

# What's Your Superpower?

If you could choose a superpower, which one would it be? When asked this question as an icebreaker, I've heard some people say they'd love to fly; others say they would choose mindreading. Some would love to be invisible.

But for the believer in Jesus, the idea of having superpowers isn't a fantasy.

It is the *reality* of being indwelt by God Himself, the source of actual and real supernatural power. And He gives gifts, spiritual gifts, that consist of supernatural enabling. We find the spiritual gifts in four places in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.

Consider these spiritual gifts—superpowers, if you will—given by the Holy Spirit to allow His people to minister to others:

**Teaching** – The supernatural ability to explain clearly and apply effectively the truth of the Word of God.

**Pastor/Teacher** – One who is supernaturally equipped to shepherd and feed the flock of God with the result of their growth and maturity.

**Evangelism** – The supernatural capacity to present the gospel message with exceptional clarity and an overwhelming burden for those who don't know Christ.

**Word of Knowledge** – The supernatural ability to receive information and truth directly from God without natural means.

To know without knowing how you know.

**Word of Wisdom** – The supernatural ability to have insight concerning God’s perspective and relay this insight succinctly to others. “Deep insight with handles.”

**Faith** – The supernatural ability to believe God for the impossible.

**Exhortation (Encouragement)** – The supernatural ability to come alongside and help others by comforting, encouraging, challenging, and rebuking.

**Showing Mercy** – The supernatural ability to minister compassionately and cheerfully to those who are difficult to minister to.

**Giving** – The supernatural ability to give of one’s material goods to the work of the Lord consistently, generously, sacrificially, with wisdom and cheerfulness.

**Leadership/Administration** – The supernatural ability to organize and lead projects while handling people tactfully and providing the vision to keep them at the task.

**Service** – The supernatural ability to serve faithfully and joyfully behind the scenes, in practical ways, in long-term commitments to service.

**Helps** – The supernatural ability to minister joyfully to God’s people in short-term service with flexibility and sensitivity to what needs to be done.

**Discernment of Spirits** – A supernatural ability to distinguish

between the spirit of truth and spirit of error, between holiness and evil. Can instantly sniff out when someone's a phony or lying.

My husband and I created a list of diagnostic questions to help people find their superpowers, which you can find here: [www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/](http://www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/)

Flying and mind-reading aren't on our list, but you might find your superpower here!

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## **The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion**

*Dr. Lawrence Terlizese says that our addiction to technology is heading toward the opposite of the life we want.*

### **What Saccharine is to Sugar, or The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion**

"Anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the word." [\[1\]](#) – Jacques Ellul

# Simulacra

Aerosmith sings a familiar tune:

*"There's something wrong with the world today,  
I don't know what it is,  
there's something wrong with our eyes,  
we're seeing things in a different way  
and God knows it ain't [isn't] his;  
there's melt down in the sky. We're living on the edge."*[{2}](#)

What saccharine is to sugar, so the technological simulacra is to nature or reality—a technological replacement, purporting itself to be better than the original, more real than reality, sweeter than sugar: hypersugar.



[This article without footnotes](#)

*Simulacra*, (*Simulacrum*, Latin, pl., *likeness, image, to simulate*): or simulation, the term, was adapted by French social philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) to express his critical interpretation of the technological transformation of reality into hyperreality. Baudrillard's social critique provided the premise for the movie *The Matrix* (1999). However, he was made famous for declaring that the Gulf War never happened; TV wars are not a reflection of reality but projections (recreations) of the TV medium.[{3}](#)

Simulacra reduces reality to its lowest point or one-dimension and then recreates reality through attributing the highest qualities to it, like snapshots from family vacation. When primitive people refuse to have their picture taken because they are afraid that the camera steals their souls, they are resisting simulacra. The camera snaps a picture and recreates the image on paper or a digital medium; it then goes to a photo album or a profile page. Video highlights amount to the same thing in moving images; from three dimensions, the camera reduces its object to soulless one-dimensional fabrication.[{4}](#)

