentation for purposes of clarification.

[2]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 21, 32-33.

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years. The fact that we are now on the verge of a third millennium since the Christ-Event also invites reflection on this well traveled concept since it first came to light in a significant way in the Apocalypse of John.

Our task is straightforward. It is to take up several important faith issues for consideration that are suggested by the arrival of the dawn of the third millennium of Christian history.

First, we wish to consider a significant fact. Is it merely an accidental detail of history that the name of Jesus hardly appeared in any standard book of history or literature of the cultured elite in the first hundred years after his death, but now, two thousand years later, we find time is dated from his birth? How can this be that someone that few heard of in the era in which he lived, or for a considerable time later, could be reckoned to be the most significant figure in human history? To repeat, is this a mere accident of history? What can we glean from this startling fact with respect to how God works in history? What is the story behind the growth of influence of Jesus culminating in the calendar change in his honor anyway?

In addition, the view that there will be a time in history when things will work well—the coming of a millennium—is an idea that has persisted in Christianity for two thousand years. At the heart of the concept of millennium lurks another set of questions that appear to have some significance for Christian faith. Two issues emerge that are of special relevance. First, how has the thinking about the millennium played a role in Christian faith? Given all that has happened in the past century, do we still believe that there will be a golden age? Or to put it more theologically, do we believe that God will fulfill his promises and finally bring his new creation to fulfillment? Second, now that two millennia have elapsed, as we anticipate the dawn of the third millennium, what is the appropriate way for Christians to celebrate this up-coming event? Procedurally, we will now move to discuss these issues in more detail.

The Growth of Jesus' Influence and the Calendar Question

Our best historical sources indicate that Jesus of Nazareth was born in about

6 to 4 BC. Of course in those times there was a very different system of dating time. Jesus was born in the early period of the Roman Empire. By and large, historians during this era situated historical events in the context of the tenure of a particular Roman emperor or official. Thus Luke, who has some pretensions to being a Hellenistic historian, dates major events in the life of Jesus from either the time of the Herods or the relevant Roman emperors (Lk 1:5; 2:1; 3:1). Others up until Eusebius do the same thing. For the wider picture the Romans placed the imperial reigns in a chronology computed from the legendary date of the founding of Rome known as A. U. C. (*ab urbe condita*). According to this basic calendar Jesus was born in about 750 A. U. C. Thus the question arises, how and on what basis was the calendar changed? Herein rests a story that has some significance for faith.

For about three centuries after its beginnings, the Christian community was marginalized. In my judgment, well into the second century, the number of adherents to Christian faith could be numbered in the low thousands. However, as time went on, growth became more significant. Among the more significant events that galvanized Christian consciousness in the early centuries were the terrible persecutions which hit hardest during the last half of the third century, especially under Diocletian (284-305). The impact of this time was seared in the memory of the church. It led some Christian groups to date year one of their calendars from the age of the Martyrs (284, the beginning of the reign of Diocletian, being a popular choice). Perhaps this way of dating came from an ancient Christian custom of commemorating the anniversary of the death of martyrs. The actual day of martyrdom was thought to be the *dies natalis* (the day of the birth of the heavenly life of the martyr). This dating is still utilized by certain groups like some of the Copts in North Africa today. Nevertheless, the influence of the Roman calendar still continued.[3]

It was not until about the year 500 that the obscure Scythian monk

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[3]Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries*, 21, 32-33.

Dionysius Exiguus arrived on the scene in Rome. As an accomplished scholar, he was instrumental in persuading the authorities to begin the calendar from the time of another birth: the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. Specifically, Dionysius decided that the true beginning of the Jesus-Event should not be December 25 (the date the Roman Church had settled on as the actual *birth day* of Jesus), but taking the time span of a normal pregnancy, he went back nine months and settled on March 25, which was reckoned to be the time of the Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1:26-34). This is the point of time from which he began to date the years. From Dionysius onward until the Gregorian reforms of the calendar in the Sixteenth Century, in Europe, the New Year started on March 25. For some reason Dionysius miscalculated the actual date of the birth of Christ by 4 to 6 years. So on our calendar Jesus was actually born somewhere between 6 and 4 B.C. *Therefore, two thousand years have actually passed since the time of Christ's birth.* But with the triumph of Christianity in Europe, Dionysius' calendar became entrenched as the normative reckoning of time in Europe. From then onward the die was cast. Yet it would be a long time before the rest of the world would recognize this calendar. Indeed, it was not until the nineteenth century of missionary expansion in Africa and Asia, what Kenneth Latourette calls "the Great Century," that Christianity truly became a world-wide phenomenon.[4] Pursuant to the expansion of Western culture and technology that followed in the wake of this missionary movement (or is it the other way around?) the use of the Christian calculation of time has practically become universal.

Thus, almost imperceptibly in the modern era, the early Christian claim, to paraphrase Oscar Cullmann, that Christ stands at the mid-point of time between Creation and Parousia, has taken on a deeper dimension.[5]

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[4]Kenneth Latourette, "New Perspectives in Church History," *Journal of Religion* 21 (1994): 436-438.

[5]Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* trans. F. V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950).

Indeed Christ not only stands at the mid-point of time but, as we noted, at the turning point of time. As we speak, no other figure can approach his impact on human history. How ironic that someone who lived the life of a servant, suffered the humiliation of the cross, and is hardly mentioned in the annals of ancient cultural literature until more than a century after his birth, turns out two thousand years later to be arguably the most significant figure of human history: just as the early Christians confessed him to be in their worship and writings. Surely it is not just a mere expression of Christian triumphalism to say that this brute fact should be cause for reflection. Fundamental elements of the confession which a mere handful of people in the first century somewhat implausibly acknowledged and staked their eternal destiny upon, *suo iure,* are now acknowledged to the four corners of the earth as pivotal and are even embedded in our calendar. This, I would submit, is a reality worth pondering as we stand at the beginning of the third millennium. Is this a mere accident of history? Or is there something more to the matter than that?

The Third Millennium

Now to the other issue. Yes, we stand at the doorway of the third millennium. And this too is a term, which, due to its potent past, demands at least passing familiarity among Christians today.

The word, as we have noted, comes from the text of Revelation 20. In the narrative context of Revelation it refers to a special reward given to the martyrs or, in the words of John, "the souls of those who were beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the Word of God" (Rev 20:4). During this time Satan is bound, the martyrs are brought to life, and as their reward they will reign with Christ a thousand years. In the context of Revelation at the end of the thousand years there comes a brief final rebellion of the nations, which culminates in the ultimate banishment of Satan, followed by the general resurrection and Last Judgment.

To put it mildly, the interpretation of the thousand-year reign of Christ has been a conundrum for interpreters ever since the Book of Revelation

came to light. As noted above, the thousand-year period primarily involves the vindication of the martyrs, a major theme that has been stressed throughout the book (cf. Rev. 6:9-11; 12:17: 13:8; 18:24; 19:2; etc.). There is also evidence in interpretation among the Jews that the idea of the thousand years appears to represent a return to ideal Adamic existence (an interpretive combination of Gen. 2:4, 17, and Ps 90:4). Ideal Adamic existence may have been considered to have lasted for about a thousand years. If we put these ideas together, we have the promise that those who would exhibit loyalty to Jesus, to the extent they may even face martyrdom, are promised a new world in which they will enjoy the glories of the original Adamic existence. This may not be too far from what the prophet John was saying to the seven churches.

Yet, ever since the second century this text has been awash in controversy. Many early leaders such as Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus took the reference to a thousand years literally. They went on to claim it was an essential element of Christian doctrine to anticipate an *earthly* reign of Christ with his resurrected holy ones over the nations after his parousia. The idea of the millennium was integrated into views that each day of the seven days of the Jewish week symbolized one thousand years of human history. This history would conclude either with a Sabbath rest of a millennium after six thousand years, or an eighth day after seven thousand years.

But there were always doubters. The text of Revelation does not indicate explicitly where the thousand-year reign of Christ is supposed to take place (on earth or somewhere else), or when it was supposed to begin. Given the fact that numbers are notoriously symbolic throughout the Apocalypse, such ambiguities fueled the view that this whole passage should be read in a more allegorical way. Especially influential was Augustine's interpretation. In his famous *City of God* he viewed the world in conflict between two powers: the *City of God* and the *City of Man.* The *City of God* is the church. With its inauguration after the resurrection of Christ, it represents the action of the binding of Satan. Thus, the beginning of the millennium,

for Augustine, was the era of the church. Gradually the power of Rome (the referent to the *City of Man*) was to be usurped by the *City of God*—the church. This interpretation took considerable liberties with the text of Revelation 20:4-6, but it did have the advantage of providing a basic rationale for the role of the church as the ideological sub-structure for the state in the Middle Ages.

Despite some recent writings to the contrary, the historical evidence is ambiguous that the coming of the year 1000 precipitated apocalyptic fever in Europe. However, a critical turning point in Western millennial thinking did come with the writings of Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202). Joachim was concerned with the moral decadence that was widespread in the church of the medieval period. He read the Apocalypse as encoding the history of the church up until his time. He was particularly interested in the reference to 1260 days in Revelation 11:3 and 12:5. He viewed these passages as saying that somewhere about the year 1260 (he read the 1260 days as 1260 years) the Antichrist would appear, and after his overthrow would come the millennium. What was necessary was that the church needed moral renewal to be ready for the millennium. In Joachim's view the response to the preaching of the monks would precipitate this renewal.[6]

What is especially significant about this is that the idea of 1260 embedded itself in the consciousness of the West. Reformation theologians argued for some centuries that 1260 referred to 1260 years of the papacy and this would be followed by the millennium. Many early Restorationist commentators took this view.

In the late nineteenth century John Nelson Darby and other dispensationalists argued that the references to 1260 in the Apocalypse should not be seen as a reference to years but ought to be taken as literal days of the

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[6]A. W. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 45-53 has a helpful discussion of the life and significance of Joachim of Fiore for the study of millennial thinking.

time of Antichrist which would come after a supposed rapture of the saints by Christ from the earth to heaven, and would eventually be followed, after a period of tribulation, by a second return of Christ to inaugurate the millennium.[7] This view is widespread among evangelicals to this day.

One could go on with a recitation of the various mutations of these views, but I think we have established the position that millennial thinking has been an important factor in Western Christian culture for over two thousand years.

Well then, what is the significance for us as we approach the new millennium? Since the rise of modern science, we doubt very much whether there are many who will expect, upon the turn of the calendar to 2000, there will be ushered in the Sabbath rest that the ancients expected. In fact, especially in some secular circles, there is an anxiety that just the opposite may take place with potential technological melt-downs! Still, the coming of the millennium is a biblical concept. No matter how much the fanatical date setters have discredited it, its appearance in the Canon is a reminder that God has pledged that he will bring his new creation, inaugurated through the resurrection of Christ, to fulfillment. And not only that, but those who suffer with Christ will reign with him. Christians do believe things will get better. In a time when the world is beset by various conflicts, it would be good not to forget that. Christianity is not a religion of an "Eternal Return." Each day we live we are one day closer to the time of our ultimate salvation (Rom 13:11). History has a goal. If the coming of the new millennium does nothing else, it serves as a reminder that the world does not belong to Caesar but will be fully claimed at a future point of time by the Christ of Calvary. Is this a

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[7]Max S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992 English Edition) gives a thorough description of Darby's views. In many ways Darby's influence in the United Kingdom paralleled that of Alexander Campbell in America. Both, in their own right, were nineteenth century Restorationists who had deeply held views on millennial matters. Of course, Campbell moved in the orbit of post-millennialism while Darby popularized dispensational pre-millennialism.

living reality for us?

The Celebration of the Millennium

What, then, is the appropriate way for Christians to celebrate the turn of the calendar to 2000?[8] This is a reasonable question, because at the time of writing there is considerable hesitancy within the Christian community with respect to the stance believers should take on this issue.

We can quickly set aside the obscene expressions of spending extravagant amounts of money on partying as not being an option for the thinking Christian. After all, despite technical problems of dating, it remains a fact that we are celebrating the blessings that have accrued for humankind since Jesus came into the world two thousand years ago and not some secular event.

Normally, the culturally approved way of marking such a time would be to stage huge rallies and use the occasion to engage in inflated expressions of the glories of past accomplishments. But, again, one senses that the Christian community is in no mood for displays of triumphalism.[9] And it is a good thing, too! For if one looks back to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth two thousand years ago, need we be reminded that it was an event that occurred in the humblest of circumstances? Less than a generation later, the apostle Paul would have no qualms in telling a Greek-speaking audience that the central focus of Jesus' life was that "he took the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-11). Perhaps with the recollection of these circumstances and the impact

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[8]Here we intend to set aside the fruitless discussion as to whether the next millennium actually commences in 2000 or 2001. Technically, those who agree with the latter perspective are correct. But it is a fruitless argument because the attention of most people is concentrated on one thing: the precise time of the turn of the calendar from 1999 to 2000.

[9]This point has been made recently by Mike Shepherd: "Why celebrate the Millennium Anyway?" *Expository Times* 110/11 (1999): 357-359. However, Shepherd engages in some unnecessary self-flagellation with his tired remarks suggesting that after the Crusades and other excesses of Constantinianism, Christians ought to mark the up-coming transition to the new millennium with repentance.

of Jesus' life still riveted in our minds, we may have stumbled upon the clue of developing a stance toward carrying out an appropriate Christian recognition of the transition to the third millennium. And that is to highlight the fact that the Kingdom which Jesus inaugurated and to which we owe allegiance is different from all other kingdoms.

If we go back to the Matthean account of the birth of Jesus, we are struck immediately by the reality that the birth of Jesus was terribly inconvenient and problematic to the political authorities of the time (Matt. 2:1-18). To the Herods and other claimants to power, Jesus' *birth day* was subversive to another gospel which claimed *their* allegiance: namely, that Caesar was the patron of all spiritual and material benefits. We would humbly suggest that not much has changed. Ever since, even after the calendar was changed to put Jesus at the center of history, the analogues to Caesar have sought to displace the stranger from Galilee from his rightful place as the central figure of history. It is generally recognized that we are approaching the end of an era known as the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment celebrated reason and personal autonomy as the ultimate value for humankind. One of the pivotal events of the Enlightenment era was the French Revolution. It is seldom recalled these days that there was a very serious attempt by the instigators of that revolution to start the calendar anew from that time.[10] Other totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have entertained the same idea.

And yet the gospel brought by Jesus subverts all of these claims. It is a story that highlights the claim that the Creator himself reclaimed the Creation and began to set all things right through the power of the wounded suffering love of Jesus of Nazareth. This story is the very antithesis to both the claims of the Caesars and all the other Y2K hoopla of our times. Somehow it remains incumbent upon a sometimes demoralized church, pushed back in

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[10]As noted by N. T. Wright, *The Millennium Myth: Hope for a Modern World* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999), 80.

the corner of the flow of history, to raise quietly its hand and speak the truth that it is, after all, Jesus' *birth day* we are about to celebrate. And when the dust has cleared after these past two thousand years, he *was* the turning point of history. What is the appropriate way to celebrate the new beginning of the new millennium? Rehearse to those who have never heard it the gospel of Jesus. This remains the only true alternative to the gods of the age.

