

What Does All *This* (Technology) Mean for the Church?

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ABSTRACT: There is an urgent need for a conversation in the church and in the theological academy regarding the scope and nature of the digital revolution and its implications for theological education and the practice of ministry. The difficulty is that this much needed conversation has proceeded erratically in fits and starts, frequently resembling a political campaign rather than a reasoned and informed dialogue. The author proposes ways that enthusiastic early adopters of technology and skeptical resisters of new technologies can join in joyful theological discourse that will enhance both theological education and the practice of ministry. The alternative of not engaging in this conversation imperils both and moves the church and its educational institutions further toward irrelevancy in a digital world.

Introduction

The task of making a coherent statement about the meaning of technology for the church reminds me of a ten-page pamphlet I saw a number of years ago. The title of the pamphlet was *All About The Bible*. It was an ambitious, if quixotic attempt at an easy introduction to the biblical drama. Likewise, the scope of new technologies that have emerged in the past decade and what technology means for the church (and the theological academy) could easily fill three or four volumes. A brief essay cannot possibly address the wide reaches of the topic. What we plan to accomplish in this short treatise is to point to overarching themes and issues in technology that have an impact on the church and its institutions.

A second stipulation before we join the discussion is that this is not a paper about how to do PowerPoint¹ presentations or use film clips in education and worship. Most congregations have high school or junior high young people who can do all the “PowerPointing” or video editing and composition they need. This paper is also not about why everyone should use PowerPoint and film clips so that the pagan masses will come streaming into our nations’ churches and synagogues. It is, however, about learning to read our culture, learning its language and media, and understanding the depth of change that has been launched by the digital revolution. Just as the term *Silicon Valley* conjures up impressions and images, so also the term *technology* used in a theological or ecclesiological context brings perceptions and even prejudices to

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mind. This paper is also intended to serve as a kind of tool by which we can reflect on who we are and what we are about in a digital world.

If one were to arbitrarily pick a time or event that introduced us to a new and different world, an excellent candidate would be the democratization of Internet technology. On October 13, 1994, Netscape offered its beta version of its Internet browser available for free download. Thousands of people took advantage of the offer, and the world changed on that day without most of the world realizing it. The Pew Internet and American Life Project in its report, *Internet: The Mainstreaming of Online Life*, declared, "A decade later the internet has reached into—and in some cases, reshaped—just about every important realm of modern life. It has changed the way we inform ourselves, amuse ourselves, care for ourselves, educate ourselves, work, shop, bank, pray, and stay in touch."² As Internet use exploded both in the United States and around the world, some proclaimed it as a wonderful gift of God while others felt it was obviously from the pits of hell. Yet the days when parents asked me as their pastor, "Do you think we should let our children use the Internet," are gone. All students now have access to the Internet—if not at home, then at school, the library, or a friend's house. There is no longer a question as to *whether* we will use it, but *how* it will be used.

The Internet is the favorite child of the digital revolution, but it is just one of myriad digital technologies that have changed our world. The generation of young people who cannot remember a world without CDs, video games, cell phones, and Star Wars have been called "Net Gen" (Internet generation) and "D-Gen" (digital generation) among other things. No matter what we call the emerging population of our churches and theological seminaries, pastors and theologians must necessarily engage the question, "What does all of this mean for the church?" Our students have changed, the culture has changed, the world has changed, and sadly, the church and its academic institutions have for the most part been very slow to change. It is my sincere hope that we as pastors and theologians can enjoin the conversation with a view to furthering our missiological imperative to bring good news to a broken world. We can no longer afford to live in academic or ecclesiological ghettos. *Church* and *academy* are partners in mission. The one cannot be healthy without the other and both are servants of God.