Simulacra does not end with the apparent benign pleasures of family vacation and media, although media represents its most recent stage.[{5}](#) Simulacra includes the entire technological environment or complex, its infrastructure, which acts as a false “second nature”[{6}](#) superimposed over the natural world, replacing it with a hyperreal one, marvelously illustrated in the movie *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). As liquid metal conforms itself to everything it touches, it destroys the original.[{7}](#)

Humanity gradually replaces itself through recreation of human nature by technological enhancements, making the human race more adaptable to machine existence, ultimately for the purpose of space exploration. Transhumanists believe that through the advancements in genetic engineering, neuropharmaceuticals (experimental drugs), bionics, and artificial intelligence it will redesign the human condition in order to achieve immortality. “Humanity+,” as Transhumanists say, will usher humanity into a higher state of being, a technological stairway to heaven, “glorification,” “divinization” or “ascendency” in theological terms.[{8}](#)

God made man in his own image and now mankind remakes himself in the image of his greatest creation (image), the computer. If God’s perfection is represented by the number seven and man’s imperfection by the number six, then the Cyborg will be a five according to the descending order of being; the creature is never equal or greater than the creator but always a little lower.[{9}](#)

Glorious Reduction![{10}](#)

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# Hyperreality

An old tape recording commercial used to say, "Is it real or is it Memorex?" By championing the superiority of recording to live performance the commercial creates hyperreality, a reproduction of an original that appears more real than reality, a replacement for reality with a reconstructed one, purported to be better than the original.

Disneyland serves as an excellent example by creating a copy of reality remade in order to substitute for reality; it confuses reality with an illusion that appears real, "more real than real."[{11}](#) Disney anesthetizes the imagination, numbing it against reality, leaving spectators with a false or fake impression. Main Street plays off an idealized past. The technological reconstruction leads us to believe that the illusion "can give us more reality than nature can."[{12}](#)

Hyperreality reflects a media dominated society where "signs and symbols" no longer reflect reality but are manipulated by their users to mean *whatever*. Signs recreate reality to achieve the opposite effect (metastasis)[{13}](#); for example, in Dallas I must travel west on Mockingbird Lane in order to go to East Mockingbird Lane. Or, Facebook invites social participation when no actual face to face conversation takes place.[{14}](#)

Hyperreality creates a false perception of reality, the glorification of reduction that confuses fantasy for reality, a proxy reality that imitates the lives of movie and TV characters for real life. When reel life in media becomes real life outside media we have entered the high definition, misty region—the Netherlands of concrete imagination—hyperreality![{15}](#)

Hyperreality goes beyond escapism or simply "just entertainment." If that was all there was to it, there would be no deception or confusion, at best a trivial waste of time

and money. Hyperreality is getting lost in the pleasures of escapism and confusing the fantasy world for the real one, believing that fantasy is real or even better than reality. Hyperreality results in the total inversion of society through technological sleight of hand, a cunning trick, a sorcerer's illusion transforming the world into a negative of itself, into its opposite, then calling it progress.

Hyperreality plays a trick on the mind, a self-induced hypnotism on a mass scale, duping us by our technological recreation into accepting a false reality as truth. Like Cypher from the movie *The Matrix* who chose the easy and pleasant simulated reality over the harsh conditions of the "desert of the real" in humanity's fictional war against the computer, he chose to believe a lie instead of the truth.[\[16\]](#)

## **The Devil is a Liar**

A lie plays a trick on the mind, skillfully crafted to deceive through partial omission or concealment of the truth. The lie is the devil's (devil means liar) only weapon, always made from a position of inferiority and weakness (Revelation 20:3, 8). A lie never stands on its own terms as equal to truth; it does not exist apart from twisting (recreating) truth. A lie never contradicts the truth by standing in opposition to it.