Conclusion

Millennium 2000 has an interesting ring to it! Almost a lure. It reminds us that no matter how improbable the initial claims of the early Christians that Jesus is Lord may have seemed, two thousand years later they echo with plausibility and conviction. Despite the many dead-ends into which millennial theories have taken the church throughout its history, the fact remains that what the apostle reminds us is true: the time of our ultimate salvation is "nearer to us when we first believed." Fortified with the conviction that the coming of Jesus was the turning point of history, we approach the dawning of the new millennium confident in the hope that before too long God will bring his new creation begun in Christ to total fulfillment.

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"Let Us Make a Name for Ourselves"
Human Innovation and Technology in Genesis 1-11

R. Mark Shipp

This morning when I woke up I slipped out of bed and took a shower in hot and cold running water. The temperature was a pleasant 72°, controlled by a central air-conditioning system. I went into the kitchen, opened up the refrigerator and took out food items to make my children school lunches. Some containers I noticed had gone bad, so these were flushed down my recently installed disposal. The kids' lunch boxes are designed to hold heat and cold and are made of durable vinyl. Afterwards I sat and watched a news show on my Trinitron T. V. I drove to work in my air-conditioned van and rode the elevator to my office. There, I sat own at my computer and checked my e-mail. One morning the e-mail server went down and work virtually came to a standstill. Indeed, we live in a web of technology which orders and determines much of our attitudes and behavior.

Recently, the cover story for *Newsweek* magazine related to the pervasive influence of the Internet and related technologies on our lives. The thrust of the article is that commerce, medicine, entertainment, education, and socializing will be increasingly done on the Internet. Technology will, to some degree, determine increasingly the quality, quantity, and procedures for each of these areas of human concern. Until recently, however, there has been correspondingly little attention given to the ethical and religious questions which such unrestrained dependence upon technology raises.

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This is not only a concern in the social, commercial, and political realms. In recent writings about technology, theology, and the Church, technology has been alternately praised as an unambiguous tool for the minister and theologian or cautiously accepted as a useful gift of God.[1] What has often been missed in our headlong plunge into a technological society (and a technological church?) is the inherent ambiguity of all human striving, including technology.

Human Technology and Innovation in Genesis 1-11

Any discussion of technology and innovation must begin with the Fall. All human technology and innovation come after the expulsion from the garden. It has been often noted, on the other hand, that work (*ʿabōdāh*, "service" or "work" in Hebrew) is a human activity in the garden and that work necessarily implies innovation and technology.[2] Jacques Ellul has reminded us that the very purpose of technology is to advance, improve, make things more accessible and convenient.[3] As such, technology is not in view in the garden,

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[1]See, for example, Kurt Anders Richardson, "The Naturalness of Creation and Redemptive Interests in Theology, Science, and Technology," *Zygon* 30 (1995): 281-291. To Richardson, technology can and should serve a redemptive function: [T]he history of technology, including the biographies of the scientists and inventors, while uneven, is replete with the "common grace" discernible in the well-intentioned innovation and genuine altruism driving many of the research programs by which the technologies were and are developed . . . Essential to theological reflection on technology would be its integration into the larger, genuinely creative and redemptive activities of the human party. As this integration into theology has a chance to take place, surely a "theology of technology" will emerge (p. 285).

[2]Richardson suggests that human technology is an natural extension of human life, rooted in the human creature itself, and capable of great good or great harm. Note the following: "[The] ambiguities of technology within nature could be compensated for by real amelioration. The technological ways in which human beings interact with nature and other living populations could become ameliorative rather than pejorative" (p. 282).

[3]Jacques Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," in *Theology and Technology:Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis*, Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, eds. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 125.

for God made the garden perfect, without need of modification or improvement. Human activity was not engaged in to advance or improve the garden, for it needed no improvement. Human activity in the garden, therefore, was to "work" (Hebrew *ʿābad*) or "guard" (Hebrew *šāmar*) the garden, but this work implies no essential alteration to the garden. Ellul asks the interesting question that if work is intended in the garden to advance, improve, or alter what God had already pronounced "good," then what is Adam expected to "guard" the garden against, as these words occur parallel? Ellul suggests that Adam simply "worked" and "guarded" because God desired that he do it and not in order to achieve an end, goal, or product.[4]

With the Fall, the man and woman are still commanded to work, but this time the work is designated *ʿiṣṣābôn*, "toil." From now on their work will be characterized by the attempt to produce from the soil, but with the caveat that the soil would not produce the expected fruit or in a manner commensurate with the labor expended. Work, as with every other aspect of humanity created in the *imago Dei*, is now ambiguous. It is part of God's gracious command from the beginning, but now, East of Eden, it is part of the lot of fallen humanity and the fractured image of God.

Human Innovation and Technology

There are two main complexes of literature which relate to human innovation and technology in Genesis 1-11: 4:15-24, the genealogy of Cain, and chapters 9:18-11:9, including the account of Noah's vineyard (9:20-27), the "Table of Nations" in chapter 10, and the story of the Tower of Babel (11:1-9). It is significant that in both of these complexes, human technology is at best ambiguous.

To underscore this last point, if one looks at the flow of the narrative from chapters 4:1-11:10, the following outline emerges. First, there is the

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[4]Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," 127.

story of murder in the first family after the expulsion from the garden (4:1-16). The result of this sin is that Cain is sent out to wander and be a fugitive in the earth. Following this story, there is the first set of genealogies in 4:17-24 (the corrupt line of Cain, ending in unconstrained violence) and 4:25-5:32 (the new line of Adam through Seth, ending in worship). Third, 6:1-4 is the strange story of the sons of God having relations with the daughters of men, which sets the stage for the flood. Gen. 6:5-9:17 is the account of the flood and the covenant with Noah and his descendants. Following the flood account is another brief account of impropriety, sin, and cursing (9:18-29, Noah's drunkenness and Ham's impropriety). Chapter 10 is the second extensive genealogy, the descendants and their respective nations of the three sons of Noah. Finally, 11:1-9 is the story of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent scattering of people over the face of the earth.

The following outline emerges from the foregoing description of contents:

A: Cain and Abel; Cain's sin; Cain driven out to *wander* (4:1-16).
B: *Genealogy* of Cain and Seth (4:17-24, Cain; 4:25-5:32, Seth).
C: Sons of God and daughters of men, *illicit sexual union* (6:1-4).
D: The flood account and covenant with Noah (6:5-9:17).
C': Noah's drunkenness and Ham's *gazing on his nakedness* (9:18-29).
B': The *Genealogy* of the Nations (chapter 10).
A': The Tower of Babel: people *scattered* (11:1-9).

The sin of Cain and his wandering, fugitive status corresponds to the presumptuous sin of the people in Babel and their scattering over the earth. The genealogies of the two sons of Adam (Cain and Seth) corresponds to the genealogies of the three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the curse of Cain corresponding to the curse of Ham). The illicit sexual union between the sons of God and the daughters of men corresponds to Ham's inappropriate gazing on his father's nakedness. The flood account is the

central narrative in the whole section, with accounts leading up to it and flowing from it. It is significant to note that all the accounts of human technology and innovation in Genesis 1-11 occur in contexts relating to sin (Cain and Abel; Cain's genealogy, leading to utter corruption; Noah's drunkenness; and the Tower of Babel).

The Origin of Civilization (chapters 4-5)

Many have suggested that the account of Cain and Abel contains the first reference to the development of civilization in terms of the origin of *pastoralism* (Abel) and *agriculture* (Cain).[5] This is complicated by the statement in 3:23 ("therefore the LORD God sent him [Adam] forth from the garden of Eden, "to till [Hebrew *'ābad*, "work"] the ground from which he was taken") and by 4:20, the account of Lamech's son Jabal ("Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle"). Furthermore, attribution for the origin of agriculture later on goes to Noah (9:20: "Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard"). It is ambiguous, therefore, whether Cain should be considered the father of agriculture, as it is attributed elsewhere to Adam (although we are not specifically told he worked the ground) and Noah.

Nevertheless, Cain works the ground and the fruit of his labor is considered unacceptable to the Lord. While many have seen reflected in this story the etiology of pastoralism and an apology for Israel's original pastoral roots, it is more likely that Cain pursues the cultivation of what was cursed

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[5]Some scholars see in this account a memory of the origin of the Kenites, a desert tribe related to the Israelites. John Sawyer in particular attempts to make a connection between Cain, the Kenites, and the Edomites on the basis of personal names found in Genesis 4 and the metal-working of Tubal-Cain and the Edomites. Assuming that the traditions found in Genesis 1-11 were arranged and explained for theological and not just antiquarian reasons, one is justified in claiming that Genesis 4 has much more to say about human culture than the origin of the smith trade. See John Sawyer, "Cain and Hephaestus: Possible Relics of Metalworking Traditions in Genesis 4, *Abr-Nahrain* 24 (1986): 163.

in Gen. 3: 17-18:[6]

> [C]ursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

After the flood, God removes the curse from the ground ("I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth", Gen. 8:21) in a passage reflective of a "new creation", with much the same commands and promises given in chapters 8-9 ("be fruitful and multiply"), with the added statement that the curse on the ground was removed.[7]

Genesis 4 contains the only significant etiologies (origin stories) about human culture. First, the origin of *cities* is attributed to Cain. Gen. 4:17 says that Cain "became the builder of a city and called the name of the city according to the name of his son, Enoch." The first city was born out of Cain's wandering, fugitive status, after murdering his brother and being driven from the presence of the Lord.[8]

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[6]See Thomas Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 19-20. Mann says we do not know the reason for God's disregard of Cain's sacrifice.

[7]David Clines ["Theme in Genesis 1-11," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Richard Hess and David Tsumura, eds. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 299] does not think that Gen. 8:21 has anything to do with the curse on the ground in chapter 3, but the "curse on the ground" here refers to the flood. His statement is puzzling, given the exact verbal parallel between 3:17 and 8:21. Furthermore, 5:29 echoes the same curse on the ground, which Noah was to ameliorate: "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.

[8]Clines says of the origin of civilization in Genesis 4, "[W]hile the genealogy appears on the surface to be a list of the founders of the arts of civilization (the city, cattle-breeding, music, metal-working) . . . it is made clear by the point to which the progress of civilization reaches, namely Lamech's tyrannous boast (4:23f), that this has been a progress in sin as much as in civilization. In the seven generations of the line of Cain, history has seen a 'progress' from an impulsive act of murder to a deliberate reign of terror." See Clines, 295.

Many have noticed the similarity between Enoch's son, Irad, and the well-known Mesopotamian city Eridu, mentioned in the ancient Near Eastern text *The Eridu Genesis* as the first city. In this text, and in general in Near Eastern myth, cities originate in the will of the gods and are a part of the blessing of the gods on humanity. Note the goddess Nintur's commandment to build the first cities:

> May they come and build cities and cult-places,
> that I may cool myself in their shade;
> May they lay the bricks for the cult-cities in
> pure spots . . .
>
> The firstling of those cities, Eridu,
> She gave to the leader Nudimmud,
> The second, Badtibira, she gave to the Prince
> and Sacred One[9]

Not so in Genesis 4. The city has its origins in Cain and Cain's line, not in the divine will or mediation. The genealogy in chapter 4 lists only seven generations of Cain. They are sufficient to illustrate the line of Cain as resulting in corruption and uncontrolled violence.[10]

Walter Brueggemann has suggested that Cain's construction of the city and the beginning of human civilization ought not to be considered resultant and illustrative of the curse on Cain. He suggests that these verses have no connection to the preceding curse of Cain, but are rather a celebration of life and culture. He does admit the uneasy relationship between a murderer and the development of a high culture, but he makes no attempt to explain the presence of two parallel genealogies, Cain and Seth, except to assign

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[9]Patrick D. Miller Jr., "Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Richard Hess and David Tsumura, eds. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 161-162.

[10]See Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 39.

them to different original sources.[11] As a literary unit, Genesis 4 begins the major theme of Genesis 1-11 which Gerhard von Rad has called the "increase of sin to avalanche proportions."[12] The building of the first city and the origin of human civilization happens as part of this "avalanche," in Cain's wandering and fugitive state, away from the presence of God.

Pastoralism (Jabal), the *arts* (Jubal), and *metalworking* (Tubal-Cain) are mentioned as originating through three sons of Lamech.[13] Claus Westermann says this relative to the origin of crafts and professions:

> Faced with the mythology of the ancient Near East, the Bible takes the same stand as does the modern secular historian. All progress in civilization is a human achievement. Cattle breeding, horticulture, metal work and other arts and crafts are the work of human beings, not the outcome of the internal conflicts of the gods. This accords well with the description of the destiny of humanity in Genesis 1-3 which is quite different from that found in Babylon and Egypt.[14]

However, Israel does see a divine activity behind human achievements. It is not God's creative action, but the blessing which God has bestowed on the person as his creature.

It is curious that human civilization first is described in Genesis 4 as proceeding from the line of Cain, including human society, the arts, industry, pastoralism, and agriculture (but see my comments above). While I agree with Westermann that human achievement is capable of great good as well

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[11]Brueggemann, Walter, *Genesis*, Interpretation Commentary (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 64-65.

[12]Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (revised edition), Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 152.

[13]All of these individuals have names based on the Hebrew root *yābal*, relating to "leading" or "conducting along", and in its noun form refers to watercourses or streams.

[14]Westermann, Claus, *Genesis: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1992), 61. He distinguishes between the Yahwist's focus on the curse and the Priestly editor's focus on blessing. Regardless of the possible concerns of original sources, Genesis 1-11 has been so ordered and composed as to make a coherent narrative with its own structure, themes, and motifs.

as great evil, Westermann does not notice that technological advancements and human innovation in Genesis 1-11 are uniformly resultant of human sin and a cursed family line.[15] The good which is accomplished, as well as the potential for great harm, are alike done "East of Eden," in Cain's fugitive and wandering state, and therefore bear all the ambiguities of human life after the Fall.

Furthermore, it is important to note that in the line of Seth, as opposed to the line of Cain which it immediately follows, there is no etiology story relating to human technology. Rather, there is a single origin story in 4:26: "At that time, calling on the name of the LORD was begun." The point of such juxtaposition may be that human technology and endeavor have their origins in the corrupt line of Cain, while the "new creation" brought about in the new line of Seth (see 5:3, compare with 1:26-27!), issued in the origin of worship.

The point is simply this: that human endeavor is at best ambiguous and at worst presumptuous and evil. After the Fall, East of Eden is where all human technology and striving originate.

Chapters 9-11

The other cluster of passages which relates to human innovation occurs in chapters 9-11. The first relates to the origin of wine-making and Noah's drunkenness and the events which surround it in 9:18-29. The second is the so-called "Table of Nations" in Genesis 10 and the third the Tower of Babel account in chapter 11:1-9.

No sooner had Noah and his family been saved through the flood

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[15]See Westermann, p. 60: "Human achievements in the area of civilization correspond not only to the will of the creator, but go back to his word of command. . . . The existence of humankind in the primeval period is colored not only by humanity's revolt and over-stepping of limits, but also by human progress as people fulfill their destiny."

and received the covenant injunctions and promises when Noah became drunk and Ham, his son, compromised himself by "looking on his father's nakedness." An inauspicious beginning to postdiluvian human culture! Some have suggested that this story illustrates the lifting of the curse on the ground (8:21) by the gift of fruitfulness exemplified in the vineyard and wine-making, while others see it as simply temporary relief from the curse.[16] What is overlooked is the close connection between human innovation and technology in Genesis 1-11 (here, the origin of vineyards and wine-making) and human sin (here, Noah's drunkenness, leading to the unhappy events of the curse on Ham/Canaan).

