Application of knowledge to the practical aims of human life or to changing and manipulating the human environment. Technology includes the use of materials, tools, techniques, and sources of power to make life easier or more pleasant and work more productive. Whereas science is concerned with how and why things happen, technology focuses on making things happen. Technology began to influence human endeavor as soon as people began using tools. (“Technology,” n.d.)

As we continue to ponder the definition for technology supplied here by Dr. Griffin, it seems appropriate that we might take a brief look at some points of interface between the church and technology over the years.

For the Catholic Church, Vatican II addressed the issue of technology in the Decree on the media of social communications known as Inter Mirifica, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on Dec. 4, 1963. The decree issues that in so far as it has always been the purpose of the Catholic Church to share the good news of Christ, the inherent right of the church then is to have at her dispose and employ all media as are necessary for the instruction of Christians and welfare of souls.¹

This was, 1963, today you can read the entire decree and all issuances of the Vatican II council on the Vatican website at Vatican.va/index.htm. Recently, the Catholic Church has introduced a patron saint of the internet, Saint Isidore of Seville Sanctus Isidorus Hispalensis and the church has issued a sacred prayer that should be offered before surfing the web that reads as follows,

A Prayer before Logging onto the Internet and the Catholic Online Forum

Almighty and eternal God, who created us in Thy image and bade us to seek after all that is good, true and beautiful, especially in the divine person of Thy only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee that, through the intercession of Saint Isidore, bishop and doctor, during our journeys through the internet we will direct our hands and eyes only to that which is pleasing to Thee and treat with charity and patience all those souls whom we encounter. Through Christ our Lord. Amen²

Also noteworthy, on May 17 of this year, the Methodist church announced the launching of a new iphone application which offers free daily prayers and bible study lessons. The Methodist Book of Discipline has this to say about technology,

We recognize technology as a legitimate use of God’s natural world when such use enhances human life and enables all of God’s children to develop their God-given creative potential without violating our ethical convictions about the relationship of humanity to the natural world.

In acknowledging the important roles of science and technology, however, we also believe that theological understandings of human experience are crucial to a full understanding of the place of humanity in the universe.³

While in this gathering we might lack reverence for the patron saint of anything, let us give credit to our sister church for understanding the power of technology and the potency of its accessibility which prompted the church to offer a prayer of Holy Spirit guidance for any persons engaging with such an available and virtually un-regulated information resource.

Let us celebrate with the Methodist church their entre into the world of Apple and the iphone revolution. “Kudos” I say for presenting the Gospel message in such a relevant and timely manner.

If then, we look to our own history, the history of the Church of God Reformation MOVEMENT, we see points of interface with technology throughout. I quote here from a paper delivered by my friend and colleague Rev. Kristin Bullock,

The Church of God historically has used technology to the advantage as they left rolls of the Gospel Trumpet to be passed out at post offices, also leaving copies of the Trumpet on railway cars to be read by travelers which proved to be significantly effective in reaching the people of India. The early Church of God pioneers also placed billboards on the outside of train cars as they would travel from place to place, they sang four part harmony and wrote their own songs as they traveled down the river on the Floating Bethel before rail transportation was available to them. In 1947, the first broadcast of CBH, originally known as the Christian Brotherhood Hour, was transmitted by radio station KGGF in Coffeyville, Kansas. Speaker, Dr. Dale Oldham, was a pioneer in religious broadcasting continually finding new and creative ways to bring the message of Jesus to a hurting world. Today CBH Viewpoint hosted by Jim Lyon can be heard in English speaking countries around the world. In addition, CBH now has broadcasts in Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Oriyan speaking India and Africa.⁴

I must tell you then, that I stand with a long history of ministers of the Gospel, Catholic and Protestant, Mainline church and Free, apostolic and ancient as illustrated by, but certainly not limited to Dr. Griffin’s exposition of nine chapters of dunameis in John, who hold that while technology for technology’s sake may seem empty and consumer driven, technology used as a tool for communicating the gospel is a sound biblical, theological and historical premise.


I will assume that my invitation to sit with these distinguished colleagues and in your valued presence has to do with being perceived as a technological/theological practitioner. While it would be a mistake to understand me to be technologically savvy, I would describe myself as a preacher and teacher and relational leader--someone who goes to great lengths to find points of connection with other pilgrims along this journey. So that my reasons for learning about and using technology, specifically film and social media are altogether theological and rest in my understanding of the ministry of Jesus and his followers, particularly one named Paul of whom I am most fond who found a way to situate himself within the culture so that he could speak to it.

