

### **Evangelicals and Technology: Establishing Boundaries**

Technological development is the most well embraced social reality and the greatest intellectually and theologically neglected subject in Evangelicalism today. Evangelicals need to reevaluate their understanding toward modern technology, seek to renew the Evangelical mind by creating a critical dialogue with technical modernity, and discover technology's limits as opposed to the easy acceptance of technological progress.

Evangelicals embrace technology as self-evident truth, except for extremes like cloning and genetic engineering, that Christians should adjust to and readily accept as legitimate means for conveying the gospel or glorifying God. Some have argued that Evangelicals represent the backwash of American academia, but fail to demonstrate that they are paragons of technical virtuosity.<sup>1</sup> Evangelicals are excellent at discerning technological trends, capturing those mediums and even contributing and leading in their development. Evangelicals have been at the forefront of social reform through adapting to new circumstances created by rapid technological expansion that result in social instability.<sup>2</sup> They have also contributed greatly to the development of technology through printing techniques, radio, innovative uses of television as medium for evangelism and propagation of conservative political ideology, cable and satellite TV and computerized telemarketing technologies.<sup>3</sup> The use of multimedia and communication technologies represent their greatest achievements, but they excel also at social forms of technology such as, the market driven church, bureaucracy, entrepreneurialism, volunteerism and business and advertising techniques used for church growth, which rank as staple diet for Evangelical megachurches and televangelism.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis in Evangelicalism's approach to technology lies between the doldrums of academic and intellectual participation and witness and the ready acceptance of all things technological. On the one hand we have neglected scholarship and critical thinking as too liberal and accommodating to modern culture, and on the other hand argue that for the church to reach people it must become culturally indigenous whether in Africa, Asia, Latin America or Exurbia. "When the church's communication forms are alien to the host population, they may never perceive that Christianity's God is for people like them."<sup>5</sup> We must become all things to all people in order to save some (I Cor 9: 22). This argument maintains that Evangelicals must adopt technological forms of communications in order to express relevance to technological society. However, this position overlooks three

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<sup>1</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eedermans, 1994); Alan Wolf, "The Opening of the Evangelical Mind" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (October 2000), 55-76.

<sup>2</sup> Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Quentin J. Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 54-55.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Trueheart, "Welcome to the Next Church" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1996), 37-58.

<sup>5</sup> George Hunter, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 58; Trueheart, "Welcome to the Next Church," 43.

important considerations. First, it adopts the same argument for technology that liberal and existentialist theologians have advocated for their modernization programs. Second, it neglects the well-established position that technology is not neutral, “the medium is the message.” And lastly, technology tends to decontextualize its message.

### **The Liberalism of Conservatism**

Adaptation of theology to cultural form was the bedrock of nineteenth century liberalism and twentieth century liberal existentialism. They believed that the traditional understanding of the gospel is irrelevant to modernity because it was tied to an ancient and obsolete cosmology that modern scientific thought and technological prowess have dispelled. Rational modern people simply cannot accept a message intricately connected to the ancient mythological worldview. The gospel must be demythologized in order to address a modern audience. This means dispensing with many of the historic beliefs of Christians such as the bodily resurrection and second advent of Christ, the virgin birth and so forth. The gospel must be modernized, brought up to date, stripped of its historical accretions and made relevant,

For the world-view of the Scripture is mythological and is therefore unacceptable to modern man whose thinking has been shaped by science and is therefore no longer mythological. Modern man always makes use of technical means which are the result of science. In case of illness modern man has recourse to physicians, to medical science. In case of economic and political affairs, he makes use of the results of psychological, social, economic and political sciences, and so on. Nobody reckons with direct intervention by transcendent powers.<sup>6</sup>

The results of science are always relative as that discipline continues to evolve and change; its conclusions are never definitive. The important aspect of the scientific worldview presents the method of thinking through which modern people perceive reality. The epistemological base of modern science calls for conformity. If people do not comprehend things scientifically, they will not find them relevant or understandable. Thus it is impossible for modern people to simultaneously accept the notion of the supernatural and electricity; everything has a rational explanation,

It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits. We may think we can manage it in our own lives, but to expect others to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world.<sup>7</sup>

Evangelicals argue similarly, except they replace the scientific worldview with the technological one. They embrace technicism (the belief in technology) instead of

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Bultmann “New Testament and Mythology” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1954), 5.