Before setting three critical questions before us, I would like to say a brief word about what I mean by joyful theological discourse. Some years ago, I needed to address a major problem that was causing division in the congregation I was serving. The evening for our conversation about the problem arrived and the church council began with the obligatory opening prayer. I began the meeting by asking that we take the time to hear one another and hopefully begin to bring some healing to our life together, and said, "We have a significant problem in our congregation and we need to talk about it." A man who was chair of our board of trustees banged his fist on the table, yelled, "I've heard

enough!” and stormed out of the meeting. This would not be what I call “joyful theological discourse.” The man was reacting to the voices of prejudice and presupposition in his own head and had not actually heard anything at all. Joyful theological discourse has a spirit of joy deriving from the fact that the discourse is related to the God who reigns and who graciously gives us a part in the building of a just and righteous world and thereby invites us to fully engage one another in respectful listening, honest sharing of our deepest convictions and commitment to work toward mutual understanding and hopeful action. Unlike my storming-out-of-the-meeting friend, we in the pastoral and theological enterprise would never act in such a way—would we?

For the content of this conversation, I propose that there are three critical questions that need to be addressed: (1) What is the nature of the digital revolution? (2) What does this revolution mean for the church? and (3) What does this revolution mean for theological education?

What is the nature of the digital revolution?

The first question that begs asking concerns the depth of change we are talking about. What is the “this” in the question of what technology means for the church. Is this truly a revolution that parallels the industrial revolution in any sense? Are we talking about changes so pervasive that they have an impact on the educational, political, economic, and social dimensions of living? Perhaps most importantly—is there any possibility that these changes are temporary blips on the radar screen, or is this genuinely a sea change?

If I can be so audacious as to answer my own question, in the interests of advancing the discourse, I would suggest a clear “Yes!” Yes, the digital revolution has changed our lives and our world in a way that calls us to seriously re-envision our work as pastors and theologians. The limitations of time and space necessitate brevity, but I would like to suggest a few ways that our world has been irrevocably changed.

The world has changed

The notion of our world as a global village has reached a new and more mature, if dangerous, stage. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, first radio, then television (with on-location reporting) brought a sense of immediacy to world events. The difference between the old news reels of battles and bombings at the local movie theater during the Second World War and the daily scenes of the Vietnam War in our living rooms brought about a dramatic shrinking of the world. We were no longer observing a report; we were witnessing the news. However, the reporting was controlled by governments and media monopolies. The Internet has changed all this. Almost everyone in the civilized world has access to instant publishing via the Internet. Digital files of human beings being beheaded are loaded on servers to be

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accessed by anyone who has a connection to the Internet where they can view the carnage. (Yes, sometimes the Internet delivers material from the pits of hell.) On the other hand, there are countless stories of how people have used the Internet to search for life-saving information. The problem with the Internet is that it can be a vehicle for evil. The promise of the Internet is that it can be a vehicle for good.

The power of the information superhighway is just one example of how the digital revolution has changed the world. A major shift has taken place in that print media has given way to visual media as a primary means for the delivery of information. This digital, visual media has made possible a 24/7 world. You can get your headlines, entertainment, and financial information needs at one o'clock in the morning, when you arrive home from work, or when you rise for the day.

The technology that has made Internet technology possible has also had a dramatic impact on economic structures. The ubiquity of Internet technology makes the issue of time and space a moot point for many service industries. In the beginning of the personal computer age, I can recall sitting on hold for hours waiting for tech support to help me through difficulties with my computer. Recently all my calls for support have been answered within minutes. It is clear that my call is being answered somewhere in India or the Far East. I am concerned about the American economy and the outsourcing of American jobs, but I am torn by gratitude for the feature of a shrinking global village that frees me from the burdens technology can bring.

The issue of data theft points to a major shift in how our personal worlds have changed. Data theft is a growing national concern and all of us are potential victims. Armed robbers are no longer gun-toting thieves but bandits of cyberspace who are armed with computers and Internet access. Internet security is a multimillion-dollar business, and the new breed of robbers (hackers) keeps this industry busy, not to mention wealthy. In one comparatively minor incident, ChoicePoint, a broker of personal information to corporate clients, sold sensitive financial information about 145,000 consumers to criminals bent on fraud. In what may qualify as a finalist in an "understatement of the year award," the company Web site told worried consumers, "At ChoicePoint, we recognize that in an increasingly risky world, information and technology can be used to help create a safer, more secure society. At the same time, we appreciate that there can be negative consequences to the improper access to personally identifiable data."³