A lie is not a negative (no) or a positive (yes), but obscures one or the other. It adds by revealing what is not there—it subtracts by concealing what is there. A lie appears to be what is not and hides what it really is. "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

A lie does not negate (contradict) or affirm truth. Negation (No) establishes affirmation (Yes). Biblically speaking, the no comes before the yes—the cross then the resurrection; law first, grace second. The Law is no to sin (disobedience); the Gospel is yes to faith (obedience). Truth is always a

synthesis or combination between God's no in judgment on sin and His yes in grace through faith in Jesus Christ. "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Law without grace is legalism; grace without law is license.{17}

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The devil's lie adds doubt to the promise of God; "Indeed, has God said, 'you shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1 NASB) It hides the promise of certain death; "You surely will not die" (Genesis 3:4). The serpent twists knowledge into doubt by turning God's imperative, "Don't eat!" into a satanic question "Don't eat?"{18}

But it is Eve who recreates the lie in her own imagination. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6).{19}

Sight incites desire. We want what we see (temptation). Eve was tempted by "the lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16) after seeing the fruit, then believed the false promise that it would make her wise. "She sees; she no longer hears a word to know what is good, bad or true."{20} Eve fell victim to her own idolatrous faith in hyperreality that departed from the simple trust in God's word.{21}

## **The Void Machine**

Media (television, cell phone, internet, telecommunications) is a void machine.{22} In the presence of a traditional social milieu, such as family, church or school, it will destroy its host, and then reconstruct it in its own hyperreal image (Simulacra). Telecommunication technology is a Trojan Horse



for all traditional institutions that accept it as pivotal to their “progress,” except prison or jail.[{23}](#) The purpose of all institutions is the promotion of values or social norms, impossible through the online medium.

Media at first appears beneficial, but this technology transforms the institution and user into a glorified version of itself. The personal computer, for example, imparts values not consistent with the mission of church or school, which is to bring people together in mutual support around a common goal or belief for learning and spiritual growth (community). This is done primarily through making friends and forming meaningful relationships, quite simply by people talking to each other. Values and social norms are only as good as the people we learn them from. Values must be embodied in order to be transmitted to the next generation.[{24}](#)

Talking as the major form of personal communication is disappearing. Professor of Communications John L. Locke noted that “Intimate talking, the social call of humans, is on the endangered species list.”[{25}](#) People prefer to text, or phone.[{26}](#) Regrettably, educational institutions such as high schools and universities are rapidly losing their relevance as traditional socializing agents where young people would find a potential partner through like interests or learn a worldview from a mentor. What may be gained in convenience, accessibility or data acquisition for the online student is lost in terms of the social bonds necessary for personal ownership of knowledge, discipline and character development.[{27}](#)

An electronic community is not a traditional community of persons who meet face to face, in person, in the flesh where they establish personal presence. Modern communication technologies positively destroy human presence. What philosopher Martin Heidegger called *Dasein*, “being there,” (embodiment or incarnation) is absent.[{28}](#) As Woody Allen put it, “90 percent of life is showing up.”[{29}](#) The presence of

absence marks the use of all electronic communication technology. Ellul argued, "The simple fact that I carry a camera [cell phone] prevents me from grasping everything in an overall perception."[\[30\]](#) The camera like the cell phone preoccupies its users, creating distance between himself and friends. The cellphone robs the soul from its users, who must exchange personal presence for absence; the body is there tapping away, but not the soul! The cell phone user has become a void![\[31\]](#)

## **The Power of Negative Thinking**

According to popular American motivational speakers, the key to unlimited worldly wealth, success and happiness is in the power of positive thinking that unleashes our full potential; however, according to obscure French social critics the key to a meaningful life, lived in freedom, hope and individual dignity is in the power of negative thinking that brings limits, boundaries, direction and purpose.

Negativity gives birth to freedom, expanding our spiritual horizons with possibilities and wise choices, which grounds faith, hope and love in absolute truth, giving us self-definition greater than our circumstances, greater than reality of the senses. To freely choose in love one's own path, identity and destiny is the essence of individual dignity.

According to French social critics Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, freedom is only established in negation that provides limits and boundaries, which tells us who we are. Technological hyperreality removes all natural and traditional limits in the recreation of humanity in the image of the cyborg. The transhuman transformation promises limitless potential at the expense of individual freedom, personal identity and ultimately human dignity and survival.

