

## TECHNOLOGY & THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

I have worked in Information Technology for the last seven years. I began my career developing web-based user interfaces to aid in department administration. Several years later, I started my own business and spent a year repairing computers and consulting for a bank. I then moved into the corporate world and maintained a web-based inventory management system. I now develop code to increase the functionality and usability of a church website. Over the last seven years, I have struggled with whether my occupation was a ministry or not. Does programming have any eternal consequences? It is the goal of this paper to show that given a historical understanding and the current cultural climate that technology can be a ministry and a necessary one.

### **Definition of ministry**

Vine's Dictionary defines a minister, *diakonos*, as a servant. Among the different words for servant, each has a different connection. Others speak of the relationship between the servant and their master or the servant and the public office they hold. The connection for *diakonos* is to the work the servant carries out. Vine's goes on to define the act of ministering as both meeting the needs of someone or more broadly "attending, in a more general way, to anything that may serve another's interests."<sup>1</sup>

According to Paul, Christ has given each believer the ministry of reconciliation. "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing

---

<sup>1</sup> *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, ed 1996., s.v. "minister."

through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5:20). We fulfill this service through the Great Commission. As we go and make disciples, we will call for people to be reconciled. Our motivation for fulfilling our ministry is the Great Commandment. If we love God with all heart, soul and mind and we love our neighbors then we will be compelled by the love of Christ within us to see unbelievers reconciled to God.

In the church, we often hear of the ministry and we hear of vocation. For those called of God to "full-time" ministry there is an intersection between their vocation and their ministry. For the typical believer sitting in the pew, Monday morning they will go a job that may or may not be their vocation. If they are anything like this author, they have a hard time understanding that their vocation is their ministry. It would be beneficial to define vocation before proceeding further. As Armand Larive mentions, the root word in Latin for vocation means, "to be called". Gustaf Wingren defines vocation as "a 'station' which is by nature helpful to others if it be followed."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to state that vocation is not confined to an occupation. Larive goes further and states that beyond simply having tasks to complete in a vocation there is also "something to be."<sup>3</sup>

We see this in Paul's epistle to the Colossians. Paul begins by discussing how believers should interact with other believers. Paul admonishes them, "whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:17). He continues by discussing how people should interact

---

<sup>2</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling* (London: Olivier and Boyd, 1957), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Armand Larive, *After Sunday* (The Continuum International Publishing Group: New York, 2004), 28.

in their homes. He speaks to husbands, wives, children, fathers and then to slaves. He tells them to "work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord-you serve the Lord Christ" (Col 3:22-24). We could also include Paul's admonition to serve others in our freedom and even in what we eat or drink we are to bring glory to God (1 Cor 10:31). It would be safe to infer that as the plumber unclogs a sink or the software programmer writes code, they are to do it all to the glory of God.

The problem that arises is often in the church; lay people are given these verses and told to witness to their coworkers and work hard to bring glory to God. The question that begs answering is, "Is there anything about the activity of our work that is redeemable?" We know from Acts 18 that Paul was a tentmaker and used this occupation to provide for his needs. He speaks of how hard he worked in his epistles to the Thessalonians so that he would not be a burden to them. So what part does work play in our lives? We know from Genesis 1 that God called man to tend the garden. Work was cursed at the fall; man would now have to toil at work. W.A. Beardslee believed that Paul's only concern with work was to support himself. He goes on to say that, the value in work is found in it as it expresses love. Jose Luis Illanes takes an interesting approach to work. He states, "human vocation is not something foreign to supernatural perspectives but perfectly rooted in them: human work is ordained to carrying out the divine plan... 'We are instruments of God co-operating with him in the true consecratio mundi; or, to put it more exactly, in the sanctification of the world from within, from the

very heart of civil society."<sup>4</sup>

Larive discusses the idea of believers as the "created co-creator."<sup>5</sup> He mentions that co-creators have two jobs: maintain the things that have come before, and create new things. These jobs are proposed because man was commanded to tend the garden, and we are created in the image of God and He is the only true Creator. We can see this exemplified in Exodus 35. "See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts-to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship" (Ex 35:30-33). These verses show us that at least in the instance of building the temple, God was intimately interested in the work that Bezalel and others were doing as well as the actual items they created. This seems to stand in stark contrast to Beardslee's belief that each believer's "secular work, while never important in itself, nevertheless contributes to the maintenance of the community and provides a vehicle for the expression of the believer's faith and love."<sup>6</sup>

### **Definition of Technology**

Webster's defines technology as "the science or study of the practical or

---

<sup>4</sup> J. L. Illanes, *On the Theology of Work* (Chicago: Scepter Publishers, 1968), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Armand Larive, *After Sunday* (The Continuum International Publishing Group: New York, 2004), 73.