Because of the growing use of networks, government database records, and security cameras, personal privacy is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. A company named ABIKA can produce a complete background and psychological profile on any person in the country for a fee. This report would be available on a confidential basis to anyone who pays the fee. There is no background check on the person ordering the information. For example, I ordered a report

on someone who attended the technology conference sponsored by The Association of Theological Schools in Chicago in the summer of 2005. All I had to do was go to ABIKA's Web site (www.abika.com), pay the fee, and receive the report. This particular report contained names, all previous addresses, an unpaid parking ticket, a court record, an account of a child who had gotten into trouble, and a psychological profile. (Just to allay any fears, I ordered the report on myself.) Anyone can order a report on anyone else.

As I reflect on how the world has changed and how some of that change troubles me, I have gradually come to the realization that my musings are those of a child who has lived in a world during its emergence from the Industrial Revolution. My grandparents were teens in the "Roaring Twenties." My concept of change and of technology has grown gradually and matured over decades. I worked for IBM when the most powerful computer to date took up a whole room and boasted a whopping 64K memory. My daughter's sparkly, flashing earrings with a microchip have more memory. It is as though Silicon Valley, the microchip, video games, and the whole infrastructure of teenage living hit a time warp somewhere in the last ten years and my industrial-age, analog, linear, print-oriented brain still struggles to keep up with the pace of change.

Technology for most of us has been something apart from and over against us. It is observable as though it were this "thing"—like a fish we can observe swimming about in an aquarium. We can get close to the aquarium and examine intently, or we can walk away and leave the aquarium behind. It is becoming clear that we are no longer observers of technology—we are *in the aquarium*. Many of us are struggling with the digital world, complaining about it, uncomfortable with it, or gradually learning to "breathe" (use our gills) in this new environment. There is, however, a growing number of persons in our culture who have grown up in the aquarium and have never breathed with anything *but* their gills. There is a significant discontinuity between the generation that has grown up with the rapid arrival and dissemination of digital technology and those of us who have gradually and often grudgingly found ourselves having to join the swim. Whether we like it or not, our financial, medical, governmental, and personal information is swimming around out there in bits and bytes. So, yes Virginia, this is a sea change.

Students have changed

I know technology well. My daughter, on the other hand, doesn't know it so much as she lives it, and her older peers are beginning to show up in our seminary. An example of how my daughter and I work and learn differently will help to us to understand the major shift that has taken place. A few months ago, after much discussion of what would be acceptable cartridges for a Game Boy and what kind of time would be allowed for "gaming," my daughter was allowed to make the purchase and was soon totally engrossed in a game. (She

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was, by the way, a bit offended that Nintendo does not have a “Game Girl” and has written a letter to express her displeasure.) After playing with her game for about ten minutes she was expressing frustration and impatience. “What’s wrong,” I asked her. “I can’t get this thing past level two—aarrghh!” she said. Personally I couldn’t figure out in ten minutes how all the buttons are supposed to move. I got the directions, found the address of an online site that had hints and tips for the game, and offered to go online with her and find them. She declined, preferring her frustrated storming of the game levels to the shortcut of reading how to do it. I wanted to show her how things work in the world of learning, so I went online, found the instructions, and voila—discovered the trick to getting past level two. I printed out the sheet, went back to my still-frustrated daughter, and with a bit of a smirk said, “Here, I have the way to get past level two.” She just rolled her eyes and said, “I’m working on level nine!”

I had read theory and propositions that there has actually been a shift in how digital age young people learn, but experiencing this personally was disconcerting. She has access to and has developed skills and intuitive processes that are born of her image-driven, digital culture while my preference is still for the printed word and linear thinking.