scientism. Technological society can only receive the gospel through technological means. Young people raised on TV or who are most comfortable in front of a screen will best understand the message of the gospel through those formats. Those in the market place best understand through marketing techniques and images such as advertising. In this sense those who claim the standards of conservative theology such as Evangelicals represent the new technological liberalism or *the liberalism of conservatism*. One critic of televangelism noted the tendency of church services to adapt television format and remarked that this phenomenon is most popular among “fundies” and “evangelicals” who are portrayed in the media as backwards, intolerant and lacking modern savvy,

Today some of the most theologically conservative churches are among the leaders in religious marketing and promotion. In this sense they are the real liberals. Old-style mainline churches, such as Methodists and Lutherans, are far more skeptical of the new worship styles and marketing techniques. Not surprisingly, such traditional churches are not growing. Overall, the church in the United States is becoming more “American” and less traditional-more like televangelism.<sup>8</sup>

There is no fundamental difference in epistemological approach between Classical Liberalism and contemporary Evangelicalism. Both attempt to adapt its message to modern epistemology. Advocates for new technologies will defend their use of innovative technology on the grounds that the church must modernize and keep pace with the times.<sup>9</sup> Even going so far as to accept technological Darwinism that believes in the survival of the technologically fittest, “If you don’t change, you die.”<sup>10</sup> Those who adapt to new technologies will increase, while those who do not will recede. No essential difference exists between modernizing to accommodate a technological epistemology or a scientific and ideological modernization in line with the liberalism found in Bishop Spong who argues similarly that “Christianity must change or die.”<sup>11</sup> Both attempt to modernize along the lines of how modern people perceive truth. One receives knowledge and understanding through the scientific method, the other through technical form. Technological modernization involves a way of thinking as much as science does. Evangelicalism has openly resisted rationalism only to allow a subtle form of technicism in through the back door. Rudolf Bultmann synthesized liberal Christianity with existentialism and classical liberalism with rationalism. But Evangelicalism is in danger of synthesizing conservative Christianity with technicism.

Jacques Ellul demonstrated the connection between rationalism and technicism, “technique is the translation into action of man’s concern to master things by means of reason.”<sup>12</sup> Ironically, Evangelicalism uncritically embraces the product of its bitter enemy, rationalism, while liberalism stemming from rationalism has largely rejected modern communication technology. This may be due to Romantic elements in

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<sup>8</sup> Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Armstrong, *The Electric Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 7, 11, 53, 176-177.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 73.

<sup>11</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 43.

Liberalism, which possess a natural aversion toward the technological. Conservatives embrace the fruits of modernity in technological progress while the older style of Liberalism remains largely aloof,

The use of the mass means of data-gathering, accounting, disseminating, broadcasting, and communicating by fundamentalists suggests an at-homeness with modern technology. Most religious liberals and humanist philosophers have, on the other hand, greeted such communications technology warily if not critically. In the spirit of Jewish theologian Martin Buber, who stressed the importance of 'I-Thou' as opposed to 'I-it' relations, many liberals have been suspicious of the ways technology 'uses' people, dehumanizing them, robbing them of spiritual freedom, making them objects. Even faith, they have feared, might become a consumer item, a commodity; prospects for conversion would be manipulated and deceived; mechanization might substitute for community in circles of faith. What Protestant thinker Paul Tillich called 'technical reason,' it was feared, would prevail at the expense of the distinctively human.<sup>13</sup>

Romantic thought in modern culture has not willingly embraced technology, but believed that such advances must be weighed critically and changes introduced slowly in order that society may absorb technological advance.<sup>14</sup> Evangelicals generally reject this approach in favor of Baconian utopianism believing that at worst technology is neutral, but can be controlled by the Christian worldview. The idea that technology can have a life of its own or produce unintended consequences seems lost.

### **Technology is not neutral or the medium is the message**

Evangelicals undermine their own message by arguing that Christians should use any and every tool at their disposal. "The rules are, Get the message over any way you can. The more tools you have, the better it is."<sup>15</sup> The inference in this approach believes that the gospel can be adapted to any technological form. There exists a naïve perception that because Christians employ new technologies they have automatic control over them. This reflects failure in the Evangelical understanding of the nature of modern technology. The notion that technology is neutral controlled by its users mirrors the nineteenth century understanding of the world that believed mankind controls its own destiny through the moral use of technology; from this assumption comes the identification between technological development and the advancement of the kingdom of God. In the nineteenth century this took the form of postmillennialism. In the twentieth century this

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<sup>13</sup> Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 31.

