

***TRUE TRUTH* and Why It Matters— “What are Three Enemies of Truth?” Part 5**

OUR TECHNOLOGIES: THE SECOND ENEMY OF TRUTH

Friend, do you ever feel personal angst about how your family life unfolds? I’m referring to busy schedules of work, school, play, entertainment, sports, etc. that make it impossible to have a family sit down dinner. Our priorities are challenged constantly; parents feel guilty when quality time is excised from children; spouses feel alienated when date-night is pushed aside; singles feel anxiety when the mortgage is late; students feel overwhelmed when term papers are due; etcetera, etcetera.

Responsibility is good, but it can crush us. If we don’t take the time to reevaluate the pace and clamor of life, our “train” inevitably goes off the rails destroying what we love most. Thus, taking inventory of our lives periodically is wise to do. But often the gadgets which are designed to enhance our lives keep us from a lifestyle of reflection—an indispensable quality for knowing and discovering what is true.

These technological wonders often rob us from being industrious, from living in meaningful community, from walking in holiness and from redeeming the—*time*. Too much time is wasted. Most of us can’t remember a time when the; television, radio, cell phone, car, washer, dryer, etcetera did not only exist, but also a time when these “servants” are not on. These technologies have made our lives easier in certain respects, but they’ve also deeply hurt human flourishing.

In part 5 of this series on truth, we will specifically consider the issue of *Technopoly* which explores the good and bad effects our technologies impose on most of us without our understanding. Depending on the technology, it can affect our abilities to *think critically*, they can present obstacles in our *pursuit of truth*,

they can twist our understanding of what *knowledge* is and technologies will often prevent us from living in *community*.

TECHNOPOLY: THE SURRENDER OF CULTURE TO TECHNOLOGY

Two writers that have influenced my views on culture and technology and also helped bring some clarifications to the angst these two have brought into my own life are Christian Philosopher Douglas Groothuis known for his books dealing with the New Age Movement and apologetic issues, and social critic Neil Postman, whose writings focus on education, entertainment, and the media.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

One way to define **technology** is the practical application of knowledge through scientific and mathematical principles. It is a means of accomplishing a task using technical methods, or knowledge (E.g., robotics to build cars, computer chips, etc.).ⁱ In other words technology (whether current or primitive), are tools humans create in order to fulfill any given task. These tools usually make difficult tasks more efficient and thus life is easier.

Technocracy has to do with individuals who through their knowledge and power manage a society—sometimes coercing it with its wishes—which is not always a bad thing (E.g., traffic signals keep people from crashing into each other).ⁱⁱ These are our leaders (mostly not elected) who apply their knowledge to build an industry that changes the way for example communication is achieved (E.g., Microsoft, Macintosh, etc.)

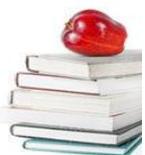
Technopoly according to Neal Postman is a state of culture and mind where technology is deified—the culture finds its satisfaction in technology and takes its orders from it.ⁱⁱⁱ Our cell phones especially come to mind, where for millions of youth and adults it's the first thing beheld when awaked and the last thing considered before going to bed. Many of us frankly feel “naked” without our “eleventh digit”—the phone. As will be shown these technologies are not neutral but affect and effect the ways we think and live.

TECHNOLOGY: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

In the introduction to his book, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Neil Postman notes that:

“...most people believe that technology is a staunch friend. The first reason, he continues, technology *is* a friend. It makes life easier, cleaner, and longer. Can anyone ask more from a friend? The second reason, because of its lengthy, intimate, and inevitable relationship with culture, technology does not invite a close examination of its own consequences. It is the kind of friend that asks for trust and obedience, which people are inclined to give because its gifts are truly bountiful...there is a dark side to this friend. Its gifts are not without a heavy cost....the accusation can be made that the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital sources of our humanity. It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living. Technology, in sum, is both friend and enemy.”^{iv}

Real changes can't be reversed. Postman shows how new technologies change the way we think and live. They change history. The invention of grades, the clock, the printing press and the television are examples where the designers of these technologies lacked the foresight to see how their genius could be used for means antithetical to their worldview.



THE (INVENTION) IMPACT OF GRADES

It wasn't until 1792 at the University of Cambridge that a tutor named William Farish suggested *grading papers*.^v While most people know very little about this man, his idea, says Postman, “that a quantitative value should be assigned to human thoughts was a major step toward constructing a mathematical concept of reality.” Postman continues, “Our psychologists, sociologists, and educators find it quite impossible to do their work without numbers.