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All limitless behavior ends in self-destruction. Human extinction looms over the technological future, like the Sword of Damocles, threatening humanity's attempt to refit itself for immortality in a grand explosion (nuclear war), a slow poisoning (ecocide) or suicidal regressive technological replacement. Stephen Hawking noted recently that technological progress threatens humanity's survival with nuclear war, global warming, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering over the course of the next 100 years. Hawking stated, "We are not going to stop making progress, or reverse it, so we must [recognize] the dangers and control them." {32}

In asserting "NO!" to unlimited technological advance and establishing personal and communal limits to our use of all technology, especially the cell phone, computer and TV, we free ourselves from the technological necessity darkening our future through paralyzing the will to resist. {33}

After we "JUST SAY NO!" {34} to our technological addictions, for instance, after a sabbatical fast on Sunday when the whole family turns off their electronic devices, and get reacquainted, a new birth of freedom will open before us teeming with possibilities. We will face unmediated reality in ourselves and family with a renewed hope that by changing our personal worlds for one day simply by pushing the off button on media technology we can change the future. Through a weekly media fast (negation) we will grow faith in the power of self-control by proving that we can live more abundant lives without what we once feared absolute necessity, inevitable and irresistible. "All things are possible with God" (Mark 10: 27). When we exchange our fear of idols for faith in the Living God the impossible becomes possible and our unlimited potential is released that will change the world forever! {35}

I see trees of green, red roses, too,

I see them bloom, for me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white,  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.

The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,  
Are also on the faces of people going by.  
I see friends shaking hands, sayin', "How do you do?"  
They're really sayin', "I love you."

I hear babies cryin'. I watch them grow.  
They'll learn much more than I'll ever know  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world. [\[36\]](#)

"[I]f man does not pull himself together and assert himself . . . then things will go the way I describe [cyborg condition]." – Jacques Ellul [\[37\]](#)

## Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), vii.
2. Aerosmith, *Eat the Rich*, "Livin' on the Edge," Sony, 1993.
3. The same is true of the game last night—I caught the highlights on ESPN—no difference really—it never happened! The Presidential debates, my Facebook page, 911, televangelism, the online (electric) church: all reproductions, all exist at the level of Santa Claus in a dreamy, surreal world not really real: hyperreal, really!
4. French social critic Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) described dimensional reduction in human nature through the process of "mimesis" very similar to Baudrillard's conception of

*simulacra* (technological simulation) and Ellul's *la technique* (technological order). *Mimesis* eradicates all protest and opposition to the prevailing technological normalcy and silences all conscientious objections to the obvious or self-evident benefits (taken for granted) and blessings of technological progress. Like a frontal lobotomy when a section of the brain is removed that leaves all necessary automatic biological functions but removes the capacity to higher critical thinking, effectively silencing all differences, removing unique personality, individuality, and private space. The person is reduced to *one dimension* without the critical higher thought process or skills. *Mimesis* or mimicry transcends the adjustment phase to new technology known as *Future Shock* and brings the population into a direct and immediate relationship with the technological environment comparable to prehistoric and primitive cultures in their relationship to their natural milieus, climates and habitats. *Mimesis* replaces the traditional social environment with a technological one, an imitation or mimicry (*simulacra*). *Mimesis* removes the ability to feel alienation. Through reduction of the individual to a cell (atomization) in the social body, one never feels out of place, discomfort or disease, etc., because there is no longer any sense of individuality or difference. Anesthetizing the soul kills the pain of maladjustment to modernity leaving all feelings alike; joy is indistinguishable from hate. What do people feel after a lobotomy? They feel nothing, *comfortably numb* describes postmodern sentimentality.