In 2003 having graduated from this fine institution with a Master of Divinity degree, I accepted the invitation to serve as this institution’s campus pastor and did so for five years. One of the great privileges of that office was to teach an Introduction of the Bible class of 49 persons who ranged typically from 18-22 and were classified as “non Biblical studies majors.” Each semester I would marvel at the fact that each class had at least one person who had no idea who Moses was or what he had done.

I do not need to express to you the holy task it is to try and engage with 18-22 year olds about an ancient text. Most of my students could be categorized into one of two groups, a group who believe they already know all the contents of Scripture and therefore have no real reason to study it again and others do not seem to care because the material in this ancient text is, well, ancient, and seems completely irrelevant and unrelated to their lives. Imagine then stumbling upon a resource such as Robert Jewett’s “St. Paul goes to the Movies,” and beginning to explore with students biblical themes that reoccur in films.

Consider the efficacy of showing a clip from the movie Troy as Brad Pitt’s Achilles shouts up at the city gates and demands Hector show himself as an illustration of the Ravshekah’s confrontation with Hezekiah on the Jerusalem wall in II Kings I8. Imagine if you will the power of showing a clip from Lord of the Rings Two Towers when Gandalf sets King Theoden free from the evil grip of Sarumaun. In this clip, Theoden breaks forth from his dying, deteriorating shell and Gandalf exclaims, “breathe the free air...” I ask you, is there a better way to begin a conversation on 2 Corinthians 5 and Paul’s teaching on the new creation. It is in these moments that you realize you have made a connection with this emerging generation and that these are holy moments, moments that occur only by and through the power of the Spirit of God.

It is then, in pursuit of connections such as these, that some years ago I opted to establish a face book page and a twitter account and even more recently a personal blog. For me these are ways of being present in the culture to which I am called. For all of the dismissive comments for the triviality of twitter and the follies of face book, I find these to be avenues for connection and community. Of course, there are opportunities, such as with all technology, for this interfacing to run amok. Certainly, there are persons who abuse these social media outlets and persons who connect online rather than in authentic community. However, I have also found these outlets to be extensions of real live community, a place of further connection and a deeper sense of knowing. And, I must admit, it is just fun to be able to encourage students to cease playing Farmville and return to work on their exegesis paper.

On face book, I can share photos of my nieces and nephews and the pool party at my dad’s house last summer, and suddenly I become for my students and “followers” a three dimensional person who has a life and a family and hobbies outside of the classroom. I get the chance to see photos from a sister’s wedding and learn more about the place and the perspective of that particular student in his or her
family system. My blog is a place where I can openly struggle and share truths that see me through good times and bad. Via Twitter I can ask for prayer or inform someone that I am praying for her or him, I can share a bible passage that I am clinging to and I can let folks know about a sale at Macy’s or a new routine at Zumba. For me, it is a way to “hang out” with the people I care most about in the world—and isn’t that what community is all about, being present, pouring in, investing, doing the hard work of listening and contributing in a relational way?

I am refreshed by the technological forward steps of the Catholic and Methodist church as these are clearly steps that are theologically informed. I celebrate the rich history of our own tradition and all the many ways the saints have worked over the years to challenge and equip the church and connect with the world. In my opening statements, I stressed word Movement as part of the identity of our tradition, albeit somewhat arguably a lost part of our tradition. I lift this up because I believe this notion of an identity as a Movement is germane to this discussion in that it seems that relevancy and cultural literacy are inherent properties of the dynamic of a movement.

I quote here my teacher and spiritual father, Dr. Gilbert Stafford because no one said it better,

> It is easy for us to forget that movement is neither a biblical nor a theological word. It is a sociological word. To use it correctly we need to be in touch with its sociological meaning. In short, a movement is a group of people within a larger whole who are so motivated to bring about change in that larger whole that they are willing to commit themselves sacrificially to bringing it about. A movement organizes itself for the singular purpose of bringing about change.  

And so I ask you, co laborers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is this still who we are and if so, is not harnessing some of the blessings of theologically informed technology a critical component of the praxis of ministry in the 21st century and what are we going to do about it?

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**Bibliography**


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