<sup>14</sup> In Europe Jacques Ellul best represents this approach: Ellul, *The Technological Society*; Idem, *The Technological Bluff* trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Idem, *The Technological System* trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980). Lewis Mumford best represents this position in America: Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1966); Idem, *The Pentagon of Power: The Myth of the Machine Volume Two* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970).

<sup>15</sup> T.D. Jakes, quoted from David Van Biema, "Spirit Raiser" in *Time* (September 17, 2001), 52.

notion took the form of improved means for global evangelization and the fulfillment of prophecy in premillennialism. The fact that the nineteenth century world remains predominant in Evangelical thinking on technology may also explain the anemia of its intellectual abilities.

The Evangelical embrace of technology reflects the attempt to disguise our own intellectual shortfalls. Technological prowess offers a way to appear sophisticated and savvy without much intellectual effort. Ellul noted that people have become technically proficient at manipulating computers but cannot solve real life problems, which requires a higher level of critical thinking and reflection that technical ability does not afford. Rather, technical ability masks critical inability and absence of thinking skills, and can present a false sign of intelligence. The proliferation of computer savvy children demonstrates that anyone can operate a computer if they know its possibilities. No other branch of knowledge is necessary for computer users. This expresses the infantile nature of computer technology and explains why children who cannot read are adept at computers.<sup>16</sup> “What produces enthusiasm for computers is not that they are useful and efficient but that they give the illusion of being intelligent.”<sup>17</sup>

The Evangelical laxity in thought concerning technology reflects the same over generalization in the Evangelical approach to cultural identification. The idea that Christians must become indigenous in cultural form while maintaining its own unique message neglects the fact that cultural form is a message itself. It suggests that any method may be used as a simple tool, while forsaking the notion that the medium is the message, which means that the way one conveys a message shapes its content.<sup>18</sup> A message conveyed in plays and novels will appear dramatic, one through liner exposition appears heady, one communicated through advertising as a commodity and one communicated through television as surreal. The dichotomy between the deep-level culture of the Christian message that holds to the Truth of Revelation does not resonate with the idea of a flexible outward form of culture that remains negotiable.<sup>19</sup> This assumes neutrality of cultural forms, including technological means.

Dichotomy requires exegesis of the culture as well as the text.<sup>20</sup> However, exegesis remains largely detached, analysis does not involve relevance or dictate behavior, analysis informs practice. Once analysis ascertains the meaning of the text or the reality of the situation other concerns take over such as wisdom, guidance and precept. How do we address the current scene from the text? Technological reality does not determine Christian praxis, nor does it alter the meaning of the text to conform to the contemporary world any more than rationalism should demand adaptation to Bultmannianism. When Paul stated that Christians becomes all things to all men, no unconditional surrender of Christian identity or simple assimilation between form and content was in mind. He was able to relate to Jews and Gentiles as a Jew or Gentile while still retaining his Christian identity. To those under the Law he became as under the Law, but not actually coming under the Law; to the lawless as lawless, although under the law

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<sup>16</sup> Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 280-83, 339-46.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* trans. by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

<sup>19</sup> Hunter, *Church for the Unchurched*, 64-66.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

of Christ in order to save some of these people (I Cor. 9: 19-23). This suggests something more than simple adaptations in cultural form, but a skillful empathic approach not reducible to practical adaptation in communicational style.

Wisdom requires us to understand and challenge the current situation instead of understanding and conforming to it. Paul demonstrates the emphatic approach on Mars Hill (Acts 17). “Men of Athens I observe that you are very religious in all respects” and that you worship “AN UNKNOWN GOD” (analysis of the culture). “What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you...” (challenge or contradiction of analysis). The true God desire that all search for Him, “if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us...even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring’” (Empathy and the reconstitution of the meaning of God). Then, finally, “God is now declaring to men that all every where should repent” (Declaration of the gospel).