<sup>6</sup> W. A. Beardslee, *Human Achievement and Divine Vocation in the Message of Paul* (SCM Press LTD: London, 1961), 65.

industrial arts, applied sciences, etc."<sup>7</sup> Stephen Spkyer in his book "Technology and Spirituality" elaborates on the definition of technology.

"Technology is the study of human art and skill...But technology is not our tools; it is how we create and use tools. In a nutshell, technology is part of what defines us; it is part of what makes us human. More than that, the technologies we adopt affect the very type of humans we become. The tools we choose to use and how we use them affect how we think, how we make decisions, how we relate to one another, how we construct knowledge, even how we think about God."<sup>8</sup>

### **God's Use of Technology in Redemption History**

Throughout human history, God has used a collection of men, institutions, governments and technology to work out His plans. The Ancient Mesopotamians are credited with inventing the wheel. They also made advancements in metalworking, irrigation and stone carving. God used Pharaoh and the Egyptian army to enslave the Hebrews. This enslavement brought about the chance for God to show Himself powerful over one of the most powerful nations of the ancient world. Egypt's power rested in their control of technology and warfare. Their understanding of engineering and technology allowed them to build the Great Pyramids as well as a multitude palaces and temples. Egyptians also are considered the first to have developed papyrus, which could be seen as the first step in the proliferation of the written word.

During the time of the Judges, God used the surrounding nations to exact His

---

<sup>7</sup> *Webster's New World Collegiate Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "technology."

<sup>8</sup> Stephen K. Spkyer, *Technology & Spirituality* (Skylight Paths Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 2007), 3.

judgment against the Israelites. After Judah had lived in disobedience for a time, God used the Babylonians to carry Judah into exile. We see in the book of Daniel, prophecies that foretold various nations rising, culminating with the rise of the Roman Empire. Without the advances in astronomy made by the Babylonians, and the Magi may have well missed the star announcing the birth of the Messiah.

On the surface, having the Jews under Roman occupation might seem counter-productive to God fulfilling his purposes for salvation. The Diaspora forced Jews to move throughout the Roman Empire. After Paul left the synagogue in a particular town, he would go to the Gentiles. Many of the Roman converts were God-fearers, meaning they had been introduced to Yahweh originally through the Jews. Paul used Rome's extensive road system and Pax Romana to move freely about the Empire preaching the Gospel as he traveled. Where the Romans built roads, the Greek language followed. Having a common language allowed for the Gospel to spread faster. Even in Paul's imprisonment, God used the simple fact of Paul's Roman citizenship to spread the Gospel among those in the Roman government.

There are those that call Christians, "people of the book". Denny Burk, a professor at Criswell College, states, "All of its [Christianity] revelation about God's redemptive work in Christ is mediated to us in letters on a page."<sup>9</sup> That is the reality for Christians in the twenty-first century, but that has not always been the case. The Gospel in the first century was an oral Gospel. The apostles wrote down the teachings of Christ. Paul wrote out his epistles and sent them to the churches. However, once a letter was

---

<sup>9</sup> Denny Burk, "Literacy and the Gospel," *Baptist Press*, August 22, 2007, <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=26294/> (accessed November 12, 2007).

received it was read to the congregation. It was too expensive to create a copy for church members to have their own copy. Even if the economics had been in place, many would not have been able to read the texts.

So how did Christianity go from a predominately-oral religion to a religion of text? Again, God used technology to fulfill His purposes, through the printing press. The Chinese invented the printing press, which used carved blocks of wood. Gutenberg expanded upon this design and developed the movable type printing press. By 1455, Gutenberg began printing the Bible. This advance in technology, allowed Christians to become a people of the book.