From such beginnings, all human families spread out over the earth. The spread of human culture is recorded in chapter 10, a result of God's scattering of nations at the end of the Tower of Babel episode.

The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 is the other extended genealogy in the section under review.[17] Of the three sons of Noah, Japheth's descendants are mentioned first, receiving only four verses (vv. 2-5). Ham is next, in vv. 6-20 and finally Shem, vv. 21-32. I suggest that Japheth's genealogy is included for completeness sake, but the author's focus is elsewhere. The line of Ham, cursed in 9:18-29, precedes that of Shem, as Cain's line precedes Seth's in chapter 4. Ham's line, as Cain's, produces a city builder. Seth is presented as a new creation, after "the likeness of Adam." Likewise, Noah

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[16]Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer, 1997 [orig. 1901]), 66 and Clines pp. 299-300.

[17]Genesis 10 is sometimes overlooked as a genealogy due to its function as an etiology of the various nations. Note that while chapter 10 deals with the origin of nations rather than strictly with individuals, much of the genealogical formulae are identical between chapters 10, 5, and 11:10-32 ("X became the father of X"). See also J. Simons, "The 'Table of Nations': Its General Structure and Meaning," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Richard Hess and David Tsumura, eds. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 245.

and his sons usher in a new creation after the flood, with similar genealogies and narratives pertaining to them and their descendants as those prior to the flood.

The only significant passage in the Table of Nations which relates to human innovation is 10:8-12, concerning Nimrod, son of Cush, son of Ham. First, note that the second account of city-building, in this case in the context of the origin of empires, also is in the line of one who was cursed, as was the case with Enoch. Second, Nimrod builds the city of Nineveh, later the capital of Assyria, Israel's most feared and hated enemy.

The final passage relating to human innovation and technology in Genesis 1-11 is that of 11:1-9, the Tower of Babel. Surely this passage is intended to be an etiology for the city of Babylon (*Bāḇel* in Hebrew is Babylon in English), but more than this it points to the spread of human arrogance and rebellion. David Clines asserts that the Tower of Babel account, far from being an example of divine over-reaction to trivial sin, is an appropriate response to human attempts to scale the heights of heaven and usurp divine authority.[18] "Let us make a name for ourselves" is contrasted at the end of the Primeval History (11:4) with the name (*ʾāḏām*) which God bestows on the man and the woman in 1:26.

It is interesting that all three accounts of city-building in Genesis 1-11 occur in contexts which are ominous: the first in the corrupt line of Cain, the second in the cursed line of Ham, and the third in 11:1-9, the ill-fated attempt to build the Tower of Babel.

Divine Innovation in Chapters 3-11

Adding to the ambiguity of innovation and technology bin Genesis 1-11 are the two references to divine intervention in human technologies. One might construe from what has been said heretofore that all innovation and technology

[18]Clines, pp. 297-298.

are a result of the Fall and therefore unredeemable and negative. God himself, however, intervenes in human affairs with technologies intended to preserve and protect humanity.

The first is in Gen. 3:21:

> And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

The first point to make is that after the Fall, God himself is the first innovator. He clothes the man and the woman in order to cover their nakedness and shame. God, therefore, preserves his sinful creation as his very first act after the Fall, demonstrating his magnanimity and grace. But this act of grace occurs after the Fall and the curse on the man and woman: "By making garments for men God shows them that this is necessary because of their wickedness."[19]

The second passage in which God provokes human technology is in the flood account. In chap. 6:12ff:

> And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

As with the account of clothing Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, so too here the reason for divine intervention is human sin. All human technology in Genesis 1-11 occurs East of Eden, burdened with the ambiguity of life lived outside of God's original intention and provision.

But there is an implicit promise in God's utilization of human technologies. It is the promise that even in a sinful, estranged state, God involved himself in human affairs in such a way that the curse points to the

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[19]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* (New York: MacMillan, 1959), 88.

blessing. In Adam's expulsion from the garden, God provides for him. In Cain's expulsion from the presence of God, God marked him and preserved his life. It is in this "curse with a promise" that Cain goes forth and builds a city. In the flood account, God undid his creation and yet preserved a remnant of it and provided for its future and blessing.

Conclusion

According to Genesis 1-11, human technologies originate in our estranged state, "away from the presence of the Lord." This is not to say that good is not accomplished through technology. It is to say that technology, as in all other arenas of human endeavor, is touched by the Fall and inherently reflects the need to "make a name for ourselves." Human technologies and innovations serve to provide what God had originally given as a gift—shelter, security, meaningful labor, and community. Given that human technology originates in the curse and is born under the conditions of estrangement—no matter how brilliant or beneficial—it cannot be instrumental in overcoming this estrangement. "East of Eden" is not a destination, it is a condition. Genesis 1-11 is the account of human alienation and attempt to make a name, to build a city, to create community apart from God. The Church, on the other hand, is the community which is given by and receives its name from God. We await the city, the New Jerusalem, which we cannot build and in which human technologies will be superfluous. As those who live "away from the presence of God" and are shaped by the "blessing within the curse," we in the Church must regard technology for what it is.

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The Magician's Bargain
Modern Technology and the Eclipse of God

Michael R. Weed

> DR. FAUSTUS: How pliant is this Mephistophilis,
> Full of obedience and humility!
> MEPHISTOPHILIS: I'll fetch him somewhat
> to delight his mind.
>
> Christopher Marlowe,
> *Doctor Faustus*

The last three and a half centuries have witnessed astounding discoveries of science and their practical applications in the accomplishments of applied science and technology. Two centuries of progress brought by modern technology have given rise to incredible optimism regarding the future conquest of virtually every obstacle to human flourishing. The Industrial Revolution, the Nuclear Age, and now the Computer and Information Ages have brought head-spinning changes in the wake of remarkable new technologies. In the area of health and medicine alone, the benefits of new technologies in conquering disease, relieving suffering, and easing the difficulties of human existence are incalculable. Understandably, the successes of applied science have evoked near-utopian confidence that modern science and technology may eventually wipe away all tears and solve the problems of the universe. As early as the last century, the advance of the Kingdom of God became equated with the gospel of scientific and technological progress.[1]

[1]Stanley L. Jaki quotes the Rev. Charles Kingsley, chaplain to Queen Victoria writing in 1850: "If those forefathers of ours could rise from their graves this day

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Nevertheless, for nearly a century philosophers and theologians have raised concerns about the role and significance of technology in modern societies. For some, the advance in human mastery over natural forces has not been accompanied by an increase in human wisdom: almost god-like power is now entrusted to finite, if not sinful, human hands.[2] Cautions have been regularly voiced regarding unprecedented ethical problems accompanying technological advances (e.g., genetic experimentation) and the damaging side effects of various technologies (e.g., toxic wastes, ozone depletion, etc.).

Perhaps the most substantive and troubling criticisms, however, have come from those concerned not so much with individual technologies but with the cumulative effects of technology on society. At the turn of the twentieth century Max Weber envisioned moderns as entering a state of "mechanized petrification," trapped in a bureaucratic-technological cage.[3] By the 1930s Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* raised the specter of a future civilization dominated by science and technology. Jacques Ellul's massive study appeared by mid-century and further warned of the dangers of the emerging technological society.[4] More recently Neil Postman and others have argued that regardless of the benefits of particular technologies, the proliferation of technologies has a devastating impact upon culture.[5]

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they would be inclined to see in our hospitals, in our railroads, and in the achievements of our physical science, confirmation of that old superstition of theirs, proofs of the kingdom of God, realizations of the gifts which Christ received for men, vaster than any of which they had dreamed." Cf. *The Purpose of It All* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press,1990), 9.

[2]Certainly such concerns have been in part borne out in the development and use of weapons of mass destruction.

[3]Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, German orig. 1904), 182, 183.

[4]See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964, French orig. 1954). Cf. Russell Hittinger, "Christopher Dawson on Technology and the Demise of Liberalism," *Christianity and Western Civilization* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 92f.

[5]Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New

Technological Culture

Over the past century, modern technology has become so complex and extensive that it is now an inescapable presence in all areas of life.[6] Neil Postman has described the advancing influence of technology in three stages. First, in a tool-using culture technologies address problems of physical life and do not attack the dignity and integrity of the culture.[7] Technology poses no significant contradiction to the world view or theology providing meaning and order to human existence. Second, a technocratic culture is one in which the fundamental propositions, beliefs, and values of the culture, while challenged by technological developments (e.g., the impact of the telescope upon medieval theology), coexist in considerable tension alongside the emerging outlook of science and technology.

Third, Postman introduces the term "Technopoly" to describe the point at which technologies become so extensive, complex, and central to everyday existence that all forms of cultural life become subordinated to technological attitudes and practices.[8] In a technopoly, technologies, apart from their specific functions, have the overall effect of fostering a technological

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York: Alfred A. Knopf,1992). *Technopoly* was reviewed by William Stewart in *Christian Studies*, Number 15, 1995/96.

[6]Cf. Sidney Callahan, "Of Human Bondage: Science and Superstition," *Commonweal*, September 26, 1997. "[F]ew aboriginal tribesmen (or tribespersons) could experience as many invisible powers and mysterious forces as I do. When I walk around my house, especially at night, I meet a thousand points of light. Many of these are giving off signals with green or red flashes—the microwave, the oven, the answering machine, the digital clocks, the curling iron, the radios, the computers (his and hers), the two printers, the two Xerox machines, the video players, the cellular phones—etc., etc. Many sounds invade the atmosphere bringing other messages. The house is alive with the sound of music and other beckoning noise: bells ring, beepers beep, faxes ping, icemakers plunk, a multitude of hums, thumps, whirrings, and flushings produce hot and cold air, water and steam. In the kitchen, grinding, chopping, mixing, shredding, and whistling noises may rend the air. . . And these technological genies, djinns, and guardian spirits are all present in one seven-room apartment" (7, 8).

[7]Postman, *Technopoly*, 25.

[8]Postman, 52.

mindset. That is, dependence upon countless technologies in all areas of our lives inevitably shapes our basic attitudes, expectations, and the way we view our surroundings—others, ourselves, ultimately even God.[9] When the role of technology in society approaches this saturation point, technology no longer stands in tension with, much less in subordination to, a broader world view. Scientific and technological concerns refashion or displace non-technological considerations.

From this it follows that the most immediate and far-reaching impact of modern technology on culture and human consciousness at the stage of "technopoly" is its radically secularizing and depersonalizing effects. Technology secularizes by narrowly focusing attention on that which can be seen, measured, and manipulated. Traditional beliefs and values are crowded out of the world of everyday experience. They are not overtly attacked; they are merely displaced or removed from the forefront of human consciousness and rendered invisible and irrelevant (for practical purposes, nonexistent).[10]

Technology also secularizes by drawing attention away from the past. The incessant march of "new and improved" techniques and methods not only shifts attention away from last year's now-obsolete technologies; it also promotes a view of the knowledge and wisdom of the more distant pre-technological past as doubly outmoded (primitive, superstitious) and irrelevant to the modern scientific-technological world.[11] Without raising the matter to the level of debate, a technologically-dominated culture fosters a materialistic outlook which impatiently awaits the arrival of tomorrow's

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[9]Craig M. Gay, "The Technological Ethos and the Spirit of (Post)Modern Nihilism," *Christian Scholar's Review*, XXVIII, Number 1, 90.

[10]Postman, 48.

[11]See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1993, Ger. orig. 1976). Science and technology not only marginalize traditional wisdom. Gadamer notes that science and technology have also become estranged from philosophy in the twentieth century and thus "irresponsible" in the sense of the former's consequent "incapacity and its lack of any perceived need to give an account of what it itself means within the totality of human existence" (161).

technological marvels.[12]

The secularizing forces of technology are also depersonalizing. The expansion of technology into every area of life promotes a technological mindset which shapes perceptions of all reality. Consequently even human interactions and the self's attitude toward itself are brought under the influence of various technologies. In this process the uniquely human—those aspects of the self which cannot be reduced to mechanistic categories—is denied either by neglect or repression.

Not surprisingly, there are enormous costs associated with such depersonalization.[13] Technology's redefinition and reduction of the human gives rise to a sickness of the human soul. As the technological-mechanistic outlook invades all areas of life, humans find themselves increasingly ill at ease in the artificial world they have fashioned but can no longer control. Without access to a reality that includes goodness, truth, and beauty, the human heart's deepest aspirations remain unsatisfied. Hence modern technological societies are characterized by an underlying malaise of

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[12]Ellul points out that it is precisely because technology does not permit its assumptions to be openly examined and debated that it is even more dangerous than secular philosophies which can be recognized and refuted. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury, 1967)111.

[13]Writing in 1969, psychotherapist Rollo May observed that mechanistic and depersonalized attitudes make moderns more wary of tenderness than of nakedness. May argues that while technology is not incompatible with sex, there is a war between technology and human eros. Technologically-driven attitudes reduce human sexuality to neurophysiological functions. He suggests an inverse relationship between the number of "how to" books and the amount of pleasure experienced by the persons involved. See *Love and Will* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969) 42, 72, 95. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). Ellul observes that birth control technology has not led to "sexual freedom" or "equality for women." It has led to excessive, obsessional, and frantic sex—sex without self-control, discipline, or responsibility, without which there can be no truly human freedom. He concludes, "Contraceptives substitute sociological determinism for biological determinism. In the strict sense they bring neither responsibility nor freedom" (486). Ellul's point is supported by soaring abortion rates in areas where birth-control technologies are readily available.

rootlessness, estrangement, and alienation.[14]

As if by demonic design, however, the cry of the human heart trapped in a mechanized world is seldom clearly voiced. The technological culture mutes or discredits its nagging presence with combinations of diversions and therapies. Countless amusements, comforts, and pleasures constantly distract, redirect, and anesthetize the self's longing for a deeper and fuller reality.[15] An entertainment industry driven by the latest technologies offers immediate (and addictive) access to the novel, the exciting, and the sensational. To those for whom the restless soul cannot be distracted, the resources of mental health sciences and a burgeoning counseling industry are readily available.[16] Here the cry of the human heart, estranged from its deeper self, may be corrected through therapies or sedated through prescription drugs.[17] However unintentionally, the counseling industry plays a major role in the adaptation or adjustment of the human to the technological. "Normal behavior" against which the "abnormal" is measured is that which is functional

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[14]This critical feature of modern technological-bureaucratic society was noted by early critics of modernity. See, for example, Max Weber's reference to "specialists without spirit." Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*,182.

[15]See Ellul, *Technological Society*, 375f. Cf. Walker Percy, *Lost In The Cosmos* (New York: Noonday Press, 1983): "The pursuit of happiness becomes the pursuit of diversion, and in this society the possibilities of diversion are endless and as readily available as eight hours of television a day: TV, spirits, travel, drugs, games, newspapers, magazines, Vegas" (12).

[16]Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1963). "Containing within its system an elaborate and supposedly scientific means of explaining all human behavior, psychoanalysis gives its adherents the luxury of a convincing picture of themselves without making any moral demands upon them and without upsetting their socio-economic applecarts" (62).