*Mimesis* reduces the population to impulsive consumers. Material goods tie us to the system. "People recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed and social control is anchored in the new needs it has produced" (Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in Advanced Industrial Society* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1964],

9). People are in love with their technology. Consumer objects express passion and spirituality; “For example, cars are not simply neutral transportation objects but beloved expressions of soul.” Their self-image is locked in the kind of cars they drive, houses they live in: “From teen dreaming about a hot set of wheels to the self-imagined sophisticate, it is image that dictates our purchase . . . Most of us can’t imagine why anyone would buy a Hummer except to flaunt his financial ability to conspicuously consume . . . . Anyone who doubts the role of image needs only drive a rust bucket” (Lee Worth Bailey, *The Enchantments of Technology* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005], 7). “Image is everything!” Modern technological materialism has become the antithesis of the Christian way of life. Jesus said, “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

#### 5. Orders of Simulacra:

Renaissance: Copies of Original

Industrial: Mass Production of Original

Hyperreality: Recreation of Original

Metastasis: Reverse effects of the hyperreal stage of simulacra proliferate, comparable to the spread of cancerous tissue. “Metastasis: the transfer of disease from one organ or part to another not directly connected with it” (Benjamin F. Miller and Claire Brackman Keane *Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine and Nursing* [Philadelphia: Saunders, 1972]). Hyperreality “more real than real” purports to be a technological improvement on nature and “the signs and symbols,” (language) and institutions of traditional society, “better than real;” however, despite the apparent success of the hyperreal stage to deliver on its promise of improvement or “progress,” opposite results threaten social stability. Disneyland gets boring. Media technology isolates people rather than bringing them together. Social media turns out to

be anti-social. The automobile extends the commute to work. The computer increases the average work load and illiteracy, reduces jobs, depersonalizes individuals, kills privacy, creates universal surveillance, makes pornography and depictions of violence readily accessible to children. The cell phone is actually an excellent bomb detonating device. The computer atrophies human intelligence, logic, and thinking (creative and problem solving skills); through societal dependence on the computer people have forgotten how to think for themselves, and solve problems in any other way. The computer is not a simple tool used to organize knowledge, making it readily accessible, but as the centralizing technology through the digitalization process it recreates the world in its own image. Instead of happiness, the technological order is producing mass neurosis evident in the increase in depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, anorexia, bulimia, suicide and the mass inability to differentiate between reality and illusion.

Metastasis in the Orders of Simulacra according to Baudrillard also reflects Jacques Ellul's critical technological analysis in his assertion of the law of diminishing returns (law of reverse effects), *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). Once the threshold of reversal in technological progress is reached, a saturation point, beyond which any further advance is completely unnecessary (and thus further progress despite mass optimism) will produce reverse or opposite effects than intended. The technological threshold is reached when new technology is imposed on the population which was unnecessary prior to its invention. When necessity for a new technology appears after its invention the threshold of beneficial effects inverts and harmful consequences, side effects—intended or not—rapidly multiply. There is no use or felt needs for much of the technology developed in the 20th century; TV, computer, jet engine, rockets, atom bomb, cell phone, innumerable widgets and gadgets, so use is found and need artificially created. People have no felt need for a

technology that does not yet exist. When useless technology is developed for its own sake (knowledge for knowledge's sake), rather than liberation it displaces *the good of mankind to the glory of God* as its object or *telos* and becomes an end in itself. The general population never asks for new technology; rather, technology is developed according to the technological imperative—whatever can be done should be done. Its beneficial use is unquestionably assumed and its use promoted through mass advertising and commercials (technological propaganda), and in short order a new necessity is added to the litany of technological requirements. As the list of “must haves” and “can't live without” grows in order to keep pace with the tempo of modern life, *users* voluntarily surrender their freedom for self-imposed technological necessity, blissfully unaware of any potential side-effects or untoward consequences.

The technological condition may be compared to generational slavery. Those born into servitude accept it as normal. The “happy slave” remains so through refusal to recognize his condition as “slave.” He embraces the world as he finds it with all his material needs and appetites satiated. There is no reason to protest, compounded by the fact that he has no ability to do so. A slave will always remain a slave until he recognizes that he is a slave. And without an intellectual horizon to lift him above his condition as a real possibility he will forever remain a slave. The first step to freedom for the slave is to recognize his condition of slavery and the possibility of a different way of life through self-determination, but that is impossible without a degree of abstract analysis and a measure of critical reason. Comparatively, technological determinism imposes its frightful inescapable necessity as a natural order without a meaningful future beyond the present way of life. In stripping society of critical ability to reason and negate that order from a metaphysical view, humanity has lost its only absolute reference point outside its own limited existence and above