I was relieved to find James Paul Gee’s book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*.⁴ Gee, who is professor of reading in the department of curriculum and instruction in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, tells about the time he was going to coach his then four-year-old son with a video game as the boy played. He found the game rather challenging even for an adult and reports that his son called what he was doing, “. . . bossing him around” and “telling him what to do when he could figure it out for himself.”⁵ Gee concludes that the incredibly challenging world of video games has important clues for the learning and literacy of the digital generation. A review of the book on Amazon.com is revealing. It reads in part,

I read through the entire book today, enthralled that an academic of the same generation as my parents finally “got” what made videogames (focusing on action, adventure, and rpg [role play games]) a fascinating medium both for players and creators. Furthermore, the author was then able to apply this knowledge to his area of expertise, educational theory. I knew videogames could be art, I knew that as simulations they could be political, but I never quite saw what seems to me perfectly obvious now, that good videogames of almost every variety teach us how to think and learn, and that they do this much better than our school system.⁶

Gee is not alone. A *Wired* magazine article in May of 2005 raised the question of why IQ scores of students are rising, “Despite concerns about the dumbing-down of society—the failing schools, the garbage on TV, the decline

of reading—the overall population was getting smarter.”⁷ The article suggested that skills and concepts learned in mastering video games may be a contributing factor.

Some of the most provocative work being done in the area of learning and video game development is that of Marc Prensky. In his article “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” Prensky uses the term *digital native* to describe what we have called digital gen. *Digital immigrants*, on the other hand, are people who have to learn the language of the digital culture—learn to “swim in the aquarium.” People like me are able to learn to speak the language of the digital culture, but we “speak with an accent.” Prensky states, “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.”⁸ In part two of his article, he documents significant research that demonstrates the fact that digital gaming is a significant teaching tool and that digital natives actually process information and learn differently than do digital immigrants.⁹

I was an enthusiastic and early adopter of new technologies and an early professional in a mainframe world. But I am not a digital native. I envisioned computers of the future as bigger, better, and faster. Our nation would have huge buildings filled with them. The American industrial engine would expand like the universe. I did not have a clue that computers would wind up being tiny little things that I could carry with me. My generation did not prepare for the digital revolution. We lived on what I call the “Flintstones to Jetsons’ continuum.” In this view, the Flintstones are the Stone Age and the Jetsons are the future. Progress would develop along the bigger, better, faster model. Instead of a wagon with stone wheels and a wooden axel, we would move first to something like a ’57 Chevy and then to a ’57 Chevy that we could fly to work through the sky instead of driving it along a highway.

As a pastor and as a theological educator, I am convinced that we lag behind in our understanding of the digital culture and its impact on ministry and theological education. It is critical that we address the issues—join in joyful theological discourse—of “What does this revolution mean for the church” and “What does this revolution mean for theological education?”

What does this revolution mean for the church?

A diverse group of clergy began a Doctor of Ministry program at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in May of 2005. This cohort will explore and work with the theme “Revitalizing the Church in a Digital World” over the next three years. Prior to the initial residency, the members of the group participated in an online discussion of a version of Marc Prensky’s question about whether today’s students are the people our educational institutions were designed to teach. “Are today’s younger folk—or even folks in our culture—the people our churches were designed to reach?” An absolute

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majority of respondents said in one fashion or another that the church is ill-equipped to reach our unchurched culture. One student wrote, "I think there is a fundamental breakdown of the language being spoken by the church and the language spoken by those outside the church. My sermon today, as a matter of fact, dealt with this very subject based upon Paul's missionary work in Athens. Paul went around Athens and found things for his message that connected with his hearers. Are we doing that today (i.e., learning the language and/or culture of those we're trying to reach with the Gospel), or are we expecting them to understand the language of the church when (or if) they come in the door? I think it's more often the latter when we look at many traditional churches.

One of the most important consequences of the digital revolution for the church is a growing awareness that we are not equipped for the missiological imperative of reaching this generation. This does not need to be. *Not* being equipped is now a choice and no longer the inevitable consequence of a lack of technological tools or training. There are myriad new tools available that can enhance ministry when used appropriately. There is a learning curve that will be encountered, but the results can change ministries in a positive way.

One of our DMin students is a judicatory executive. She used our DMin group's online discussion to share a story of how one young pastor used a new technology in vital pastoral ministry.

A couple of years ago, one of our very few, young (late 20s) Gen X pastors here in the presbytery received a phone call when he had barely begun his ministry. A 15-year-old in his congregation had said goodbye to his mom and dad, left for school, and blown the back of his head out with a 12-gauge shotgun. [The pastor] needed some resources on teen suicide, and he needed them fast. I was out of town and my associate in the office, the Executive Presbyter, wasn't even dressed yet but sent him a list of links to a short list of Web resources.