Evangelicals throughout modern history have expressed deep-seated optimism towards technological progress. In this sense they have become the proper heirs of the nineteenth century Idea of Progress. Americans are particularly optimistic concerning technology. Evangelicals share in this common optimism. The notion of progress was originally identified with the postmillennial mentality of establishing the kingdom of God on earth then latter transposed into a secular belief in the advancement of the city of man.<sup>21</sup> Premillennialism believes that communication technologies will speared the gospel around the world and fulfill prophecy and hasten the Second Advent (Matt. 24: 14; Rev. 14: 6). Some have even believed that the Second Coming could be televised.<sup>22</sup> Recent technological advances in communications, biometric technology and identification systems make the fulfillment of the prophecies of *Revelation* possible for the first time in history. Satellite TV will make it possible for the entire world to view the two slain prophets in Jerusalem for three days and their resurrection (Rev. 11). Global communication and networking makes it possible for the mark of the beast to be issued to everyone on earth (Rev. 13). Although, the underlying tone is apocalyptic these ideas lend theological credence and support for technological progress. They express an implicit hope in technology as the medium of God’s will.

The church awaits the development of perfected means of communication in order to accomplish global evangelization that will hasten the return of Christ. Global evangelism becomes a technical problem. This shares in the national faith that all problems whether; economic, racial, political, or religious has technical solutions.<sup>23</sup> Pollution may be solved through recycling rather than conservation. Genetically engineered food addresses the problem of world hunger. Global communications will harmonize relationships between mutual misunderstandings. These claims ignore the fact

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<sup>21</sup> Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (Hew Haven, CT: Yale Univeristy Press, 1932); Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980); Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture*, 52-57. One writer argues that America is the only nation established on utopian principles and millennial vision; Damian Thompson, *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University of New England Press, 1996), 320. This is not entirely true; Marxism was also a utopian vision. The entire modern world takes shape from the utopian vision of the Idea of Progress.

<sup>22</sup> Armstrong, *The Electric Church*, 172-177; Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture*, 60-63.

<sup>23</sup> Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture*, 45-68.

that technology can only offer limited assistance to problems that have deeper economic, political, religious and spiritual causes.

Church growth demands the application of marketing principles and advertising to get people in the door. Improved technical means of communication can solve the problems of spiritual disconnectedness. Young people will be reached through electronic means; baby boomers will feel more comfortable worshipping in a building that resembles their offices or the mall. The belief that technical means will solve the church's alienation from society fails to realize that it risks turning its message into a commodity, further alienating people by misunderstanding their true needs and questions. The technical format reduces church growth, discipleship, theological education and missions to a technical problem that has a technical solution. In this sense a technicized gospel is closer to Bultmannianism than Evangelicals think because it does not reckon with the necessity of divine intervention.

## **A Surreal Gospel**

If the medium contextualizes whatever it communicates, the textual and literate faith of Protestantism leads to linear and rational understanding, then it can also decontextualize any message. In other words, if a message is not commensurate with its medium it will become distorted. Evangelicals argue for an indigenous approach to evangelism using all forms of cultural expressions. However, the notion that any means are acceptable appears too promiscuous. Ellul noted that because revelation took a particular orientation or form, "it cannot be spread by just any method. There is a need to discern and evaluate the means, even when the technological methods are legitimized in advance."<sup>24</sup>

How compatible or incompatible are modern communications with the Bible? The stock answer replies automatically that no inconsistency exists and that modern technology merely continues the work of the printing press begun by Reformers. Technology is neutral and therefore controlled by its ends. This represents a knee jerk reaction to a sensitive question that Evangelicals have largely answered in advance in attempts to justify their uncritical acceptance of technology. Unfortunately, it does not offer a thoughtful approach. Nor does it address the fact that means do effect and determine ends.

Asking whether or not TV can communicate revelation concerns the nature of our message as much as the nature of its medium. If the message of salvation largely means assent to information then TV and modern communications represent the best available medium. Electronic mediums are highly effective in transmitting information. However, those who believe that salvation requires simple assent to information and that only the lack of means prevents the transmission of global evangelism represent a revival of the ancient Gnostic heresy of belief in knowledge. Gnosticism found salvation in the accumulation of data, as one Neo Gnostic commented, Gnosticism could be characterized

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives On Our Age*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 89.