[17]Cf. Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind/Care of Souls: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction* (New York: Harper/Collins, 1992). "[W]e need to refrain from any attempt to label this deep and subtle uneasiness as pathological. In the absence of clearly identifiable disorder, it is terribly destructive to encourage the dulling or denial of this deepest existential discomfort, for this is one pain we are not meant to anesthetize ourselves to; one hunger we are not meant to deny; one 'problem' we are not meant to fix with our own hands" (60).

in the modern technological-bureaucratic society.[18]

This ability to distract the restless heart through amusements or, through therapies, to fashion the inner self in conformity with society's expectations has led observers to refer to the "soft despotism" of modern technological culture.[19] The tyranny of modern society, more effective than that of any military dictator, entices its subjects with distractions and coaxes them through therapies to embrace their chains.[20] Hence most moderns wander in a world of alluring distractions, vaguely aware of being distracted but uncertain of that from which they are distracted.

Finally, the culture of technopoly is a "mass culture," a culture which tends to level individual distinctions into an undifferentiated sameness. At least two related forces contribute to mass culture's evolution. First, self in a "mass culture" finds itself within a vast system of similar selves who are defined not by independence, creativity, or imagination, but by adapting to the bureaucratic-technological routines of mass society. The inescapable patterns of technological-bureaucratic organization, planning, and production become accepted as the forms of life itself.[21] Second, as the mass media reach into every home, attitudes and beliefs are altered as easily as clothing fashions are changed and fads are manufactured. Constant exposure to news, advertising, and entertainment creates attitudes, dictates conversations, and

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[18]Psychiatrist Gerald May, writing in 1992, states that there is no psychiatrically accepted personality theory that includes any real consideration of grace or transcendence. He also observes that psychology may aid one in living more efficiently but can offer no insight regarding the purpose of human existence. See May, *Care of Mind*, 4, 151.

[19]Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1991), 9,10, 112, 115.

[20]Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, 112. See also Ellul, *Technological Society* : "That it is to be a dictatorship of test tubes rather than of hobnailed boots will not make it any less a dictatorship" (434).

[21]Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington: ISI, 1998, orig. 1956). "The gadgets and technics forced upon him by the patterns of machine production and of abstract planning mass man accepts quite simply; they are the forms of life itself" (60).

inevitably shapes a mass mind. Thus mass man's outlook becomes reflective of and subservient to a "public opinion" which itself is created and monitored by technology and the mass media.[22]

Technological Morality

The secularizing and depersonalizing effects of the technological culture shape the way we think and act. The technological culture carries with it a technological morality. Whatever one's theoretical commitments to traditional views of goodness and truth, these find little place among the pressures and demands of everyday life in the world of modern technology. Traditional values are simply crowded out of one's life world.[23]

Near the center of the new technological morality lie science and technology as almost sacred values. Ellul contends that today, "One can call everything in our society into question (including God) but not technology. It is seen then, to be the decisive value."[24] Technology provides the criterion for redefining good and evil which, no longer attached to any moral framework (much less transcendent reality), quietly become synonymous with "success" and "failure."[25] The good becomes equated with success in achieving visible and quantifiable goals. Those techniques, methods, and devices by which goals are achieved are also good.

"Truth" also takes on new meaning as it becomes displaced by technique, which in turn redefines truth as that which is "useful," "whatever works," or "true for all practical purposes." The moral imperative easily becomes the technological imperative: if something can be done, it should be done. Here technological morality is committed to an open-ended impulse for all technological advance.

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[22]Cf. Gadamer, *Reason.* "[M]ore perilous is the effect of the technical penetration of society by means of the technologizing of the formation of public opinion" (73).

[23]See Jacques Ellul, *To Will & To Do* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1969), 187. Cf. Richard Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

[24]Ellul, *To Will*, 191.

[25]Ellul, *To Will*, 193.

In fact, the human good itself is redefined as technology concentrates attention on material realities and quantifiable results. The human good becomes seen as residing in or consisting of obtaining those benefits which technology provides. The implications of this shift are subtle and far-reaching. The human is adapted—and reduced—to the technological; the human good becomes fully equated with technological progress and those benefits it can make available.

In this process, technologically-driven thought and action (secularized and depersonalized) exclude traditional virtues such as honor and integrity.[26] While traditional morality may survive in personal relations, in time it retreats into the private worlds of individuals. For the most part, however, traditional morality is redefined within the new technological morality, or it survives as isolated conventions (e.g., handshakes) whose original significance is lost.

The individual, without a substantive moral framework, is defined by the surrounding culture and is helpless before pressures to conform to its depersonalizing forces. Hence the ability to adjust and adapt becomes the highest virtue of the technological morality.[27] Countless polls, surveys, and questionnaires offer access to scientifically-compiled statistics measuring beliefs and attitudes. These statistics, identifying what is "normal," become the standards enabling one to adapt, conform, and fit in. One no longer seeks what is good or right (and apt to make one abnormal); one seeks what is normal. Quite simply, the normal becomes the moral.[28]

In essence, the technological morality embodies the materialistic

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[26]Ellul, *To Will*, 198. To the extent the self is conscious of such virtues, they appear as irrelevant to life in the modern world. See Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1974), 83-96.

[27]Gadamer, *Reason.* "Here lies the greatest danger under which our civilization stands: the elevation of adaptive qualities to privileged status. In a technological civilization it is inevitable in the long run that the adaptive power of the individual is rewarded more than his creative power" (73-74).

[28]Cf. Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism*, 106f.

and superficial view of the human fostered by the technological culture. It is an ethic of power judged by its efficiency in enabling mass man successfully to pursue security, comfort, and happiness as offered and defined by technology. Which is to say, it is an ethic of power judged by norms of power. In effect, the technological morality is an anti-morality.[29]

Christians and Technology

It is not surprising that Christian attitudes and practices reflect the surrounding technological culture. What is surprising is the degree to which both theologically liberal and conservative Christians have uncritically embraced modern technology and applied sciences as tools for advancing the kingdom of God.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, revivalist Charles G. Finney declared that the mass conversions of the revivals were not miraculous but were obtained by applying the right means to the end of producing conversion experiences.[30] By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, liberal Protestants were turning to the social sciences to advance the social gospel's version of the kingdom of God through political and economic strategies designed to produce a just and humane society.[31] In short, for more than a

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[29]Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism*, 167.

[30]Charles G. Finney, one of the greatest of the nineteenth-century evangelists, made it clear that revivalism was the work of using natural human powers possessed by all humans. "There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else." Revivalism ". . . is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means." See Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1960; orig. 1835), 13. Cf. also George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1980), 50f.

[31]See Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1945, orig. 1917): "The social gospel registers the fact that for the first time in history the spirit of Christianity has had a chance to form a working partnership with real social and psychological science" (5). Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological," *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University, 1983), 21f.

century American Christians, both theologically conservative and liberal, have reflected the general optimism of the age and expressed confidence in modern science and technology to accomplish the work of God. For some, the advance of technology was itself the work of God.[32]

In addition to the constant influence of the technological culture on the lives of modern Christians and thereby upon the church, two efforts to utilize modern science and technology in the life of the church have further accelerated their effects in American churches. First, much like Finney in the nineteenth century, today's theological conservatives have sought to use the methods and techniques of modern social sciences and technology to produce greater results in both foreign and domestic missions. Countless surveys are taken and statistics gathered so that scientifically adapted methods may be directed toward identifying "affinity groups" and "target audiences." In this process the technological culture further penetrates the church at two levels. The assumptions are pragmatic and essentially those of Finney: mission and evangelism ("outreach") are human enterprises. Selecting the most up-to-date marketing strategies and employing the latest technologies will produce statistically significant successes. Additionally, a common strategy is that of adapting the faith to the shallow and shifting commercialized tastes of the surrounding culture. Hence churches become preoccupied with monitoring the vagaries of contemporary trends and having the latest in lighting, sound equipment, and music.[33] In effect, modern churches are attempting to reach

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[32]See the first footnote in this essay.

[33]See William H. Willimon, "This Culture is Overrated," *Christianity Today*, May 19, 1997. "Christianity is a distinct culture with its own vocabulary, grammar, and practices. Too often, when we try to speak to our culture, we merely adopt the culture of the moment rather than present the gospel to the culture. Our time as preachers is better spent inculturating modern, late-twentieth-century Americans into that culture called *church*. When I walk into a class on introductory physics, I expect not to understand immediately most of the vocabulary, terminology, and concepts. Why should it be any different for modern Americans walking into a church? This is why the concept of 'user-friendly churches' often leads to churches getting used. There is no way I can crank the gospel down to the level where any

moderns through the same devices of communication, advertising, and entertainment that have produced standardized thoughts, consumerized tastes, and programmed desires. Whether such "outreach strategies" will successfully produce mass Christians remains to be seen. (It should not be overlooked that such strategies also appear to provide a rationale for churches to do what they would have done anyway by virtue of being helpless against the currents of popular culture.)

Second, developments in ministerial training are an additional source through which the influences of the technological culture are infused into the life of church. Since the mid-nineteenth century, concerted efforts have been underway to make theological education more scientific.[34] These efforts, driven by concerns to enhance ministerial performance, prestige, and authority, have redefined Christian ministry as a profession rather than a calling.[35] Ministers are trained to be proficient by reducing ministry to identifiable skills and techniques at which one may become proficient (management, communication, counseling).

American can walk in off the street and know what it is all about within 15 minutes. One can't do that even with baseball!" (27).

[34]Jackson W. Carroll, *As One with Authority: Reflective Leadership in Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991). Carroll points out that the early- to mid-nineteenth century was the time of the rise of modern science and technology. "It became important to the emerging professions to demonstrate that their practice was grounded in a scientifically based theory that could be translated into skills for addressing important human problems. Improving existing schools and developing new ones to educate the new professionals provided major impetus for the growth of universities and professional schools. A large number of seminaries had their start in part as a response to the new emphasis on the Professionalization of ordained ministry" (51f). See Allan J. McNicol, "Skills, Credentials, or Faithfulness? Reflecting on Theological Education," *Christian Studies*, Spring, 1992, No. 12, 19-28; see also Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[35]See David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993): "There can be little doubt that it is the realization of their sinking fortunes that has inclined the clergy to give their concentrated attention to the problem of how to present themselves instead as serious professionals in the modern world" (221).

The process of defining a technics of ministry, however, shifts the underlying unity of ministerial education (and practice) from knowledge of the Bible and Christian faith to mastery of the different skills necessitated by the various tasks of the minister.[36] Like other professionals, ministers have areas of expertise (education, youth, counseling) which are informed more by various social and applied sciences (educational psychology, management techniques, communication theory) than by biblical or theological resources.[37] As a "trained professional," the modern minister is more nearly equipped with management techniques, marketing strategies, and counseling skills than knowledge of Scripture, Christian theology, and traditional pastoral wisdom.[38]

The minister-as-professional movement also means that ministers are respected for the same kind of expertise as other professionals.[39] In this context it is not surprising that the dominant image of the minister is becoming that of manager.[40] Nor is it accidental that the average church office resembles

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[36]Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 127f.

[37]Farley, *Theologia*: "Graduate degrees in Christian education, and one type of course work present in seminaries, have as their unity and subject matter the administration of a church education program. Specialists in Christian education in this sense are themselves neither teachers nor theologians, but are trained as educational administrators" (131).

[38]David Wells points out that between 1980 and 1989 less than 1% of the articles in *Leadership* magazine, a publication for equipping ministers, made "even a remote reference to Scripture or any theological idea, despite the fact that a number of the topics dealt with are themselves treated in the Bible." *No Place for Truth*, 177.

[39]Cf. Jackson W. Carroll, "Seminaries and Seminarians: A Study of the Professional Socialization of Protestant Clergymen," Princeton Theological Seminary Ph.D. dissertation (as quoted in Wells, *No Place For Truth*): "[T]he minister's authority and professional status rides not on his or her character, ability to expound the Word of God, or theological skill in relating that Word to the contemporary world but on interpersonal skills, administrative talents, and ability to organize the community" (234).

[40]Cf. Carroll, *As One with Authority*, 53. On the emerging significance of the manager as an ideal type in modern society see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

almost any small business one might enter with its specialists, array of computers, copy machines, fax machines, sophisticated telephones, and intercom and security systems. All of this is, of course, reinforced by church members who, presumably more exposed to the secularizing effects of the technological culture than ministers, thoroughly approve changes within the church which reflect the same kinds of technological developments with which they are familiar in the surrounding world.[41]

In reviewing this process of adapting the contemporary church to the culture of technology and the aspirations of mass man, we must remember that accommodation invariably comes at a high price. The outlook and logic of technology (and the social sciences) is unavoidably secularizing. The language and practice of the Christian faith cannot be translated into that of science and technology without crippling loss.[42] Quite simply, the emerging climate in the contemporary church is one of practical atheism.[43]

Out of the Shadow of Babel

The medieval legend about a magician who exchanged his soul for knowledge

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(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981), 71f. MacIntyre argues that "effectiveness" becomes a dominant moral concept that masks more fundamental questions about the manipulation of human beings into compliant patterns of behavior. Managerial techniques, while especially attractive in a technological era, raise crucial moral questions that go unnoticed under pressures to achieve quantifiable results.

[41]The growing number of churches with detailed policy manuals captures a dilemma of the modern church. The need for procedures and practices, much less policies to protect the church in a litigious society, make such documents necessary. And yet such documents inevitably carry assumptions about the nature of the church and for assessing its work that are drawn from sources that stand in considerable tension with the essential nature of the church.

[42]Craig Gay, "Evangelicals and the Language of Technopoly," *Crux*, March 1995, Vol. XXXI, No. 1, 35f. Gay contends that the language of science and technology admits a new authority into the life of the church that is intrinsically alien to the nature of the church. In essence, the terminology and practices of the social sciences encourage Christians to view the church solely as another human organization and promote practical atheism. See also John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[43]Cf. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, "Ministry as More than a Helping Profession," *The Christian Century*, March 15, 1989, 282.

and power in a bargain with the Devil lies behind Marlowe's and Goethe's portrayals of a Dr. Faustus. Mary Shelley's story of Dr. Frankenstein gives the legend a twist. In giving life to his creature, Frankenstein usurps the power of the Creator and is eventually destroyed by the monster whom he cannot control. For a growing number, such stories are prophetic intuitions of the crisis brought by modern technology. In essence, humans have become enslaved by their own brilliant handiwork and are in the process of losing their souls.

The issue is not merely that some technologies are harmful. Nor is it even that there are trade-offs, unforeseen "downsides," and negative consequences associated with technologies. Rather, the fundamental problem, often fiercely denied, is that the overall impact of technology (including beneficial technologies) as the single most dominant force in modern culture is destructive of fundamental human values.

Moderns live in a world of technological artifices upon which they have grown dependent and which monopolize their time and thoughts. As a constant and inescapable influence in everyday life, technology alters the landscape of the mind; it fosters an outlook, attitudes, and behaviors affecting the way we see, think, and act in the world.

The setting of modern life, surrounded by and dependent upon a world of technological artifices, makes it extremely difficult to distinguish the artificial world from any deeper reality. The secularized and mechanistic world that we have manufactured becomes our only reality. Trapped in the shadow of Babel, we no longer see the sun and mistake the shade for the light. An artificial world has replaced the deeper and richer reality. The eclipse of God and the attendant sickness of the spirit and moral confusion rife in the modern world are human achievements.