The pastor, Jeff, spent the day with the family, the funeral director, and school officials. (It was the third youth suicide in a few months.) That night, word spread like wildfire among the youth that Rev. Jeff was on ICQ (their digital native instant messaging client) and had opened a chat room. More than 100 youth joined in the grieving ("Is it our fault?") and discussion ("How can God let this happen?"). Far more effective ministry happened than if he had held a face-to-face meeting. I think Jeff is probably the only one of our clergy that this would even have occurred to. The amazing thing is, it never occurred to him NOT to look for the youth on ICQ.

New technologies offer the potential of ministry, enhancing possibilities in every area of congregational life from administration and education to worship

and outreach. Digital generation seekers will visit congregations on the Internet before they will visit in person. The Pew Internet and American Life Project mentioned earlier reported that 82 million Americans have used the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes, and 48 million have used the Internet for religious or spiritual discussion.¹⁰ All clergy who are going to lead congregations in our culture will need to develop digital literacy to become aware of the technological tools that are available, to know how to appropriately use these tools in ministry, and to know how to provide leadership in the integration of ministry and technology. A basic bibliography of essential reading for the development of minimum skills is given at the end of this article.

What does this revolution mean for theological education?

In 1999 I came to the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary to administer and develop a grant from Lilly Endowment to offer theological education using technological means to lay persons who were preparing to serve the church as lay pastors. It is an amazing thing to realize that the entire modern history of distance education using Internet technologies has developed from that beginning until the present time. No one could have foreseen the amazing technological changes that have been made widely available to educational institutions for the delivery of Web-based education. Although there has been some debate about the credibility of online education in the past, it is clear that the field has matured in a pedagogically healthy way. There is no longer a valid debate about whether online delivery of education is in our future. The verdict is in: distance education via Internet-based technologies has come of age. The genie is out of the bottle, and the question is no longer *whether* but *how* that education will be delivered with integrity and positive learning outcomes.

But what of theological education? Are we somehow an exception to the trend? The train that has perhaps not yet left the station? What does the whole digital revolution and attendant revolution in education mean for those of us who are in the business of preparing persons for congregational ministry?

My background is primarily in parish ministry. I will have been ordained for forty-three years when this article is published. Six of those years have been spent in the theological academy and thirty-six have been in parish ministry and specialized ministries such as pastoral counseling and hospital chaplaincy. I intentionally chose the pathway of a practitioner rather than as an academic. Yet, after these years in the seminary working with students who are bound for ministry in a local congregation, I am concerned that we in the theological academy may not be properly equipping our students to *equip the saints for the work of ministry*. Here are some of the reasons I believe we need to take a new look at theological education in a digital world.

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The digital revolution has made available a theological dialogue that has not been possible until this generation. The *Journal of Christian Education and Information Technology* is published by the Korea Society for Christian Education and Information Technology (KSCEIT). At the fifth international conference of KSCEIT, Dr. Un Na Hur said, "As one of the most competent IT nations in the world, Korea can and should take the lead in evangelizing the world."¹¹ The shrinking global village that has been made even smaller by digital technology makes international theological dialogue possible in a way that has not been available until the present moment. If we are truly concerned for the religious and spiritual underpinnings of a just world, we will make use of digital technology to facilitate intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Turning to the immediate need of most of our students, the obvious, and perhaps safest place to begin an exploration of how all of *this* relates to theological education is the missional imperative of local congregations. If we are to faithfully prepare practitioners of congregational ministry, then it is necessary to equip them to understand the nature of the digital revolution. Additionally, it is important to enable pastors to give leadership and manage the appropriate use of new technologies in ministry. It is no longer essential (it never should have been) for pastors to learn all the specific skills that the use of technologies will require. In fact, it may be better for the pastor if he or she does *not* know all about PowerPoint, Web page design, and video editing. Nevertheless, a knowledge of how technologies can enhance ministry in the local church is critical.