The Protestant Reformation spread as fast as it did in part to the printing press. A letter to Martin Luther in 1519, states that his books were being printed and then sold throughout Germany, Spain, France and Italy. Around the same time, Huldreich Zwingli received correspondence from a friend suggesting he acquire some of Luther's newest books. Zwingli's friend also mentioned that he recommend these books to his congregants and his fellow preachers. Hans Hillerbrand gives a good overview of this period. "But hardly fourteen days had passed when these propositions [the 95 theses] were known throughout Germany and within four weeks almost all of Christendom was familiar with them. It almost appeared as if the angels themselves had been their messengers and brought them before the eyes of all the people."<sup>10</sup>

### **Web 2.0 - What part does it play in God's redemptive plan?**

The predecessor to what we know as the Internet was developed in the early

---

<sup>10</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 47.

1960s by ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency). The Internet is the physical networking infrastructure in place around the world. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, while working at CERN in Switzerland, developed HTML (hypertext markup language) in 1989. The World Wide Web is the interconnected collection of hypertext documents accessed by the Internet.

With these advances, came a meteoric rise of a multitude of Internet based companies and with them stratospheric stock valuations. And is always the case with gravity, what goes up must come down. In 2001, the dot com bubble burst and saw a market correction. Along with the correction, came a change in how people saw and interacted with the Internet and other people.

"Web 2.0" is the label given to this new approach to the World Wide Web. Tim O'Reilly, President and CEO of O'Reilly Media, is often the one cited as having coined the phrase. In a paper written in 2005, O'Reilly gave some clarification to what Web 2.0 meant. The first and foundational principle is that the Web is the platform. Instead of tying the information and functionality of software to a particular computer or operating system, the software and data is available anywhere access to the Internet is available.

The second principle is that Web 2.0 "harness[es] collective intelligence."<sup>11</sup> The advent of blogging and wikis allow users around the world to interact with and contribute to a vast body of knowledge. Another principle is "software above the level of

---

<sup>11</sup> Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0," *O'Reilly*, September 30, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>. (accessed November 12, 2007).



a single device." The web is now accessible apart from a desktop PC. Cell phones, DVRs and even refrigerators are connected to the Internet and use the Web as their software platform. The final principle given by O'Reilly is "rich user experiences."<sup>12</sup> Web 2.0 applications are typically easy to use and provide an enjoyable experience for the user.

These characteristics are not only of Web 2.0 companies but these are also characteristics of the new global culture. Justice Anderson, in his article for "Missiology", discusses the place of a cross-cultural understanding in proclaiming the Gospel. He discusses characteristics of our current culture that affect how we communicate the message of reconciliation. Several influence or express themselves in the culture of Web 2.0. The list includes a renewed search for the supernatural, the Two-Thirds World exerting more influence, technology and culture are changing at a faster and faster pace, economic structures are changing, and the increase in political, social and economic revolutions.<sup>13</sup>

In the discussion of the web as a platform, we see the impact of a decrease in development costs and the proliferation of cheap computers and Internet connections. These occurrences allow people from around the world to connect and compete in the global market. One of the larger connections between Web 2.0 and the culture is the use of the collective intelligence. Imagine what could happen if theologians around the world collaborated on a central commentary of Scripture or a collection of systematic theology.

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Justice Anderson, *An Overview of Missiology*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 15.

Authors will disagree, but with the advent of wikis, each viewpoint would be readily available to anyone. Two-Thirds World theologians would be able to contribute to the sometimes-lacking theology of the western developed world. However, the contribution does not stop with quote-unquote theologians. Laity would be able to learn from and contribute to the process as well.

Social network sites can allow separated believers to maintain their relationships with one another and draw encouragement from those outside their region or nation. Video podcasts allow house churches to supplement their teaching. With micro payments, the distributed Church could give to those that are in need around the world. Those that can give a mite would be able to with nothing more than a cell phone. Whereas in Paul's day, the churches in Asia Minor gave to those in Jerusalem today, Christians from around the world could give to those in need within minutes of the need arising.

When it comes to the rapidity, with which technology and our culture changes, many in the church have taken the stance of an ostrich. Spyker states that whether we bury our heads or not, the changes are still influencing the world around us. Spyker continues by saying,

"Change disorients us, and when we are disoriented we can forget who we are, lose our sense of identity. Perhaps this isn't all bad. One of the principles of transformational learning is that it's helpful, if not necessary, to be temporarily disoriented in order to think critically, to reexamine our hidden assumptions about the nature of ourselves and our reality so we can experience true growth, and be transformed into a better, more self-actuated person."<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps God is using this rapid advance of technology and the sluggish

---

<sup>14</sup> Stephen K. Spyker, *Technology & Spirituality* (Skylight Paths Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 2007), 71.

response of the Church to fulfill a greater part of His plan for humanity. It is not hard to imagine that God could bring forth a great reformation in the Church to address the problems of stagnation irrelevance.