It is naive to think one could, or should, return to a pre-technological era. Anti-technology movements and efforts to turn the clock back to simpler times are unrealistic and irresponsible. But it is disastrous to think that the technological juggernaut may be resisted from within the confines of the

technological mindset. As the technological outlook becomes more prevalent, it becomes increasingly difficult to challenge presuppositions which have become second nature.[44]

The possibility of living in a technology-dominated culture without succumbing to its mesmerizing forces turns upon having a place to stand outside the expanding world of technology. Without such, criticisms of technology are either absorbed into the expanding technological framework, or cannot achieve the coherence necessary to offer an alternative and are left helpless against the gravitational pull of the technological culture.

The church is a place where a deeper, richer, true reality has become concrete—incarnate—in the world. It is here that we receive a new outlook, attitudes, and behaviors, and are enabled to see, think, and act differently. It is here that we receive an awareness, an ability to discern good and evil, to read the signs of the times. And it is here that we receive a commission to be light in the intellectual and moral darkness the modern world brings upon itself. It is here that we are commissioned to challenge the age—its gods, its myths, and its presuppositions. No message could be more urgent to the present age than to challenge the myth of technological utopianism which beclouds the modern mind.

> Dazzled by the brilliant achievements of the intellect in science and technique, we have been deluded into believing that we are the masters of the earth and our will the ultimate criterion of what is right and wrong.
>
> Abraham Joshua Heschel

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[44]Cf. William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique* (New York: Anchor, 1979): "Already these presuppositions are so much the invisible medium of our actual life that we have become unconscious of them. We may eventually become so enclosed in them that we cannot even imagine any other way of thought but technical thinking" (223).

Preaching Technique
The Ministry of the Word in a Wired World *

Jeffrey Peterson

The advent of "postmodernism" is a subject much discussed in academic circles today, and increasingly in ecclesiastical precincts as well.[1] On offer are a variety of definitions and historical analyses, along with perhaps exaggerated claims that the advent of postmodernism represents a fundamental reordering of human society and experience, an opportunity "to boldly go where no man has gone before"—or "where no one has gone," in the more postmodern version of that remark.[2]

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*I am indebted to Dean Smith, pulpit minister of the University Avenue Church of Christ, and to Maurice Weed, both of Austin, Texas, for comment on this essay.

[1]For an essential Christian perspective on postmodernism see Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989); "Christianity and the Creed of Postmodernism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 23 (1993): 117–126. With respect to Churches of Christ, the advent of postmodernism has been heralded by Douglas A. Foster, *Will the Cycle Be Unbroken? Churches of Christ Face the 21st Century* (Abilene, TX: ACU, 1994), 101–107, 121–123. For important recent critiques of postmodernist epistemology, see Edward Pols, *Mind Regained* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1998) and John R. Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998), and the comparison of these by Richard John Neuhaus, "Minding the Mind," *First Things* 97 (November 1999) 77–82.

[2]The allusion is of course to the opening voice-over of the television series *Star Trek*; the term "man," employed in the original 1960s voice-over was replaced by "one" when the program was revived in the late 1980s and early 90s. For a surprisingly insightful exploration of philosophical issues in *Star Trek* by an editor of the conservative Christian magazine *Cornerstone* —noting significant differences

One significant component of the set of transformations in human consciousness that are grouped under the postmodern banner is the pervasive influence of broadcast media. The technology that facilitates virtually instantaneous communication across vast distances has already wrought a transformation in the way we conceive of the world and our place in it, much of it for the better; in a world of digital telephones, electronic mail, and live news via satellite, the War of 1812 need never be fought again.

Not all the effects of this transformation are salutary, however; the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia is only possible in a world where heads of state can manipulate public opinion via CNN, pilots miles above the earth can site targets with lasers, and civilian audiences can be granted a nose-cone view of missile launches. Of special interest to the readers of this journal, the pervasiveness of communications media represents in some respects a challenge to the ministry of the word at the opening of the third millennium in which Christ has been invoked as Lord. In this essay we consider three such challenges that life in a wired world presents to those who would minister with integrity in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. These cautionary remarks are offered in the hope of facilitating a genuine engagement between the Gospel and contemporary culture.

What Were We Talking About?

Whatever the details of its intellectual ancestry, the post-modern world reached American living rooms midway through the 1980s, when the manufacturers of televisions began including with their sets a device known as a "remote control." This device enabled TV viewers to change from one channel to another without leaving their seats, and it consequently disconcerted the advertisers who fund television programs. Before the remote control, inertia favored the advertiser. Since changing the channel required the investment of energy needed to rise from the couch or easy chair and manually adjust

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between the original, "modern" series and its various post-modern offspring—see Mike Hertenstein, *The Double Vision of Star Trek: Half-Humans, Evil Twins, and Science Fiction* (Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 1998).

the channel selector, viewers tended to remain tuned to a single station—and so within earshot of its advertising—until some stimulus actively moved them to another station. The remote control significantly lowered the threshold at which viewer disinterest leads to channel switching and left advertisers scrambling to retain viewers long enough for a spot to penetrate their consciousness.[3] Coinciding with the rise of the remote control was the quick-cutting style of video editing pioneered on MTV and now ubiquitous on television.[4] Not far behind came the World Wide Web, with instantaneous links between vast disparate collections of information, much of it untrustworthy.

These are not only interesting, perhaps even amusing, matters of cultural trivia. They also represent a challenge to those who would speak in the name of Christ to the first remote-control generation, to all of us now afflicted, as it were, with AADD—Adult Attention Deficit Disorder. Those who keep nightly vigil surfing channels (and now the Internet) are, after all, the same men and women who file into churches on Sunday morning to hear the Gospel proclaimed; those charged with preaching to these postmoderns face the challenge of attracting and retaining attention as surely as advertisers do. It naturally seems appropriate to address them in the modes to which they are accustomed from television viewing, which accounts for a greater

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[3]Frank Greve (Knight Ridder Newspapers), "The quick TV clicker empowers the fickle," Austin *American-Statesman*, 12 August 1999, A1, A9.

[4]The "new video" is analyzed and largely celebrated by Mitchell Stephens, *the rise of the image the fall of the word* [*sic*] (; New York and Oxford: Oxford University, 1998), esp. 204–230. Stephens argues that quick cutting permits "information" to be communicated at greater velocity than through the medium of print, since video images can be rapidly juxtaposed in the viewer's consciousness; while expressing some nostalgia for print, he does not clearly consider the difference between information and understanding, or the advantages of print as an agent of the latter. A more cautionary assessment of the shaping of human consciousness by manufactured images is offered by Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1994) 186–190.

proportion of most Americans' day than family conversation. The sound bite, then, would seem the privileged medium of address, and Jay Leno might well seem the model for pulpit ministry in the twenty-first century.

It may be wondered, however, whether the sound bite is an adequate vessel for the Gospel. The telling of the Gospel in the New Testament took the form of a story—even in the ministry of Paul, who often alludes to the story he had told his converts, the story his letters nowhere fully narrate.[5] Nor is this simply an accidental debt that the earliest Christian literature owed to a story-loving ancient culture, a narrative husk that, once liberated from Aristotle's *passé* linear logic, we can exchange for isolated aphorism.[6] The Christian faith invests its hearers' lives with meaning by plotting us on a narrative comprehending all creatures and all history, beginning "in the beginning" and concluding with the descent of the new Jerusalem from the heavens.[7] Only those willing to be shaped by this narrative can truly experience the transformation wrought by the Creator, and only ministers who give attention to proclaim this narrative of events can hope to convert their hearers to the Gospel rather than to some lesser proclamation.

Coarsening the Kerygma?

Another matter for concern in the area under discussion is the accelerating coarseness evident in all forms of broadcast media and film. It may seem nostalgic to recall that throughout Lucille Ball's pregnancy, her delicate condition was never so termed out of respect for the audience's sensibilities, or that Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore occupied separate beds as

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[5]See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983).

[6]It may be accidental that those New Testament scholars who have recently sought to de-emphasize the canonical narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection have exhibited a marked interest in aphorism as the decisive expression of Jesus' significance (e.g., John Dominic Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* [San Francisco et al.: Harper and Row, 1983]); but then again, it may not.

[7]See Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1993) 189–210.

Rob and Laura Petrie. Yet the quaintness of such depictions, combined with constant exposure to current programming, may blind us to the fact that standards of decency have dropped markedly within the past decade.[8] The *Ally McBeal*-ization of broadcast programming proceeds apace, and casual sex serves today's television characters as bridge did a generation past.

One indicator of the decline of standards is the campaign recently launched by Steve Allen, Johnny Carson's predecessor on the *Tonight Show* and author of several books. Allen is far from reactionary and in his politics is recognizable as a citizen of Hollywood, perhaps better read than most. Yet Allen has recently been featured in full-page advertisements for the Parents Television Council, asking,

> Are you as disgusted as I am at the filth, vulgarity, sex and violence TV is sending into our homes? Are you fed up with steamy unmarried sex situations, filthy jokes, perversion, vulgarity, foul language, violence, killings, etc.? Are you as outraged as I am at how TV is undermining the morals of children . . . encouraging them to have premarital sex?[9]

Faced with the task of communicating the Gospel to people formed in this environment, the temptations facing ministers of the Gospel resemble those before the managers of television newsrooms. The latter inherit a code of journalistic ethics from their predecessors, and most retain at least an abstract concern for the betterment of those who view their work. On the other hand, their wares compete for attention in an increasingly competitive marketplace in which the lowest common denominator is the lure for the greatest audience, and so the sensational and the perverse vie for position on the network lineup.

Television news consultants have measured the level of viewer interest that characteristically attaches to various types of stories and produced the

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[8]L. Brent Bozell III tirelessly catalogues instances in the television and movie reviews compiled on his Media Research Center's web site (www.mrc.org/columns/ent/welcome.html).

[9]Don Feder, *Jewish World Review*, 3 November 1999 (accessible at www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/feder.html).

following ranking.[10]

Very Strong—(1) Humor; (2) Sex.
Strong—(1) Human interest; (2) Entertainment; (3) Fires.
Above Average—(1) Science; (2) Disasters.
Average—(1) Environment; (2) Health; (3) Education; (4) Energy; (5) Obituaries; (6) Courts; (7) Sports; (8) Politics; (9) Ethnic news; (10) Weather.
Below Average—(1) Consumer; (2) Government; (3) Transportation; (4) Accidents; (5) Dissent; (6) Economics.
Weak—(1) Religion; (2) Labor.

Indeed, the minister compares unfavorably with the producer of television news, for his assigned topic is outmatched by every conceivable news lead except an AFL-CIO convention.

What is the preacher to do? If the consultants' index of "inherent viewer interest levels" is an absolute guide—if contemporary churchgoers are interested only in sex, humor, and fires—then it might seem worthwhile to invite the attractive comedienne Jenny McCarthy on a Sunday morning to demonstrate the flame-retardant properties of asbestos swimwear, perhaps decorated with religious artwork. Failing that, the advice of a disillusioned member to a young minister might seem worth trying out: "Nothing gets the attention of an audience like a good dirty joke."

The church that succumbs to the temptation—e.g., inviting non-Christians to a worship service through a newspaper advertisement announcing, THIS BLOOD'S FOR YOU!"—may succeed in attracting attention, but at the risk of abandoning the earnestness and holiness that are to mark believers in Christ. It takes a special measure of courage and humility to acknowledge that those who find a degree of worldliness reassuring in a sermon—much less in a church—may not be ready for the renunciation of the world that is the condition of inheriting the kingdom of God.

Demystifying the Christian Mystery

Perhaps the most subtle influence exerted by mass media on the character of

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[10]John H. McManus, *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* (Thousand Oaks, London, and New Delhi: Sage), 130–131.

preaching is the temptation to make the Gospel manageable, in much the same way that the broadcast media themselves picture human life as a succession of discrete problems, each admitting of a tidy solution. Gabriel Marcel famously suggested that human life is not merely a succession of problems, it is also a domain of mysteries.[11] The distinction can be well illustrated by considering a modern hospital.[12]

A hospital brims with problems inviting solution, as any viewer of *ER* or *Chicago Hope* knows: in this treatment room there is a gunshot wound, in that one a cerebral hemorrhage, in another a respiratory failure. For each of these medical emergencies there is an appropriate surgical or medical response; proper procedures administered in a timely fashion by a competent practitioner will solve the problem and preserve the patient's biological life.

But such problems—the bread and butter of medical dramas—aren't the only realities present in the operating room; there are mysteries present, too. On occasions when treatment fails, we confront the mystery of *death*—and the mystery of human *life*, too, for our death is simply the end point of the temporal arc that begins with our conception. In those situations when family and friends gather around the hospital bed for words and gestures of comfort or confession or farewell, we may encounter the further mystery of human *society*, of love and hate and enmity and reconciliation. And, when a patient whispers in the ear of a physician or a chaplain, "I'm afraid; I don't want to die," we glimpse the mystery of human *value*, the ultimate meaning of

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[11]Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* (2 vols.; London: Harvill, 1950–51; reprinted, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). See the helpful expositions by Michael B. Foster, *Mystery and Philosophy* (London: SCM, 1957), esp. 18–28, and by Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (Westminster: Dacre, 1948), 63–78.

[12]The hospital as illustrative of the distinction between problems and mysteries was suggested by remarks of Paul Riddle, family life minister of the University Avenue Church of Christ, in a chapel service of the Institute for Christian Studies, 4 November 1999.

human existence in the vast span of the universe. These are not problems, and they cannot be solved; but these realities fill hospitals as surely as conditions amenable to treatment—and this is to say nothing of the relations between members of the medical staff, where fidelity and betrayal are the stuff of every emergency-room drama, as of every human community.

When we look in on doctors at work, whether real or fictional, we are apt to confuse these mysteries with other conditions that go by the same name. If a patient suffers with a malady that defies diagnosis, or if an indicated treatment is found to be ineffective in relieving the patient's symptoms, the doctor may well exclaim in dismay, "This case is a mystery!" Such a "mystery," however, is really only a type of problem; if the patient were properly diagnosed, or if the mysterious malady could be identified, the doctors could proceed to administer the cure. But no medical breakthrough is even dreamt of to extend the life span many years beyond the biblical threescore and ten, and even should the 120 years of Genesis 6:3 become the norm in the twenty-first century, death will still stand before us as a mystery beyond which no imaging device will enable us to peer.

The way in which the challenges of living a fulfilling human life are routinely presented in broadcast media encourage the confusion of mysteries with problems. The "practical" segments of news programs and the infomercials—those portions of the broadcast day that relate most directly to the routine lives of viewers—predictably present a concrete, easily describable problem: unwanted pounds around the middle, bacteria rampant in the kitchen sink, the heartbreak of psoriasis. Deliverance from the problem, offered by a specially qualified expert or by a seemingly omniscient correspondent, typically takes the form of a recipe, a procedure that can be displayed on the screen in bulleted steps, and all of this neatly packaged to fit between advertisements.

The minister of the Gospel is tempted to enter into competition with the recipes for happiness and good fortune broadcast ceaselessly into our homes. We have been granted a recipe for human flourishing, have we not?

Who can gainsay that the book of Romans begins with the plight of humanity in chaps. 1–3 and then moves to the divinely proffered remedy? Are we not then justified in treating the Gospel as God's recipe for health and well-being, and pitching it to audiences just as tooth polish is pitched?