Increasing numbers of students at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary are asking for courses that will prepare them for ministry in a digital world. Six years ago, when I first came to the seminary, students would ask for training in how to create a Web page or put together a PowerPoint presentation. As digital technologies expanded and became more sophisticated, students began to ask for training in video editing and more advanced resources. A Certificate in Ministry and Technology program was put in place to offer advanced training for the use of technologies in ministry and approximately thirty practicing pastors and judicatory leaders have taken advantage of the program. Students' requests have begun to shift, however, as they discern the depth of technological change in our culture. They are shifting from practical skill-oriented courses to opportunities for developing a broad-based understanding of the digital culture and how technology has changed our world.

A pastor who does not know what an iPod is and why it is essential gear for young people is akin to a pastor in the '70s who did not know that a Yellow Submarine was a Beatles' song, a youth culture movement and not an underwater vessel. In my opinion, a youth pastor who does not understand the iPod and its impact on the entertainment industry should probably find a new field of work.

One of my students is a pastor of a small congregation in a small, rural Iowa town. He came to take an independent study course to learn more about Internet technology. He is pastor to a young farmer who was featured in *Time* magazine as one of the most high-tech farmers in the world. He travels around the world giving presentations about his Iowa farm and how technology has had an impact on every phase of farming. The central issue for the student pastor was that he needed to understand more about the changing world that will be his context for ministry.

During a curriculum revision that took place at our seminary during the period of 2000–2003, a proposal was made to have a required 3-credit course on technology. That requirement was eventually dropped as curricular demands leaned more heavily toward the traditional disciplines. I acquiesced in that decision. The next time we visit the curriculum, I will be inclined to press hard for inclusion of a course in understanding the nature of the digital world and the image and media-driven underpinnings of the culture. The question for our curriculum is where this whole field of ministry and technology should live within the disciplines. The purpose of the old audiovisual subsection of the Christian education department or practical ministry division was to teach people how to use things like the old film strip projectors, film projectors before the self-threading Bell and Howell, and other AV aids. A couple of days in the Introduction to Christian Education elective course would do it for many. For a time, the use of PowerPoint and other high-tech tools made my department a kind of audiovisual department on steroids. It was bigger, better, faster, and more powerful media resources. It has become clear, however, that the digital revolution is about much more than super audiovisuals, and students are increasingly understanding that they need adequate preparation for ministry in a radically different world than the one most of us left seminary to serve.

A more difficult and, for many of us, more threatening area that sorely needs attention in the academy is the place of technology across the theological curriculum. Clearly the students who come to us will increasingly be children of the digital revolution. If we are to converse with them and they with their parishioners, we (and they) need to speak the language of the realm. To ignore the ways in which their learning modes have changed and the potential of new learning strategies, is to fail in our task of preparing competent practitioners of ministry. Yet, this whole digital revolution is difficult for many of us. Arthur C. Clarke, English physicist and science fiction author wrote in his *Profiles of the Future*, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”¹² A colleague at my seminary confided to me that, “The further technology gets away from common knowledge, the more mysterious it becomes.” We might call this the “Harry Potter factor.” People who love Harry Potter love Harry Potter. People who “don’t get it” or simply don’t care for “all that stuff” just don’t “do” Harry Potter. The problem is that we do not have the choice of ignoring the digital revolution. Or better—we *do* have the choice of ignoring the digital revolution—it is just that we *dare* not ignore it if we hope to be relevant to the missiological imperative that is the basic premise of our task.

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Our motto at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary is, "Preparing Faithful, Competent Pastors." Most of us aspire to such a mission. We are unable to accomplish our mission if we do not address the issue of technology across the curriculum.

Conclusion

It is very clear that the world has been irrevocably changed by the technological revolution. It is also evident that the church and its institutions have lagged behind in understanding and responding to the shift that has taken place and in equipping students and teachers to live and work in this new world. The conversation about these things that we are having in recent days, both at our summer conference and in the wider church and theological community, is among the more hopeful movements that has taken place in recent times.