They believe that without numbers they cannot acquire or express *authentic knowledge*.”^{vi} Authentic knowledge comes in many ways, has preceded the technology of grades, and the *grading of papers* can give one a false sense of knowledge that is antithetical to apprehending truth.

Under this understanding of authentic knowledge then some of the greatest minds this world has encountered did not have real knowledge (E.g., Moses, Jesus, Plato, Aristotle, etc.).

The grading system can be very deceptive when it comes to the true acquisition of knowledge. Just because one can answer correctly 100 questions on a test, say for U.S. Government History, it doesn't necessarily follow that they understand nor can articulate the nuances of events, their causes and what they mean.

The reason is because many of these tests are comprised of: short answer, true or false, multiple choice answers. Often, strategies and classes are taught on how to use the "process of elimination" to arrive at the correct answer. This does not demonstrate the pupil's internalization of the material, but a strategy at playing the odds.

Grades don't necessarily promote critical thinking or the true apprehension of a topic. To do that one must minimally internalize historical facts, be skilled at worldview analysis so that they can come to a conclusion about a state of affairs. After this, I think one can reasonably claim, "I know U.S. History". Thus, grades can masquerade as a possessor of true knowledge, all the while developing another "educated fool".



THE IMPACT OF THE CLOCK

Most of us don't wear watches anymore, we use our cell phones. There was a time when morning came, the alarm clock went off with that blaring sound; "it's time to get up!" The ability to tell time with a device also changed history forever.

The clock had its origin in the Benedictine monasteries of the 12th and 13th century A.D.^{vii} Their purpose for invention was to regulate more precisely the routines in the monastery, chief among which was the seven times of daily devotion.^{viii} Scripture commands believers to redeem the time because the days are evil. That is, don't waste it, but make full use of the time at hand for the glory of God and his kingdom.

What the monks did not foresee was how the clock would be used not just to tell time, but to control human action which eventually emerged in the life of

the laborer and merchant.^{ix} Lewis Mumford (1895-1990), an American historian, sociologist, philosopher of technology, and literary critic has said:

“The mechanical clock made possible the idea of regular production, regular working hours and a standardized product.”^x

Postman concludes that it’s the mechanical clock that made capitalism possible (E.g., the Stock Market Index). When it comes to the paradox of this invention and its purpose, he says that:

“...the surprise, and the wonder are that the clock was invented by men who wanted to devote themselves more rigorously to God; it ended as the technology of greatest use to men who wished to devote themselves to the accumulation of money. In the eternal struggle between God and Mammon, the clock quite unpredictably favored the latter.”^{xi}

All good gifts have a dark side, depending on how they are used. But how can the clock become an enemy of truth? It can distract our focus in church—“the world cup is in ten minutes and the preacher is not even half way through his message”. This distraction of “time” just robbed you of *apprehending* the critical distinction, just explained from the minister, between the meaning of “justification and sanctification”^{xii}. A distinction too many believers confuse that can cause either tremendous anguish or a false sense of security. That’s no small deal.



THE IMPACT OF THE PRINTING PRESS

German Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with replaceable/moveable wooden or metal letters in 1436 (completed by 1440). It is this method of printing which can be credited not only for revolution in the production of books, but also for fostering rapid development in the sciences, arts and religion through the transmission of texts.^{xiii}

He “was a devout Catholic who would have been horrified”, opines Postman, “to hear that accursed heretic Luther describe printing as ‘God’s highest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward’.”^{xiv}

The printing press, arguably, was the key technology making the ideas of the Reformers spread rapidly. The Bible was now in everyone’s home...this changed everything. Postman holds that, this technology; “in the struggle

between unity and diversity of religious belief, the press favored the latter, and we can assume that this possibility never occurred to Gutenberg.”^{xv}

Postman points out, that old technologies compete with new ones and it’s a fierce battle. These compete, he says, “for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their world-view.”^{xvi} The medium is at war with what it replaces because it is not neutral in ideology—it has a bias. He notes that,

“It’s not merely a matter of tool against tool—...the photograph attacking the art of painting, television attacking the printed word. When media make war against each other, it is a case of world-views in collision”^{xvii}

The printing press definitely caused a monumental stir within the Church, it helped division obtain and continues unto today. This is evident in the area of information glut where junk mail, spam, tweets, Face Book and the like are available to us today.