It may be answered that the divinity is in the details; how the human plight is sketched, and how the Gospel is presented as the remedy for what ails us, are all-important. John Bowker has identified religion as that aspect of human culture that deals with limitations on human aspirations that are *intransigent*, limitations that are not merely a function of our social or historical context but that are built into the human creature and the world of which we are a part, such as death and evil.[13] It is a matter of concern if, shaped more by mass media than by the Christian confession, we present the Gospel as the answer to something less than our ultimate need, and as requiring less than the commitment of ourselves entire if we are to realize its benefits. In such circumstances the Gospel is not proclaimed but merely peddled (cf. 2 Cor. 2:17), and the Christian mystery of redemption is demystified.

Withdrawal, Accommodation, or Engagement?

In relating to any cultural situation, the church faces options: it may withdraw from the world into a separatist enclave, it may accommodate its life-style and message to fit more neatly into the surrounding culture, or it may engage the culture with an alternative vision of the good human life in the name of Christ.[14] There is little danger that the church at large will withdraw from the world shaped by communications technology, but the danger of accommodation is very real. If the church in the twenty-first century trims its message and its mores to accord with that of the dominant culture, it

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[13]John Bowker, *The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), esp. 14–16.

[14]For this analysis of the church's options in evangelism I am indebted to Stanley G. Reid's D.Min. thesis (Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 1994), esp. 9–10.

would not be the first time; Franklin Littell has shown that the history of Christianity in America can largely be told in terms of the promulgation of techniques for mass evangelism combined with a relaxation of moral standards for membership.[15]

The church may offer a kerygma reduced to sound bites that appeal to the mundane concerns of a vulgarized populace, and may in this way be able to tally impressive numerical successes. Such religious infotainment, however effective, will be something less than a proclamation of the Lordship of Christ and a summons to his service. What will truly embody the Gospel of God is a people committed to answering the call of God in Jesus Christ, the call that leads upward (Phil. 3:14) by way of those things that are true, sober, just, pure, pleasant, commendable—the qualities that conduce to true human excellence (*aretē*) and ultimately to the praise of our Creator himself (Phil. 4:8).

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[15]Franklin Hamlin Littell, *From State Church to Pluralism: A Protestant Interpretation of Religion in American History* (2d ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1971), esp. 54–66, 90–98.

Waiting on the Slide
The Impact of Technology in the Contemporary Church

Mel Witcher

> **Praise and Worship Leader** [We are] seeking a Minister of Magnification. Skills needed: computer and multi-media presentation, drama writing and directing, praise team leading and development (classified ads, *The Christian Chronicle*).

We live in a culture fascinated by technology. From our climate-controlled homes protected by continuously monitored security systems to our state-of-the-art audio systems and cellular phones, we are surrounded by technological tools designed to make our lives more pleasant, efficient, and productive. We have not only grown utterly dependent on our technology (note the hysteria surrounding Y2K), but we unconsciously accept it as an unadulterated good. Upon reflection, this presupposition—that technology is an unadulterated good—is obviously naive, for since the Fall humans have at times used every gift from the Father to their own hurt. Technological progress is not the same as cultural progress; technological progress may in fact foster cultural degeneration.[1]

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[1]The effects of television on education is a case in point. Educators in the 1960s believed *Sesame Street* would make learning both more efficient and entertaining. Jane Healy found that children who watch a great deal of television may, regardless of content, experience permanent structural changes in their brains that make learning to read much more difficult. *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don't Think* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 47-55, 195-234.

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We rarely pause to reflect on the role and effects of technology in our lives. The wholesale incorporation of technology decreases the opportunity, need, and ability to reflect by exponentially increasing the amount of information significant for our lives and the speed at which that information changes. We are "distracted from distraction by distraction / Filled with fancies and empty of meaning."[2]

> Information has become a form of garbage, not only incapable of answering the most fundamental human questions but barely useful in providing coherent direction to the solution of even mundane problems . . . Information appears indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volume and at high speeds, and disconnected from theory, meaning and purpose.[3]

Since the information glut spawned by technology affects all areas of our culture, it is not surprising that the church has also been distracted from considering the impact of technology—lights, amplified sound systems, computer-animated overhead projections, etc.—in light of the biblical purpose(s) of worship itself. These reflections will focus on: 1) a biblical basis for Christian worship; 2) examples of technologically-driven innovations in corporate worship; and 3) reflections on the alterations in purpose which these changes introduce.

Worship: A Biblical Rationale

Worship is divinely commanded. Worship is the only appropriate response of the human creature to the transcendent Creator. To try to create a rationale or a set of goals for worship threatens to take for the human being the prerogatives of God Himself. Yet if worship is not to lapse into empty ritual or shallow entertainment, we must have a vision for our worship—not only the means (what we do) but also the ends (or goals).

Worship is, first and foremost, the declaration of the "worthiness"

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[2]T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," from *Four Quartets* in *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), lines 104-105.

[3]Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 69-70.

of our God. As the seraphim declare in Isaiah 6: 3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is filled with His glory." Second, in worship the great acts of God are recounted so that worshippers may "put their trust in God" and "not forget His deeds," but "keep His commands."[4] Third, in worship we are reminded both of our faithlessness and of God's steadfast love which never ceases, despite our sin.[5] Finally, worship should enable us to view our lives—our circumstances and choices—in light of God's presence and purposes.[6]

These ends—declaring God's holiness, recounting His praiseworthy deeds, confessing His faithfulness despite our faithlessness, and learning to see our lives through the eyes of faith—must determine the appropriate methods we choose for worship. Our methods create an environment—a culture, if you will—in which biblical worship is either enhanced or enfeebled.[7] The question is not whether an innovation or change is permitted, but whether it fosters or impedes true worship (or in fact imposes a false set of goals).

Technological Innovations and Corporate Worship

Having been told repeatedly that we live in a visual society, worship leaders around the country are encouraging congregations to "re-image" worship.[8] Not only do we project the sermon notes on the overhead screen, we now create computer-generated images behind the words of our hymns and scripture

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[4]Psalm 78:7.

[5]Lamentations 3: 22-24, 31-39; see also Isaiah 6:6.

[6]2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Galatians 2: 20.

[7]"The introduction into a culture of a technique such as writing or a clock is not merely an extension of man's power . . . but a transformation of his way of thinking—and, of course, the content of his culture." Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 13. Postman's reflections on the second commandment of the Decalogue—that a people who are called to praise a transcendent, universal deity would be rendered unfit to do so by the regular use of visual aids—call for careful consideration as we deliberate over the use and abuse of computer-generated visuals as an aid to worship.

[8]I participated in one such "worship renewal" conference two years ago. The following two paragraphs are recollections and reflections on that weekend and subsequent conversations with fellow conference participants.

readings above the pulpit. (Older leaders may be reminded of cartoons in which the audience was instructed to sing along by following the bouncing ball.) To create the proper mood, lighting specialists manipulate spotlights, floodlights, and houselights through well-scripted lightings and dimmings. To relieve boredom, video technicians provide panoramic visions of mountains and rushing rapids, rustic images of grassy meadows and old barns, and intimate close-ups of flowers waving gently in the breeze. To remind us of the brutality of the crucifixion, the video "image-makers" can now shift the visual focus of the Lord's Supper from the bread and the cup to a graphic video of a blood-spattered hand on a rough-hewn board.

Innovations in technology not only allow us to "re-image" worship, but to "re-hear" it as well. New and improved digital sound systems amplify not only the sermon from the pulpit, but vocal ensembles standing in front and the voices of hidden scripture readers seated within the congregation. The growth in utilization of technologically amplified "praise teams" ensures that all four vocal parts are always audible, which is promoted as an aide to the learning of new songs (and which also renders full congregational participation in the singing not only unnecessary, but redundant).[9] Cordless microphones free worship leaders from the tyranny of the pulpit and enable creative choreographers to manipulate the "audience" by shifting the visual focus to different locations around the sanctuary. The sound of disembodied voices singing, reading scripture, or praying can create a sense of visual and auditory disorientation similar to that created by contemporary rock music videos or fast-paced television commercials.

A recent experience illustrates our growing dependence upon

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[9]A few years ago I was told that, with the selection of a few carefully placed microphones and speakers, we could make a congregation of three hundred members sound like a much larger congregation. The question then becomes "why should a congregation of three hundred (or one hundred, or even forty) want to sound like a much larger congregation?" Our fascination with technological speed and efficiency complements our desire to be "successful" by growing big churches.

technology and the disorientation it can produce. The worship service began as the worship leader began singing while people were still entering the sanctuary. A large screen displayed the words of the hymns, allowing the congregation to join in the singing as they finished their conversations.

After a few words of welcome, the worship proper began with a series of songs sung without break—almost without breathing—between each song. Suddenly, in the middle of a praise medley, the computer-generated image on the screen jammed. The congregation, literally at a loss for words, began to murmur as the moments grew into full seconds of "dead air." The worship leader finally looked away from his video monitor, smiled nervously, and explained "We're waiting on the slide."

Reflections on Worship and Technology

Is that what we are waiting for? Is the right amplification or projection system the key to revitalizing worship? Instead of waiting upon the Lord to enliven our souls, we seem to be waiting on technology to enliven our worship. Modern dissatisfaction with worship is not related to the inadequacy Moses felt before the burning bush, or the sense of moral corruption Isaiah experienced in the temple, or the fear which made John's knees weak. Our discontent is instead an impatience with the slow work of developing the mind of Christ, a disappointment with the time-consuming labor of building Christian character. Rather than forcing us to confess our moral and spiritual deficiencies, this dissatisfaction sends us to technology in search of "new and improved" ways to revitalize our worship—and mask our deeper problems.

Those who advocate new and improved worship methods insist that these changes are necessary to make worship meaningful to an entertainment-saturated culture suffering from attention deficit disorder. The goal of worship planning has become providing fast-paced audio and visual stimuli that elicits an emotional response from the worshipper. Worship leaders and ministers must constantly search for new songs and flashy visuals and unique sermons to hold the attention of audiences whose attention span is formed

by thirty second T. V. commercials.[10] It is as if no one realized that each "success" immediately excites the desire for more and different experiences.

Yet Jesus did not jump from the top of the temple. He rejected the temptation and reframed the question. The question is not whether God is powerful enough to save Jesus from death (or to work His will through state of the art sound systems and visual technology), but whether the action in question is an act of submission to and trust in the Father or an act which tests God, attempting to grasp and control His power and use it to our own ends.[11] In the first century Paul rejected the temptation to give the crowds what they wanted, even though he understood that "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom."[12] For those who plan the church's worship today, there are at least three temptations we must not only resist, but reframe by asking better questions.

The first temptation is to entertain instead of worshipping. "In attempting to enliven the Church's worship, many try to spice it up with new enthusiasm, engineered with the proper techniques . . . [but to do so] is to apply modernity's solution to a problem that modernity caused."[13] I once participated in a worship led by a "praise team." During a pause, one of the team members remarked to the assembly that the service was particularly meaningful because he was about to leave for college. "This," he said, "will be our last gig together." Precisely! His words betray a fundamental

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[10]"One of the great conspiracies against philosophy and civilization [and faith], a conspiracy immensely aided by technology, is [the] substitution of sensation for reflection." Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1948), 29-30.

[11]See Matthew 4: 5-7. In his discussion of the second temptation, Diogenes Allen writes: "If we call on God to relieve us, to intervene on our behalf *just as unconditionally as we call on drugs or machines to do our will,* then God becomes part of our technology. We would be masters, in control of the situation, even though we call upon God." *Temptation* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986), 41.

[12]1 Corinthians 1: 22.

[13]Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 70-71.

misconception—the confusion of worship and performance. This misconception is exacerbated by the introduction of the technology of musical performance—32 channel mixers, wireless microphones, spotlights, computer-generated visuals—into the corporate worship.[14] The act of leading an assembly of Christians in worship is not the same as performing a concert. When I "land a gig," I am concerned about pleasing the audience (and thus satisfying the one who hired me). When I lead God's people in praise and adoration, my concern is to please the One who calls me to the praise of His glory. Yet the temptation to lead worship in order to "entertain the crowd" is always present, and through the use of technologies associated with the entertainment culture, pleasing the audience is more easily done than before. We must reframe the question from "what method do people most enjoy?" to "what method most clearly focuses on the praise and adoration of God?"

The second temptation is to use worship primarily as an opportunity to assert one's own special gifts, one's own unique personality. This concern with the autonomous individual and his ability to express himself quietly slips into the worship, aided and abetted by the same technology which enables entertainers to display their individual skills. In an advertisement for a microphone, beneath the picture of a beautifully coifed model sporting a small crucifix, we are told that "Claire sings for one reason . . ." The mind conjectures "to praise God? To edify others?" The advertisers say "to bare her soul." By purchasing this microphone, we will be able ". . . to capture the emotion of the female voice [through a microphone that] listens first, then speaks just the way you want to be heard."[15] Here worship of God,

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[14]The classified ad at the beginning of this article demonstrates how naively the entertainment mindset is embraced. While prospective applicants were instructed to check the web site for the full job description, it is significant that the only skills listed in the ad pertained to the use of technology, drama, and music—all aspects of the ubiquitous entertainment culture. Perhaps it was assumed that anyone desiring a position as a minister would have more than superficial knowledge of the Bible. On the other hand, perhaps we can no longer safely make this assumption.

[15]*Technologies for Worship* 7 (May/June 1998): 13.

through the assistance of technology, becomes a means of self-expression, of self-actualization. We must reframe the question from "what method best showcases my/our talents?" to "what method most clearly portrays our dependency and God's all-sufficiency?"

The third temptation, a temptation also immensely aided by technology, is to manipulate the emotions of the worshipper. From video projections to background music before worship to taped thunderstorms, the potential of technology to startle, to soothe, to engage the emotions is enormous. Yet is the engaging of emotions all there is (or even a major aspect) of worship? Over a half century ago, C. S. Lewis wrote:

> It looks as if they believed people can be lured to go to church by incessant brightenings, lightenings, lengthenings, abridgments, simplifications and complications of the service . . . Novelty, simply as such, can have only entertainment value. And they don't go to church to be entertained . . . The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God . . . But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping . . . There is really some excuse for the man who said, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dog new tricks."[16]

Worship which focuses on eliciting the proper response from the worshipper ceases to be worship of God. In worshipping God alone, the result should not be a flat, emotionless, ritualistic worship. Neither should it be an exuberant, giddy, "happy-times" worship. Worship must focus primarily on God—His praise and the retelling of His mighty works—and secondarily on our repentance and submission to His will. We must not confuse our feelings of repentance and submission with our acknowledgment of the One who is greater than all our feelings about Him. We must reframe the question from "what method most effectively touches the emotions?" to "what method most faithfully communicates the transcendent holiness of God?"

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[16]*Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), 4-5.

So what are we waiting for? Instead of waiting on technology to enliven our worship, let us learn through faithful worship to nurture those "habits of the heart" that mold us into His image. If the Lord wills and we live, new and improved technologies will develop to render today's achievements obsolete, and our decisions regarding their use and abuse in worship will continue to be revisited. But the critical choice—to use the methods which most faithfully declare God's holiness, recount His praiseworthy deeds, confess His faithfulness in spite of our faithlessness, and nurture a coherent vision of life in God's kingdom—this choice may become difficult, but it will never become obsolete.