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ENDNOTES

1. Microsoft PowerPoint is either a registered trademark or trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.
2. Pew Internet and American Life Project, "Internet: The Mainstreaming of Online Life," *Trends 2005: A Look at Changes in American Life*, chap. 4, 57–69, http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/Internet_Status_2005.pdf
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4. James Paul Gee, "What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
5. *Ibid.*, 5.
6. Amazon.com, http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1403961697/ref=sib_rdr_dp/104-7581642-3867943 (accessed May 7, 2005).
7. Steven Johnson, "Dome Improvement," *Wired* (May 2005): 100.
8. Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" (2001), <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing> (accessed May 7, 2005).
9. Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part II: Do They Really Think Differently?" (2001), <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing> (accessed May 7, 2005).
10. Pew Internet and American Life Project, 58.

11. "Celebration Address," *Journal of Christian Education and Information Technology* 6 (October 2004): 12.
12. See Clarke's Third Law in Arthur Charles Clarke, *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

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What Does All *This* (Technology) Mean for the Church?—A Response

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My initial response to John Jewell's paper is one of appreciation for his outlining three central questions the church and academy must begin to address if we are to effectively communicate in the languages so fluently spoken by those who use digital media on a regular basis. For nearly one hundred years, Protestant and Catholic clergy have seen the development of technologies that brought us movies, radio, sound recordings, and television and have asked the church to address these developments theologically and practically. This is to say that with a few exceptions, churches and seminaries have failed to address what Catholic theologians named thirty and more years ago: that a whole generation has been raised with a new "mother tongue" of audiovisual language.

A second response I have to Jewell's paper is a desire to move the conversation along. What Jewell calls a "digital revolution" is what happens when computer systems are used to produce, edit, store, present, and distribute texts, still images, animation, motion pictures, sound, and other data. It is important for us to know that human brains have been fashioned by audiovisual language of film, television, photography, musical recordings, and art well before computers made it easier to copy, store, manipulate, and distribute these materials.

If these languages are becoming a mother tongue, and if Jewell is correct that we must begin a theological discourse about this, what language will be used? The church has been a speaking-listening (oral) culture completely reliant on the technologies of print for a long time, and yet these last one hundred years have begun to produce people fluent in electronic and digital languages. What shape does theological discourse take if it honors this multilingual situation?

Among the very important theological questions that can be illustrated by using electronic and digital sources are the questions of "what is real?" and "what is true?"

When an image can be manipulated by putting an image of a person into a picture who had not been present for the taking of the photograph, is it real? Is it ethical to do this? Another question has to do with the vast amounts of printed information available on the Internet. What is "true" and how do we know we can trust what we read? How do we help those who regularly use digital media to evaluate, criticize, and discuss what they see and hear?

What does the digital revolution mean for the church? Before answering that, we need to parse out what this digital revolution provides us. A first reality of the digital age is online information. As mentioned earlier, the Internet offers print resources so plentiful that libraries are starting to reduce their printed holdings and making room for more computers. Serious researchers know the ease and speed of online research. Few would argue that we are “dumber” because of the plethora of print resources available online.

A second aspect of the digital revolution is the number of devices that make it possible for people to be connected with one another from anywhere in the world through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, and text messaging. The growing number of online universities attest to the popularity of learning at one’s convenience and point to the promise of developing virtual classrooms in cyberspace.

Both of these examples show us the tools available to church and seminary: research and teaching. Digital technology makes them possible.

A final promising role for digital technology in church and academy is to use it for face-to-face Christian formation. By that I mean learning to use digital media in our educational and worship settings for Christian formation. Yesterday’s electronic or audiovisual language of film, sound, and image is much easier to create, edit, store, and present using the vast memory and speed of a personal computer. Through digital technology, pastors, teachers, professors, and laity can easily engage theological topics and themes through visual and auditory arts supplementing, illustrating, and amplifying the Word of God. As Paul Tillich wrote in his *Systematic Theology*, “. . . a ‘theology of the Word’ is presented which is a theology of the spoken word. This intellectualization of revelation runs counter to the sense of the Logos Christianity. If Jesus as the Christ is called the Logos, Logos points to a revelatory reality, not to revelatory words.”¹

The digital revolution at last makes it easier for theologians to use more than words to express the Word.

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ENDNOTE

1. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 157.