When it comes to a rich user experience, many would decry this as a call to compromise the Gospel in an effort to be relevant. To begin with, the global culture is becoming increasingly technology focused and driven. Media is also increasingly influencing the global culture. The Church fought the changes and is now lagging behind because of it. John Maxwell sums up this problem well, "For too long, evangelical Christians have been passive citizens, benefiting from society but not making a constructive contribution to it."<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Harris points out that according to some scholars "insist the church still speaks the language of pen and paper while the culture around it communicates using technological advances."<sup>16</sup>

Many of the churches attempting to use technology to be relevant are failing. They are jumping on the bandwagon of trends instead of becoming the instruments of cultural change. Churches are podcasting their sermons and using more video in their services. These are steps in the right direction but they are bandages on a gaping wound. For unbelievers, they see this as just a feeble attempt to stay relevant. They can view better videos online and there are hundreds of thousands of podcasts vying for their attention. A lack of passion is another problem the Church faces. There are those churches that will spend very little time or effort developing their church website. They

---

<sup>15</sup> John Maxwell, Stephen Graves, and Thomas Addington, *Life@Work* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Harris, "Same Story, New Language," *Baptist Standard*, October 22 2007, p. 8.

break all the standard design rules and they do not make it usable for an unbeliever. They are stating by their actions that they do not believe Paul when he says that we are to glorify God through all our actions. Let us turn our attention to an entity that is attempting to be relevant but is symptomatic of the Church's state.

### **God Tube vs. YouTube – Which is the correct worldview?**

God Tube is a new video sharing site that is marketed to be a direct competitor to YouTube. Upon arriving at the site, you begin to understand that this is supposed to be YouTube for Christians. A look at the top 20 videos on the site confirms this assumption. The number one video is of a little girl reciting Psalm 23. It is a cute video with over four million views. A video called "Baby Got Book", a parody of "Baby Got Back" from a decade ago is third on the list. There are also three parodies of the Mac vs. PC advertisements, that round out the top 20 videos on God Tube.

As the body of Christ why is it we must try to emulate or rip off the world's ideas instead of coming up with our own. We are Christians, which means the God of the universe lives inside each believer. He created this world. He gave each of us minds to pursue thought. Why don't we ask God for unique ideas that will reveal His glory to a lost world instead of trying to Christianize bad rap songs?

Leaving the discussion of the content, the question needs to be asked. What is the purpose of God Tube? According to an interview with CEO Chris Wyatt on ABC Nightline, the goal of God Tube is to reach the 2.1 billion Christians in the world and

help them grow in their faith.<sup>17</sup>

This I believe is the problem with many so-called Christian entities. They are inward focused. They take the words of John in his first epistle and use it for a proof text. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-comes not from the Father but from the world." Alternatively, they take the symbolism in Matthew 5:14-16 too far, that we are to be a city on a hill, shining our light that others would see our works and glorify God.

In "Cost of Discipleship" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he further explains how this plays out.

"We can well imagine them saying: 'Now we must set to work and build the kingdom of heaven on earth'-and in so doing they would ignore and perhaps even overthrow the established order of things. They might adopt an attitude of indifference to this present age, like the enthusiast, and try to realize the extraordinary quality of the age to come in a visible institution. Their ideal would then be to withdraw radically and uncompromisingly from the world and by means of force to set up a Christian order more compatible with their following of Christ and more in accordance with his extraordinary demand."<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Daniel Morgan, Associate Professor of Missions and Director of Nehemiah Project at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, put forth that the church has moved away from a fire base mentality. With a firebase, a soldier goes to reequip and rest after battle, but then he goes back out to the front line and re-engages in the battle.

---

<sup>17</sup> *GodTube*, October 29, 2007, "ABC Nightline - Reports On The Launch Of GodTube," [http://www.godtube.com/view\\_video.php?viewkey=e0a053237ad620553060/](http://www.godtube.com/view_video.php?viewkey=e0a053237ad620553060/) (accessed December 1, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1995), 155-156.

He states that many in the church have adopted a fortress mentality. They go inside their fortress and do not leave the security of the walls. They eat, sleep and fight from behind the walls.