Finally, I return to my experience with the frozen video. The slide eventually came up after some thirty seconds or so. But while we were waiting, the worship leader reached for a hymnal, remarking "If the slide isn't working, we'll have to use the book."

I agree completely.[17]

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[17]In Marva J. Dawn's latest book *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), she has prepared a list of advantages and disadvantages of the use of overhead projections and of the use of hymnals for congregational singing. Although the title of the chapter, "In Praise of the Harder Way," telegraphs her conclusion, the lists are well balanced. For those congregations considering changes in worship format, her discussion is insightful

Sermon

Romans 1:1-7
Jesse's Truth[*]

David Worley

By now everyone has heard Jesse Ventura's (former wrestler and governor of Minnesota) comments that "organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers."

Jesse is partly right.

While we were "weak" Christ died for us. He died for the ungodly. Together, "in numbers," we do find ourselves enduring the failings of the weak, including ourselves. We are not ashamed of the power we have experienced in the gospel of God, a power needed for the weak.

But . . . shame on us, at least some of us.

Where Jesse Ventura gets it wrong he gets it from many spokespersons for "organized religion," spokespersons for Christianity. Jesse understands Christianity as a grand medication scheme for human ills. God is the great pharmacist in the sky who dispenses relief . . . the Christian religion, a kind of medicine cabinet for the weak.

Jesse was not the first to detect this as a public face of Christianity.

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[*]This homily was delivered in chapel at the Institute for Christian Studies, Austin, Texas on October 7, 1999. President Worley graciously consented to the faculty's request that it be included in this issue of *Christian Studies.—Editor*

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Many others, not the least Marx and Lenin, have described religion as an opiate, or less severely, an Excedrin for the masses.

Such criticisms may be closer to the truth than we would like to admit. Too often the gospel is construed primarily as individual rescue from personal troubles and unease. The only news proclaimed is news affecting my immediate situation. It must be relevant to me.

Jesse is on target in perceiving much Christian talk to be talk about protecting me now or keeping me happy now or comforting me now. Certainly the gospel effects salvation, certainly the gospel is relevant to our real needs, but that is not the gospel.

The gospel is God's righteousness. It is first and foremost the gospel of God. It is talk about God and His name and not first about me. It is not first about Jesus as my personal savior. It is first and last about God, His glory, His honor, His name.

We announce, or at least we should announce, and repeatedly, that the most remarkable human event ever was actually a God event. The body of an executed man disappeared from his tomb even though police were posted and guarding the area. But such disappearance paled in comparison to what happened next. The dead man was clearly seen to be alive three days after his death by many, many witnesses.

Jesse Ventura has probably not been confronted with this message. Jesse's "minister" told him that he knew Jesse would come to church (to religion) when he needed to. After all, that is what Christianity is about. Coming to the medicine cabinet when we don't seem to be able to heal ourselves.

But again that is not the gospel.

The gospel is that this man who came back to life did not die again, that this man became the real King, the only one worthy of honor in politics, the King God had promised long ago through the prophets to the people of Israel, a King through the very lineage of King David of Israel, a son of Jesse.

Another Jesse, at another time, had a son named David. And the only true and living God had promised that the kingdom and reign of this son of Jesse would be an eternal one. The man who had come back to life was the one who inherited the throne of this David. He was now the ruler. He is now the King of Kings and Governor of Governors.

The gospel is God's way of making things right through the gracious reign of King Jesus. Such language and logic may not be altogether intelligible or, even less so, relevant to many. Paradoxically, it takes one asking and seeking for *terra firma* to understand language and logic of an eternal weight.

Jesse Ventura would like to be King but it seems nobody has confronted him with the only one worthy of being King, the one slaughtered like a silent lamb, the one who is now King, whose Kingdom spreads without assault or coercion, during the night, growing . . . outside the lights and noise of the political or wrestling arena.

Woe be unto us who have imaged Christianity in the image of Adam, seeking to go our own way, to be our own gods, seeking what looks good, tastes good and feels good. That is not the gospel. Jesse Ventura thinks it is. Who can blame him? Better blame and shame ourselves.

The gospel is God desiring to create, to create out of nothing, to create a people for Himself, a holy people, calling a people, calling them beloved, calling them saints, making things right in the image of His son, sharing His glory, with His children, by degrees.

The gospel is God honoring His name, preserving His name, protecting His name, extending His name. The gospel is God's righteousness, God doing the right thing, righting the wrong, unifying the universe, healing cosmic divisions, keeping His promises, sacrificing His own life within, without, absorbing hostility, seeking no revenge, permitting, intending, designing the sacrifice of life itself to define love, to define the heart of God.

Yes. As long as Jesse Ventura sees billboards announcing Christian classes designed to assuage my every conceived and conceivable weakness, Jesse has got it right . . . organized religion is (ironically) a crutch for the

weak minded.

But that . . . that is not the true gospel of God. And that is not the people God has called His own . . . whom he set apart, whom he foreknew . . . whom he justified, whom he is, now, by degrees, glorifying.

Book Reviews

Roland Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NIBC. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999. xvi + 312 pages, ISBN 0-85364-733-X.

Reviewed By R. Mark Shipp

Roland Murphy is a well-known commentator on the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (*The Tree of Life,* Eerdmans, 1996 and *Ecclesiastes*, Word Biblical Commentary, 1992). Murphy consistently engages his readers with his clarity of writing and fresh insights. In this new volume, he has teamed up with Elizabeth Huwiler to once again produce a readable and insightful commentary on two canonical books of wisdom (Proverbs, written by Murphy, and Ecclesiastes, by Huwiler) and one book of lyric poetry (Song of Songs, Huwiler).

Murphy does a predictably fine job of introducing and commenting on the book of Proverbs. The introduction, while brief, covers many areas essential to situating the Old Testament Wisdom Literature in its historical and literary contexts. Murphy does a good job of comparing the Wisdom Woman of chapters 1-9 with the Woman of Folly, although he is more reserved in making connections between these women and wise and foolish living than in his earlier works. The Proverbs of Solomon (chapters 10-22:16) he deals with in a verse-by-verse manner, except where he finds several proverbs in a row which deal with the same, or similar, subjects. While he is largely constrained by the editorial policy of the series, one wonders if he could not have found more connections between adjacent proverbs than he seems to have found. Also, his comments on individual proverbs are helpful, but often too brief to be able to show the mysteries and possibilities inherent

in them, to which he alludes in the introduction. The admonition literature of 22:17-24:34 and the appendices in chapters 30-31 are well presented, though once again he is more restrained in his explanations of the riddle of Agur ben Yakeh and the Wisdom Woman of Proverbs 31 than he is in his previous works.

Elizabeth Huwiler provides the commentaries for Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Her introduction to Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom tradition in Israel is enjoyable reading and provides several interesting insights. Her suggestion for the structure of the book, long debated by scholars, makes sense to me: rather than impose an artificial structure to the book, why not look for the cues the author provides, such as "So I turned" or "Again I saw." Her treatment of the meaning of *hebel* (traditionally translated "vanity"), on the other hand, is less satisfying. She opts for the traditional rendering, or even the translation "meaningless," though she admits "vapor," or "mist," is the literal translation. In my judgment, a translation which clarifies the companion phrase in the book "grazing on wind" is preferable. "Insubstantial," "fleeting," or "ephemeral" come closer to the sense of the word, which seems to deal with that which cannot be held or grasped. Her comments on the text of Ecclesiastes are particularly helpful relative to the author's relentless questioning of human striving, insistence on divine, but inexplicable, sovereignty, and insistence on enjoying the good gifts God provides of food, family, and labor while there is still time. One would have hoped for a more complete explanation of the poem on old age in chapter 12 than simply to characterize it "like a house falling down."

It is perhaps with Huwiler's comments on the Song of Songs that the commentary has its most serious shortcomings. Huwiler suggests that the main significance of the book of Songs is in the celebration of human sexuality and the lack of a clear hierarchy between the sexes. She gives little attention, on the other hand, to the more overtly religious usage of the Song. What is it about the Song which prompted the early interpretation of it as a metaphor or allegory of God's relationship with his people? Why is it that

Jews for hundreds of years have read the Song at Passover? While she quotes Aqiba's famous statement, "all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies," she does not provide any suggestion for what this might mean in terms of religious/cultic usage and why Christians and Jews have always felt free to read it metaphorically. She does suggest that one can read the Song from the standpoint of Genesis one as a celebration of the "very good" creation of male and female. While this is helpful, she neglects to make the same connection which Genesis one makes between the creation of human gender and marriage. Indeed, she states that nowhere in the book of Songs is marriage implied, but rather a love relationship between young, unmarried people. This is curious, considering the overt mention of Solomon's wedding in 3:11. She does little with this datum, nor with the ascription of the entire series of Songs to Solomon, except to mention its connection with the wisdom tradition.

Apart from this criticism, the commentary is enjoyable reading and insightful. Preachers and adult Bible class teachers will find it particularly appropriate for sermon and lesson preparation.

Marva Dawn. *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World.* Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999. viii + 377 pages. ISBN 080284586X.

Reviewed by William W. Stewart

In the United States, changes in the worship of God have occurred almost across the board. The use of English rather than Latin for Roman Catholic mass is now accompanied in many churches by the use of folk music, popular music, and other styles of music. In wrestling with declining numbers of worship participants, many mainline Protestant churches have developed seeker services in which contemporary music is used. Jewish synagogue worship has seen changes too.

As a free-lance theologian and guest speaker in many churches around the country, Marva Dawn has had a better opportunity than most to see the full extent of these changes. In *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World,* she thoughtfully explores worship, a task not made easy by the issues surrounding worship. She has a profound understanding of worship and how it shapes us morally. The royal "waste" of time in the book is the genuine worship of God in a world trying to make worship useful for something else.

Marva Dawn's book is a faithful guide for Christians amidst the issues and sensitivities surrounding worship in the postmodern era. Although some criticize her for advocating traditionalism, she gives five reasons why she is not. For example, she is opposed to clinging to traditions without understanding why and is not opposed to contemporary forms and styles of music. She personally uses a wide variety of music in planning worship services. The main message of her book is that we must keep God as the center of worship.

"Keeping God the Center does not narrow our options, though it gives us our primary criterion for sorting through them" (153). In Chapter 27 of the book, she offers eight examples of contemporary hymns that keep God as the Center, but does not want the hymns she offers to be used without the work of sorting for their appropriateness for the Church. She urges all congregations to think deeply about worship.

Marva Dawn explores the roots of changes in worship which stretch back 300 years when, through science and reason, Western societies turned from the supernatural to the natural, from the truth of God to the scientific method. As technologies developed from the application of science and as economics began shaping society for its products, Western man assumed he had control of his future. "Science provided the insights, technology the power, and economics the wealth to combat ignorance, superstition, and poverty in a never-ceasing spiral of progress" (42).

The postmodern spirit, which idolizes progress, began to develop when "God was no longer absolute," and societies shifted religion to the individual (42). This shift enabled one person to say to another, "Christianity might be true for you, but it is not true for me" (42). Who controlled the power released by technology became a world-wide concern once God was lost as the center of society and religion was limited to the individual. At the close of a list of world-shaking "graphic contradictions" to progress unleashed in the Twentieth Century, Marva Dawn includes "the emptiness . . . of entertainment that continues to escalate violence and blatant immorality" and "the . . . loss of any moral consensus or commitment to the common good" (42-43). With no moral, vibrant center and no overarching story, society is fragmented and raked by suspicion and loss of meaning. "Channel surfing with the remote control illustrates the postmodern condition: from a distance the viewer experiences no plot, but merely disconnected images and smatterings of feelings" (43). The postmodernist's spirals of despair and hopelessness signal the failure of progress.

Marva Dawn captures the confusion of the times in the following lines:

> Having no point of reference, no overarching story, no master narrative, people don't know who they are. Constantly shifting their image of themselves to fit in with the fads and fashions of the times, young folks especially lack a nucleus of identity, a personality that has been formed by moral authority and mentoring models. Furthermore, since they have no sense of themselves, they are unable to make commitments to another person in marriage or friendship or to a job, a vision, a vocation, a

> religion. Their subconscious cry often becomes, "Keep entertaining me, so that I don't have to face the absence of my self." Religion, in the form of pop spiritualities, is merely another technique for entertainment (43-44).

Few, if any, of us have completely escaped the influence of the postmodern spirit, which, according to Marva Dawn, often goes unrecognized.

Marva Dawn identifies television, an entertainment medium, as the idolatrous agent of the postmodern spirit, endangering the developing brains of our children and the genuine worship of God. The Christian worldview must now battle against the 28 hours per week the average person watches television in which the postmodern spirit predominates. She contrasts genuine worship with the worship of television which truly wastes our time by distorting our understanding of what is real. Television motivates us to feel, not think; it trains us to demand instant gratification, a major force in church conflicts over worship; it trains us to favor coziness in worship rather than intimacy with God; it limits our attention span to sound bites and makes us "greedy for what makes us feel good, instead of for what will transform us" (80); through sitcoms, it makes us believe "that major life problems can be solved in half an hour" (81); and it trains us to receive and discard enormous amounts of data without acting on it, raising the issue of how worshippers can be trained to act on Christian beliefs. The postmodern worldview and the symbol system of television, most of which are hostile to the Gospel story and to the kingdom of God, shape our interpretation and perception of reality each day.

In Chapter 7, "The Church as a Colony of the Kingdom in a Consumer Culture," Dawn recognizes how "extremely difficult" it is "to live in a Christian way in a consumer culture" (88).

> [W]e have to ask if it is really possible to have genuinely *Christian* worship in such a culture—characterized as our society is by individualism (rather than biblical community), consumption (as opposed to generosity and sharing), manipulative advertizing (instead of truth), and intentional fomenting of desires (in contrast to the scriptural recognition that human desires often derive from our sinful nature and must, therefore, be frequently held in check) (88-89).

In this chapter, Marva Dawn explores the shopper mentality and the world's emphases on taste and choice, opinion and self fulfillment contrasted with our response to God's intentions for our lives in faithful, obedient service to Him.

Carefully, Marva Dawn traces the origin of the shopper mentality from a number of sources, including religion. When the Puritans' powerful religious emotions waned, they sought something else to satisfy their appetite. This appetite for something new is related to the postmodern appetite for novelty. The postmodern spirit channels our insatiable appetites toward the latest and newest marvel of the technological economy and toward comfort and convenience, rendering us bags of unmet needs satisfied only by goods and experiences sold to us. Consequently, we think first and foremost of ourselves and meeting our felt needs. The various psychological and physical therapies in the culture have turned us toward feeling good and being pleased rather than being saved.

Growing out of the shopper mentality is the idol of personal taste. The postmodern spirit has shifted the society away from the ideal of the common good toward the ideal of individual self interest. Marva Dawn drives home the challenge of being church in postmodern times by reporting that the function of religion to provide moral vision in the early days of the American culture has been replaced by television. Religion resides in the lives of individuals within a worshipping community. Television survives in an economy seeking profits from the results of technology.

> The one is committed to community and the ideal of self-sacrifice for the greater good of the commonweal; the other is committed to utilitarianism and to the development of technology for the purpose of instantly gratifying the needs of the individual (188-89).

Personal taste is rooted in self-gratification and when it controls worship, the balance between the community and the individual is destroyed, releasing selfishness.