as an “information theory.”<sup>25</sup> Although, mass media imparts information it cannot impart the necessary understanding that must accompany a theological message. “Probably the most distressing aspect of televangelism’s faith in technology is its rather naïve juxtaposition of transmission and communication. Televangelists...characteristically equate the sheer broadcast of sounds and images with the actual communication of messages.”<sup>26</sup> Theological and religious teachings are the most difficult to communicate because of the need for contextualization. One needs faith to understand the gospel and that cannot be imparted through electronic means, but must be developed over time. Electronic transmission diminishes the possibility of evangelism by abstracting the gospel from any social context and objectifies its meaning by transforming it into information.<sup>27</sup>

It is not an accident that TV lends itself to revivalist and emotional persuasions that often present a simplistic message. “It is difficult to communicate authentic religious faith through a medium dominated by relatively trivial drama and silly commercials.”<sup>28</sup> The televised format requires ministries to make long impassioned pleas for financial support even preempting their main goal of evangelism to raise funds. In addition, in order to attract viewers they must adopt the same marketing strategies and inane entertainment formats of more successful TV programs. TV presents a good format for faith healers, and miracle workers already given to sensationalism and surrealism.

Has TV proved itself too limited a medium for the gospel because of the narrow possibilities it affords? Like much of mass media it must locate its market audience. The wider the audience the less substantive a message must become expresses the general rule of mass communication. The more popular the audience the greater the need to find the common denominator exists. Thus TV and other electronic mass communications will marginalize the gospel message if they attempt to broaden their scope. The simple fact is that mass media outlets already minister to people of their own persuasions, which can have some helpful benefits, but as tools for evangelism they are much too inept. Dubbing over Pentecostal preachers in French, German or Chinese with little thought given to how these messages will be received in other cultural contexts creates a surreal and ridiculous gospel. People watch televangelism because they are already conditioned too surrealism regular programming offers. People listen to Christian radio because they are already Christians. But for modern Gnostics transmission is paramount, as if the Truth was noncontextual and only needs transmission to be effective.

## **Establishing Boundaries**

The essential error in the current Evangelical approach does not lie with technology, but in our perceptions of technology as divine endowment. This can be traced to the popular faith most Americans place in technological development, even to the Evangelical belief that technology has divine origins and serves divine purposes. God has given humanity authority to rule in the Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1: 26-28).

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<sup>25</sup> Harold Bloom, *Omens of the Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 28.

<sup>26</sup> Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Technological application over nature may be legitimized if performed within a Christian framework as opposed to a secular godless mindset.<sup>29</sup> As appealing as this position seems it presents several problems.

First, the underlying notion is that technology may be used to reverse the effects of the Fall. An inherently utopian idea first advocated by Sir Francis Bacon in *Novum Organum* (Second Book 52). This idea certainly propelled modern utopian visions that technology can usher in a Golden Age, such as Bacon's *New Atlantis*. This notion idolizes technology even ascribing co-redemptive qualities with the work of Christ. There is nothing inherently redemptive in technological development. Spiritual maturity and greater moral responsibility do not accompany greater technological advance. This was the profound mistake of the nineteenth century to assume that human responsibility will necessarily keep pace with technological progress. At best we can argue that technology mitigates some of the effects of the Fall at a physical level in providing for the necessities of life in the harsh environment of nature. In addition, the cultural argument can only apply to believers in Christ who do not control the direction of the modern technological world.

Second, the cultural argument infers that technology was present in the Garden along with the state and other institutions necessary for maintaining civilized society. Their presence and necessity indicts humanity in sin and irresponsibility. The state and the use of technology infer imperfection in the creation and belong strictly to a postfallen world. There was no place for technology in the Garden because there was no need for it.<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, modern technology cannot be used to glorify God. This assumes that God has given humanity technology to accomplish his purposes as caretakers of the earth. This strictly apriori argument refuses to acknowledge the results modern technology brings or the genuine motivating factors in its development. Ellul pointed out that God could not be glorified through modern technology because it has not contributed to the development or care of nature but to its rape and exploitation. To argue that God wants humanity to control nature through the current means that has led to environmental destruction seems blasphemous. How can God condone modern technological development as a source for the enhancement of his creation when the same means are employed that wreak havoc on it? If God is reflected in the creation (Psalm 19; Job; Rom. 1), then as nature disappears and the world becomes more urbanized, the modern technological expansion responsible for this necessarily defaces the image of God in nature. God reveals his glory in creation not technology. Technology reflects the glory of the city of man not the city of God and finds its impetus in greed and the will to power, to the aggrandizement of mankind. Mysteries are pierced, without divine warrant, for the increase of humanity not the glory of God that is the reality of the technological