There are those in the Christian church who have adopted this mindset. They believe that we are to separate ourselves and protect ourselves behind fortified walls. When the world attacks, we will defend ourselves and yearn for when the battle will be over. We will live pious lives so that we can fulfill Matthew 5:16. The world will be able to see our light through the arrow slits in the walls of our fortress.

To begin with, the fortress mentality goes against the Great Commission. Christ commands us to go into all the world. That cannot be accomplished from behind the walls of a fortress. The armor of God that Paul describes in Ephesians is one of an infantryman, not of a fortress guard. We see how we are to live in the world in 1 Peter 2:11-12. "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." We are to live among the world but not be conformed. By rubbing shoulders with the world every day and living lives set apart from the world, God will receive glory. Just a few sentences before Jesus talked about believers being the light of the world, he called believers salt of the earth. Not only are we to reflect God's glory through our actions but we are to be change agents in our culture.

A better use of the time and resources of God Tube would be to infiltrate, for lack of a better word, YouTube. They should begin by not posting "Baby Got Book" or the little girl reciting the 23rd Psalm. They should pray and fast as they wait on God to

teach them how they should go about redeeming YouTube. Then they create videos that clearly explain the Gospel and God's work in humanity through preaching, story telling, music and even parables. Jason Moore was quoted in Jennifer Harris's article about the use of metaphor. "We've gotten so far from the method Jesus gave us... Most sermons are informational, mostly removed from story and parable. Jesus gave us the model for a reason. If Jesus didn't say anything without using metaphor, what does it mean that we don't use it all?"<sup>19</sup> Those at God Tube should heed that advice, put forth their very best effort, and create something that is original, culturally relevant, but above all eternally significant.

There are countless other ways the Church can engage the culture in and through technology. Another overlooked avenue is the ministry to IT professionals. It is possible for someone that is not a technophile to engage those within IT. However, just as any missionary ministering among a people group different from their own, you must contextualize your message. There should be more missionaries reaching out to those among the technophile subculture. A Christian IT professional should be able to debate convincingly with unbelieving IT professionals the merits of using Ruby on Rails versus PHP or the ramifications of Google buying the 700 MHz spectrum. This will lend credence to their words when they share the Gospel with these people.

### **Conclusion**

Both ministry and technology have been defined and an examination of history and the culture have been made. It has been shown from Scripture that the first goal of a

---

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Harris, "Same Story, New Language," *Baptist Standard*, October 22 2007, p. 8.

believer is to preach the message of reconciliation. It has also been shown that a believer's job is not simply something to be endured. Through a Christian's vocation, they serve others, develop their character, and glorify God through their words and actions. They also glorify God through the work of their hands as they reflect His creativeness.

With the rapid technological advance of the culture, Christians should be at the forefront as salt and light to the world. The church needs to move out of the fortress mentality it has been holding onto and move to the front lines. This will occur as more and more believers begin to minister through technology. This will also occur as believing IT professionals move into and begin proclaiming the Gospel in the IT sub-culture around the world. Not only is it possible to have a ministry in technology but it is imperative.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Justice. *An Overview of Missiology*. Edited by John Mark Tery, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998.
- Beardslee, W. A. *Human Achievement and Divine Vocation in the Message of Paul*. SCM Press LTD: London, 1961.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Simon & Schuster: New York, 1995.
- Burk, Denny. "Literacy And The Gospel." *Baptist Press*, August 22, 2007.  
<http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=26294/> (accessed November 12, 2007).
- GodTube*. "ABC Nightline - Reports On The Launch Of GodTube." October 29, 2007.  
[http://www.godtube.com/view\\_video.php?viewkey=e0a053237ad620553060/](http://www.godtube.com/view_video.php?viewkey=e0a053237ad620553060/) (accessed December 1, 2007).
- Hillerbrand, Hans J. *The Reformation*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964.
- Illanes, J. L. *On the Theology of Work*. Chicago: Scepter Publishers, 1968.
- Larive, Armand. *After Sunday*. The Continuum International Publishing Group: New York, 2004.
- Maxwell, John, Stephen Graves, and Thomas Addington. *Life@Work*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.
- O'Reilly, Tim. "What Is Web 2.0." *O'Reilly*, September 30, 2005.  
<http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>. (accessed November 12, 2007).
- Spyker, Stephen K. *Technology & Spirituality*. Skylight Paths Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 2007.
- Wingren, Gustaf. *The Christian's Calling*. London: Olivier and Boyd, 1957.