When too much information comes our way, the mind does not have the capacity to decipher much less analyze the content. Often when confronted with this barrage of “information glut” we either press the delete button or throw the content into the trash. But not all information is “spam” material and we must beware of treating good information as such.



THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION

What happens when a child brought up on television comes to the class room and is required to understand the written page? The book and the printed page, according to Postman emphasizes: “logic, sequence, history, exposition, objectivity, detachment, and discipline.”^{xviii} But if children can’t read, won’t read or have difficulty following a sustained thought, how will they be able to get at what’s true, good, and beautiful?

Reading is an active event and while not every book is created equal (e.g., Dr. Seuss *Cat in the Hat* vs. Plato’s *Republic*) there’s nonetheless the engagement of the soul with the “word”, but not for many of our children.

What results in the classroom is that children either won’t or can’t read, they can’t logically organize thoughts on the page, they can’t listen to oral explanation or lectures for more than several minutes.^{xix} They’re not stupid, but

they are failures, opines Postman, “because there is a media war going on, and they are on the wrong side”.^{xx}

Where are the parents monitoring this horrible erosion of the mind? They are often sitting beside their children being “disciplined” as well. Technologies have their strengths and weaknesses, the changes through invention they bring is a mixed bag—some good, some bad—and often the geniuses have no foresight as to what entails their inventions.

We’ve considered the two-edged sword of technologies like grades, the clock, the printing press and the television. Now we’ll peer into the meaning of Technopoly.

TECHNOPOLY FURTHER CONSIDERED

As stated earlier, according to Postman, Technopoly is a state of culture and mind where technology is deified; the culture finds its satisfaction in technology and takes its orders from it.^{xxi} There’s the attitude of “out with the old, in with the new”, there’s a replacement of the transcendent, with the temporal, the humane with the machine, and sanity is exchanged for madness.

WHAT ABOUT TECHNOPOLY & COMMERCE?

What kind of change has resulted from the technologies we’ve already considered? Because of the printing press, and the consequent dissemination of information, Postman in his chapter *From Technocracy to Technopoly* (pages 40-55) notes how these ideas impacted the way we do commerce. For example Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) “justified the transformation from small-scale, personalized, skilled labor to large scale, impersonal, mechanized production”.^{xxii}

Shortly thereafter, a barber by trade, Richard Arkwright developed the first *factory system* for his cotton spinning mills, where in a hostile environment void of government controls was fueled by utilitarianism that was undaunted by danger or financial risk.^{xxiii}

The point here is that a frenzy of invention marked the 19th century where the *how* of invention muted the *why*. People became mere *means to an end*, the new *royalty* was not inherited but earned through “guts and smarts”, the *speed of*

life trumped the *contemplative life*, and the old ways were seen as *obsolete*—kept private.^{xxiv}

The dehumanization of individuals can swallow us up in the pursuit of riches and glory. The tools we make have consequences and depending on how they are used people will both benefit and suffer as a result.

“WHAT ABOUT TECHNOLOGY & INFORMATION “GLUT”?

I’ve briefly mentioned information glut, but “indulge” me. Information “glut”, describes the state of affairs where a barrage of information we usually *don’t need nor understand nor have time to analyze, comes to us unsolicited*. This is known as junk mail, spam, etc. But again, this “glut” has a long history which began through the circulation of: books, newspapers, pamphlets—made possible through the *printing press*.

It was from here that most sectors of knowledge were available to the literate masses so that knowledge on (i.e., Astronomy, anatomy, physics, medicine, machines and agriculture) was possible.^{xxv} In fact, it’s the means through which the USA nation was birthed. Postman says:

“...technocratic-typographic America was the first nation ever to be *argued* into existence in *print*. Paine’s *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*, Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence and the *Federalist Papers* were written and printed efforts to make the American experiment appear reasonable to the people....”^{xxvi}

So the revolutionary war against England resulted from the printed page’s help. Ideas have monumental consequences and the tools made to propagate them should not be underestimated.

Another way the information “glut” got out and sped up, was through *the telegraph*. Toward the mid-19th century trains went about 35 miles an hour and so did the spread of information. The telegraph removed that barrier of time and space, such that *transportation* and *communication* were not attached to each other.^{xxvii} This resulted in getting news that was not local.