Marva Dawn shows how the postmodern spirit, forged by the combination of the three idols of the times—entertainment, consumerism,

and personal taste—contributes to the confusion of worship with evangelism. To counter this confusion, she underscores the need for the community of faith to be truly an alternative community by coining the word *Churchbeing.* She urges us to recover the rhythm of worshipping God and then sharing our faith with our neighbors. "Put simply, we must remember that worship is *for God,* in contrast to evangelism, which is *for the unbeliever*" (122).

Faced with declining numbers as the idols of the times draw people away from true community, church leaders panic. In this crisis state, they listen to the false advice of marketing experts on how to grow a church by discarding church traditions and appealing to the world around them. Influenced by techniques of advertizing as practiced by the electronic church, church leaders push for "a worship style that lacks theological substance, invites passivity, and fosters an easy-listening consumerism that provides neither music nor words that will help worship participants remember deep truths" (123). The alternative to this quick-fix technique are educating participants in the meaning and practice of worship, understanding the real idolatries that keep people from participating in the Church, and equipping the believers for outreach to the world.

The difference between worship and evangelism is never so clearly stated as in these words:

> Worship is the language of love and growth between believers and God; evangelism is the language of introduction between those who believe and those who don't. To confuse the two and put on worship the burden of evangelism robs the people of God of their responsibility to care about the neighbor, defrauds the believers of transforming depth, and steals from God the profound praise of which he is worthy (124).

Turning worship into an evangelistic performance with advertizing, emotional hype, and entertainment to attract people from our television and cyberspace culture only transfers the very problems of that culture into the churches and leads to a dumbing down of worship. "If one's introduction to Christ comes from a polished performance, how will that person have the courage to live his or her own awkward, stumbling version of the Christ-life?" (125).

Marva Dawn provides 16 ways in which splitting worship and the

Body over personal taste destroys Churchbeing. Dividing worship into a traditional service and a contemporary service generally separates the old from the young based on preference for what each knows; and Marva Dawn says that "what the old know comes from a culture that was much more Christian than contemporary culture" (190). Both groups suffer; but those in the contemporary worship are separated from "continuity with the Church throughout time" (190). Those who infuse the worship with an entertainment style do not consider the relation between content and style and succeed in baptizing entertainment and in developing "a star clergy and cult of personality" (191) with applause for the soloist. Then we are worshipping ourselves, not God, and singling out certain gifts in the church over others. Personal taste leads to the divisive idolatry of power, not faithfulness to God.

In order to make worship *for* God, God must be the infinite center of our worship. Marva Dawn says that "everything we plan for our corporate gatherings must be consistent with who God is and what it means to worship him" (152). Worship is not worship of God if it is used for evangelism. The entry point into a congregation is each of its members individually.

In the practical parts of the book, Marva Dawn commends the harder way in making choices about worship. Contrary to prevailing attitudes toward worship, Marva Dawn says "that congregations must do all they can to counteract the present idea that we must do all we can to make worship easy for those who come so they'll come back again" (297). The worship in many churches has become an exercise in what satisfies the people rather than work in participating in worship. Congregations "have given into consumers' wishes to be merely entertained, lazy, mindless, just like the world, successful, or rebellious against all that the Church has been" (296-297). The postmodern spirit has robbed many worship planners of the language of Christianity, the overarching story, and who God is, all of which are necessary to plan a worship service.

Among the practical guides she provides are four lists, two each on

the advantages and disadvantages of using screens and using hymnals for congregational singing. Understanding the idolatrous times in which we live, it is not surprising to find the following:

> The fact that screens are what people use most in the rest of life is a very good reason not to use them in worship (290);
>
> [T]he hymnal underscores the continuity of the Church as the people of the Book, (292);
>
> [W]ords on a screen do not entail much learning of doctrine" (291);
>
> Hymns gathered in a hymnal together give a more thorough development of doctrine, which we need as the bones that keep the shape of the body of faith" (292).

Seemingly harmless changes may be made for unrecognized reasons having idolatrous origins.

Dawn commends Colossians 3:16 as a guide for choices in planning worship services and provides 16 criteria by which to plan worship services, the first of which is "*What is appropriate for displaying the character and interventions of God?*" (302). The first four criteria require that the music, the words, and the combination of the two be appropriate for every piece sung in worship and that the tempo and tone with the words we say be coherent (305). In determining whether the music and text are appropriately coherent, she uses the peppy "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" to illustrate how the words are biblical but the music is not majestic, (304-305). In explaining the fifth criterion, *What is appropriate for forming the character of the followers of Christ?*, she says, "Worship is not about feeling good; it is about becoming good" (306). Under the criterion "*What is appropriate for building community in this place?*" she poses the questions, "How can what we use for worship counteract the ravages of our technological milieu, which pulls us apart from each other? and How can our songs and sermons give more of a sense of *we*?" (307). She illustrates the criterion "*What is appropriate for envisioning the reign of God with all its truth, beauty, and goodness*?" by recalling a service in which a screen

"hid both the cross and the altar for the entire worship time" (310). For the twelfth criterion, "*What is appropriate for the level of pain in the world?*" (311) she recalls how difficult it was during the year she had cancer "to worship in places that sang only happy songs (rather than genuine praise songs that focus on the character and interventions of God)" (311).

We delude ourselves if we think that idolatry is limited to primitive peoples. Marva Dawn's book clears our vision and faithfully restores to us the splendor of genuine worship of God, a royal "waste" of time. She pulls no punches on how difficult it is for us to worship God today and to be Church for the postmodern world. She says a hard word for churches traveling down the wrong path, planning worship according to the shifting tastes and fads of the day. For such churches it will be extremely difficult to recover the way. Her critics have called her elitist. Perhaps we should be careful in labeling her elitist, for the degree to which we believe her to be elitist may reflect the extent to which we have made peace with our culture and its values.

Obiter Dicta

Abortion

Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life. To raise the question whether we are here concerned already with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder. A great many different motives may lead to an action of this kind . . . All these considerations must no doubt have a quite decisive influence on our personal and pastoral attitudes towards the person concerned, but they cannot in any way alter the fact of murder.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*

Added Attractions

Apart from the specific expedients advocated as a means of winning the laboring man to the church, the more typical approach to the problem of recruiting members was the utilization of the principle of the "added attraction." . . . The more prosperous churches began to specify that gymnasiums, bowling alleys, and social halls be included . . . Constant efforts were made to "dress up" the services in order to make them more appealing. . . . In the more fashionable churches well-trained professional soloists, quartets, and choirs had early been employed and in these churches the congregation would not think of spoiling the performance by joining in the singing.

Winthrop Hudson, *The Great Tradition of the American Churches*

Amusing Religion

I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether.

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

An Awesome God

In the contemporary idiom Michael Jordan is "awesome," movies are "awesome," rock groups are "awesome." When we say "God is awesome"

we do not redefine "awesome," we redefine God. God is like Michael Jordan, movies, and rock groups.
Do we call this being relevant?

Mike White, University Chemistry Professor and church leader

Audiences

A preacher who confines himself to considering how a medium can increase his audience will miss the significant question: In what sense do new media alter what is meant by religion, by church, even by God?

Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*

Baby Boomers

The generation that was crowded into maternity wards and grade schools and rock concerts now crowds into megachurches. The generation that reorganized family around the ideal of self-fulfillment has done the same with religion. Surveys consistently show that baby boomers . . . attend church not out of loyalty, duty, obligation, or gratitude, but only if it meets their needs.

Michael S. Hamilton, in *Christianity Today*

Discipline

While the freedom of a church to say what it has to say may be preserved, if it imposes no tests for membership and makes no provisions for discipline, it will not only display no distinctive quality of life but in due time will have nothing to say except that which everyone will be saying.

Winthrop Hudson, *The Great Tradition in the American Churches*

Entertaining worship

I worry about congregations that focus on having "exciting" worship services because this merely fosters our society's self-gratification and does not welcome believers into the disciplines of the alternative lifestyle of *Churchbeing*. We may attract lots of consumers if our worship services are merely entertaining, but unless we continually increase the emotional hype, we cannot expect consumers not to turn away to other diversions when the difficulties of being a Christian surface—or else we merely continue contributing to their shallowness.

Marva Dawn, "True worship, real evangelism," *Christian Century*

Evangelism

Evangelism happens in our daily lives, our regular encounters, our simple conversations and carings—or at evangelistic events, which have a focus different from that of worship—in order that we can bring others with us to worship God. Evangelism is the means: worship is the end.

The original Greek version of Matthew 28:19 literally says, "While you are going, be making disciples." Helping others to know how Christ changed your life happens while you are at work, when you chat with your neighbors, whenever you assist someone else in crisis, all the time.

Marva Dawn, "True worship, real evangelism," *Christian Century*

Evangelism, Modern

The Methodist Church—specifically, its Western North Carolina conference—now sponsors a race car in the Legends circuit. Just as on the cars sponsored by Winston cigarettes, Tide laundry detergent, and Busch beer, their 115 MPH vehicle is painted with the Methodist logo, along with the number for a 24-hour prayer line. Driver Sam Beam is a Presbyterian, however.

The American Enterprise

Fashion

When poisons become fashionable they do not cease to kill.

C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*

Feelings

If "my feelings" and "my experiences" are the goal of the Christian life, then the real object of my concern is not God but myself. Once that step is taken and "my feelings" are made central, the next expected step is to censor and sift the emotions, letting in only those in which "I" find some comfort and consolation. This restricts the way in which God is present to me. Since the feelings are for the sake of myself and my enjoyment, all threatening modes of God's presence are abolished. The feelings of the Christian life are limited to peace, companionship, consolation, and rest, thus excluding any possibility that God is present to me as judge, corrector, and a troubler of the waters. This means that real repentance and real forgiveness are eliminated.

Edward Farley, *Requiem For A Lost Piety*

Though discipline and perseverance may sound like words for a bygone era, they are often what we need most. We believe in an orderly life as a corrective to the permissive, "follow your feelings" climate of today. Left to our own inclinations, our prayer would likely become nonexistent. Our discipline should include both public and private prayer. In private prayer we open ourselves to God whether or not we feel like praying . . . Persistence takes discipline.

Robert H. Ramey, Jr., & Ben Johnson, *Living the Christian Life*

Show me a Christian who only goes to church when he or she feels a deep, spontaneous, overwhelming need to praise God, and I will show you a rather weak, insubstantial disciple.

William H. Willimon, *With Glad and Generous Heart*

Freud

Freud's hostility to religion was wide-reaching—he first took cocaine in liquid form on the night of the Witch's Sabbath, April 30, 1884, obviously mimicking a pact with the devil sealed in the same way and on the same night in Goethe's *Faust.*

Paul Vitz in *The American Enterprise*

Gambling

Gambling has been swiftly transformed from a social disease into social policy. A generation ago, legalized gambling was rare and generally stigmatized. Today it is ubiquitous—68 percent of Americans gambled at least once last year, often egged on by the 37 state governments that run lotteries.

[C]an government label gambling a vice, now that governments do most of the advertising to exhort Americans to gamble, in government-run lotteries?

George Will, syndicated column

Habit

Most of us eat, sleep, work, make love out of habit. We habitualize certain actions because we think they are important. Most Christians go to church out of habit. Contrary to popular belief, their habit in no way minimizes the important of this experience, in fact, it confirms its importance. Spontaneity is fine, so far as it goes. But our deepest feelings, our most important values and commitments, must be constantly reiterated in our lives. Therefore we do them out of habit.

William H. Willimon, *With Glad and Generous Hearts*

"Hot Tub Religion"

Church leaders research the latest marketing strategies, pastors feel pressure to act like businessmen whose goal is to attract the most customers. Often unconsciously many pastors repackage the church's message to draw more people in. A little rationalizing here, a little rounding off there, and the church is transformed from a worshiping community into a comforting haven from life's pressures. J. I. Packer calls it "hot-tub religion."

This all adds up to a massive identity crisis within the church. When Jesus talks about the church, He isn't talking about buildings or programs or therapy groups. He's talking about His people, purchased with His blood-the new community called to bring redemption to mankind and to give the world a foretaste of the coming kingdom.

The church has to pull the plug on the hot tub. Its real task is not to make people happy but to make them holy. Its goal is not growth in numbers but

spiritual growth. Its true measure is not slick marketing techniques but biblical faithfulness.

Charles Colson, *A Dangerous Grace*

Letters to Seven Modern Churches: To the Suburban Church

But I do have this against you: you're far too impressed with Size and Power and Influence. You are impatient with the small and the slow. You exercise little discernment between the ways of the world and my ways. . . You grab onto anything that works and looks good. You do so many good things, but too often you do them in the world's way instead of mine, and so seriously compromise your obedience.

Christianity Today, October 25, 1999

Loss of Grace

When a church loses confidence in the absolute, transcendent grace of God, what else can it do for its suffering souls than to rationalize our sin, moralize about our behavior, and keep assuring us that we are basically nice people who are doing the best we can? Without a story of redemption, if we are not doing our best, we are damned.

William H. Willimon, *With Glad and Generous Hearts*

New Hymnody

[T]he focus on individual experience aligns perfectly with the baby boom's luxuriant self-concern . . . one cannot sing praise songs without noticing how first person pronouns tend to eclipse every other subject.

Michael S. Hamilton, in *Christianity Today*

Overhead Projector

[I]t went so well we asked the pastor just to print the salient points of his sermon on a transparency, aim it at the wall, then serve coffee and croissants while we each interpret the meaning of the lesson in light of our varied backgrounds and experiences.

Eutychus, *Christianity Today*

Praise Songs

One cannot sing praise songs without noticing how first person pronouns tend to eclipse every other subject.

Michael S. Hamilton in *Christianity Today*

[T]he rock generation was very self-centered. By that I mean the horizon of one's sense of reality and significance was constricted pretty much to that of personal experience—what *I* am feeling, what is happening to *me*, what is going on within *me*—that is about as far as my concern and interest go. Listen to the rock lyrics and see if this is not the philosophy they reflect.

Then check out the lyrics of gospel rock and see if they do not have the same orientation. Is not "my personal experience of Jesus," or "what Jesus has done *for me*," the dominating focus of gospel rock lyrics?

Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound*

Summum Bonum

The most radically new feature of our civilization is not technology, its newly powerful means, but the lack of a *summum bonum*, an end. We are the first civilization that does not know why we exist.

Peter Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis for the Third Millennium*

Worship

Many pastors, lay leaders and national church officers seem to be thoroughly disdaining God's own instructions whey they accept the false advice of marketing gurus to "throw out the traditions" of their churches in order to "appeal" to the world around them and thereby "grow." The result is a push for a worship style that lacks theological substance, invites passivity and fosters an easy-listening consumerism that provides neither music nor words that will help worship participants remember deep truths. Another result is that the real problems—namely, failure to educate people concerning the meaning and practice of worship, failure to understand the real idolatries that keep people from participating in the church, and failure to equip the priesthood of all believers for outreach to the world—remain unaddressed.

Marva Dawn, "True worship, real evangelism" in *Christian Century*

An exclusive focus on God abolishes every form of idolatry. Although we bring our lives—our total life experience—into worship, we do not concentrate on our experience. . . . Elevating God does not exclude an experience of the divine in worship, but rather shifts the focus from the worshipers to God.

Robert H. Ramey, Jr., & Ben Johnson, *Living the Christian Life*

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