Christian Studies

A Publication of the Institute for Christian Studies

Volume 17 / 1999

Christian Studies

Volume 17

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 17

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

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> 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

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 17 1999 ©

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).

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Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 17