For the first time, information not immediately pertinent to a local place for solving particular problems was made available. Sound familiar? Moreover through the merging of the papers with the telegraph and the photograph, language according to Postman, was replaced with *the image* as the primary means, of “construing, understanding, and testing reality.”^{xxviii}

This phenomenon helped mold and shape the way information comes to a society. For the most part, this information is useless because it lacks; *context, historical coherence, is purposeless and person-less.*

Do we need most of the information available to us? This question should be at the forefront of the thoughtful, contemplative person. For the Christian who wants to live for Christ and make a difference for the kingdom this matters. For the non-believing skeptic this too should concern you.

Who's really in charge of your life? Is the onslaught of: junk-mail, e-mails, tweets, Instagrams, vines, FB posts, etc. consuming your time? The old adage is true "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail". You and I have a choice, what will our response be?

MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This issue is a big deal and Neal Postman has so much to say I commend the book to you along with Douglas Groothuis' book; *"The Soul in Cyberspace"* to strengthen and think more deeply about this subject. I have a few concluding remarks:

First, concerning ***the media and "Christian Community"*** Christians need to wake up and realize that they've not gone to church if they've heard a podcast, or watched a preacher on television or partook through internet streaming. I understand that people sometimes are shut-in because of physical ailments and other difficulties that prevent them from gathering with the people of God weekly. But if you are healthy, you have no excuse (E.g., Heb.10:25).

Second, concerning ***the internet and "Social Media"*** people say things on Twitter and Facebook they never would face to face because often it's uncivil. When using these technologies make courtesy the goal, not vitriol because through the latter we make civilization less civil and thus less safe. Moreover, if we don't control our time on these sites these machines will be in control of us. That's an unnerving thought.

Third, concerning ***the I-phone and "Human interaction"*** when for example you're at a sit down dinner, put the phone away so that you are not tempted to look at or be interrupted by beholding this technology. This is becoming increasingly epidemic (for both young and old) and the human experience is

becoming more isolated within a crowd. How ironic that a device designed for human communication can actually hinder it.

There's much coming at us, and it would be wise to take personal inventory and consider how our technologies (those mentioned or not) are potential enemies of truth in our lives. We only have one life before entering eternity, what will we do with it?

ⁱ Langenscheidt's Pocket *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, © 1997 Merriam-Webster

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pg. 71, © 1992 by Neil Postman, a Borzoi Book, Published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

^{iv} Ibid., Pg. xii,

^v Ibid., Pgs.12-13

^{vi} Ibid., Pg.13

^{vii} John H. Lienhard, THE FIRST MECHANICAL CLOCK, <http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi1506.htm> (accessed 2/20/2014), and Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pgs.14-15

^{viii} Postman, Pg.14

^{ix} Ibid., 14-15

^x Quoted from Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pg.15

^{xi} Ibid., Pg.15

^{xii} The term **justification** in Scripture is a legal term that describes the believers standing before God as "those who are declared to be righteous" by God (Rom.3:20, 26, 28; 5:1) alone and thus are not guilty before Him because they trust God's provision of rescue from wrath through Jesus Christ alone. **God alone does this**. The term **sanctification** in the Bible speaks of the progressive **work of God and man** in the lives of those who are justified where one is increasingly freer from sin and is becoming more like Jesus (Rom.8:28-29). Jesus said that a tree is known by its fruit, justification is the tree that produces a sanctified life in the real believer—a life that's God-centered. This distinction is important because many falsely believe that they are not real converts, and many falsely think they are real converts. **For a deeper treatment see:** Elwell, Walter A., Editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1984 by Baker Books), Erickson, Millard J., *Christian Theology: Unabridged One Volume Edition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1983, 1984, 1985 by Baker Book House), and Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994 by Wayne Grudem)

^{xiii} By [Mary Bellis](http://inventors.about.com/od/gstartinventors/a/Gutenberg.htm), Johannes Gutenberg and the Printing Press, <http://inventors.about.com/od/gstartinventors/a/Gutenberg.htm> (accessed 2/20/2014)

^{xiv} *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pg.15

^{xv} Ibid., Pg.15

^{xvi} Ibid., Pg.16

^{xvii} Ibid., Pg.16

^{xviii} Ibid., Pg.16

^{xix} *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pgs.16-17

^{xx} Ibid., Pg.17

^{xxi} *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pg.71

^{xxii} Ibid., Pgs.40-41

^{xxiii} Ibid., Pg.41

^{xxiv} Ibid., Pgs.42-52

^{xxv} Ibid., Pgs.64-65

^{xxvi} Ibid., Pg.66

^{xxvii} Ibid., Pg.67

^{xxviii} Ibid., Pg.68