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy J. Demy, "Theology and Technology: Reality and Hope for the Third Millennium" in *Issues 2000: Evangelical Faith & Cultural Trends in the New Millennium* ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 31-52.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis" in *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* Eds. Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote (Lanham: MD: University Press of America, 1984), 123-137.

explosion. If all things are done for the glory of God (I Cor. 10: 31), then science and technology cannot be one of them.<sup>31</sup>

The failure of the cultural argument does not mean Evangelicals must reject technology or even hi-tech ways of relating theological truth. What it does mean is that Evangelicals must enter upon a critical path in relation to the technology it uses. This requires that we initiate Socratic dialogue with technology. Ask, “what is this technology capable of performing and what is it not capable of?” The creation of web sites and uses of e-mail are means of communicating faster and transmitting more information. We should not attempt to make technology perform tasks it cannot do; nor should we make claims for technology that glamorizes it and feeds its divine mystique, such as the Internet is capable of creating genuine Christian communities.<sup>32</sup> How can communities form around the principle of anonymity? If communities cannot form around other electronic devices like TV, radio or the telephone why should we think it will form around a computer? The Web may be helpful for gathering information or expediting correspondence, but Evangelicals should not lose themselves in the claims of an electronic community. Nor can Internet services replace live worship services with the excuse that this saves money, a pure example of technical thinking, believing that the church best serves people by telling them to stay home and gather around a computer screen instead of going to church. This also is the problem with video preaching. Outreaches of megachurches form groups around a videotape or live broadcast of the service instead of a live pastor.<sup>33</sup> We would not accept the notion of a virtual parent why then should we accept the idea of a virtual pastor or a virtual teacher? The technological issue cannot be settled by applying good ends to more or less neutral means. This neglects the nature of technology and suffocates any critical interaction.

Evangelicals can establish boundaries in their use of technology by discovering technology’s inherent limits and ends. The boundaries are already built into the means, but we must recognize them. In establishing boundaries we ask not only what is the nature of technology? But more importantly what is the nature of ministry and revelation? What is salvation and what is evangelism? How does replacing church attendance with an on line community lead to growth? Can an electronic means deliver personal involvement demanded in ministry? Marva Dawn notes that seeing a screen on Sunday morning may not be what people need if they see one all week long.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 215-219.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Moring and Matt Donnelly “Christians in Cyberspace” in *Christianity on Line* (September/October 1999), 11-12.

<sup>33</sup> John Walker, “Put your money into missions, not buildings” in *The Dallas/Forth Worth Heritage* (August 2001), 10B. This article reports that the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul Korea and Saddleback Valley Community Church in Southern California broadcast services over the Internet and even encourage people to stay home to watch the services; Willow Creek Community Church in Indiana also broadcasts its service over TV and video tapes its messages for small groups affiliated with the church but are not in driving distance (Verla Gillmor, “The Next 25 Years” in *Christianity Today* [November 13, 2000], 54). This goes beyond supplementing the church’s ministry with mass media outlets to replacing pastors and teachers with video. The human element appears lost in this approach because of the impossibility of questioning, interaction, disagreement, affirmation and participation.

<sup>34</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 290.

The failure to recognize boundaries does not mean we have misapplied technology but that we have overrated its potential. The ends are contained in the means. A television format will produce an entertaining and surreal gospel. This is not misapplication of technology but the out working of its inherent potential. TV cannot communicate rationally with any amount of depth. It is limited to images and pictures. This is why common wisdom teaches that “the book is always better than the movie.” Only so much can be accomplished through film and TV. In-depth analysis and critical thought must be left to the printed and spoken word. TV entertains, TV informs, and has a limited capacity to educate-do not ask it to do more; it cannot.

Much can be resolved if we simply stop ascribing divine qualities to hi-tech mediums, if we stop idolizing it, such as the belief that modern communications represent a modern day miracle, likening satellites to angels, believing TV fulfills prophecy and that satellite TV will evangelize the world, or that the electric church is a genuine Christian fellowship with its own virtual communion wafers, ministers and songs. Is this not asking too much from the very limited mediums of TV, radio and the Internet? Assigning divine significance to technology does not treat it as a simple utilitarian tool, but raises technology to messianic status. It becomes a sort of gift from the gods that demands reverence and homage.