its concrete situation from which to criticize technology and bring it under ethical control and moral limitation. God is greater than any technological idol made by human hands and provides an immovable ground from which humanity can reassert control, but mankind's Creator, Savior and Helper does him no good if he does not believe in his power or worse confuses it with the status quo, so that the apocalyptic power of God's confrontational judgment that leveled Babel (Genesis 11), Egypt (Exodus), Jerusalem and Rome is convoluted through blessing the technological utopia as *New Atlantis*.

The idolization of technology follows in the wake of modern science and rationalism but has a dehumanizing effect rather than amelioration. New technology brings new necessity and demands rather than freedom that exacts its price from humanity and nature, resulting in a much more complicated and dangerous world. The Apostle Paul stated that if we have food and shelter we should be content (1 Timothy 6:8). The accumulation of material things beyond meeting basic needs becomes a new burden, an added necessity not there before, resulting in bondage not freedom. People are owned by their possessions, must work harder for their technology and have been reduced to cogs in the wheel of progress rather than individuals with inherent value made in the image of God. From electricity, to phones, appliances to automobiles to computers, cell phones, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam* each new technology begins with the promises of convenience and improving modern life by making it faster, then through habitual use it becomes necessary, eventually addictive. From the basic material needs of food and shelter modern life has added dishwashers, microwave ovens, vacuum cleaners, TVs, cars, computers and most recently the cell phone as necessary for life in modern times. The devaluation of human life pays for the technology that is developed for the sake of expanding the frontiers of knowledge and exploration rather than creating the condition of freedom. Human freedom is lost with each new artificial technical necessity, resulting in an

increasingly nihilistic society; where power increases, choice is lost, resulting in increased meaninglessness. Nihilistic sentiment develops along with technological power; "*We know that power always destroys values and meaning . . . Where power augments indefinitely there is less and less meaning*" (Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age* [New York: Seabury, 1981], 45). Technological necessity proliferates along with technological power over nature, reducing the scope of available choices, options or way of life that differs from those ensnared in the modern mechanized mainstream. What possibilities for a decent way of life are open to those who own neither car nor home, do not use a cell phone or computer, or possess at least a college degree? How *successful* will any corporate organization, church, school or business be if it does not use modern communication technology, radio, TV, computer or advertising techniques (propaganda) to promote its cause or product? As the world conforms itself to technological necessity, "you must get a cell phone and use a computer or risk getting left behind," it loses touch with the reality outside these devices, which is reduced and recreated online. For example, the traditional "church service" where believers join together in the unity of faith around the communion table as community and family becomes the embarrassing forgery of a lone spectator in front of a one dimensional monitor.

6. Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society* (Macon, GA: University Press, 1988), 7. "Tillich describes the creation of a 'second nature' that results from science's attempt to control nature. Second nature in turn subjects man to the same domination he wishes to exert over nature, making himself subject to the very thing he had created to liberate him" (Lawrence J. Terlizzese, *Trajectory of the 21st Century: Essays on Theology and Technology* [Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2009, 155]).

7. Baudrillard's description of Simulacra is reminiscence of

Herbert Marcuse's depiction of "Mimesis" in *One-Dimensional Man*. Mimesis: the total identification of the individual with technological environment that mimics, apes or imitates historical social conditions, for example the city replaces nature, the automobile replaces the horse and carriage, TV replaces the family hearth, social media substitutes for personal relationships. [Muk-bang](#) replaces family members at the dinner table, traditional institutions that requires a personal presence, school and church, are rapidly transferring to the online medium. Likewise Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society* describes technological advancement or "la technique" as creating a new environment, one that overlays both the natural and historical social environments with an urban/industrial/digital one.

8. Braden Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 1-13; *Humans Need Not Apply*, CGP Grey, 2014. The Transhuman Transformation is the ultimate in works salvation that lifts humanity to the next stage in evolutionary development through technological immortality or digitalized godhood that replaces all his physical corruptions with artificial replacements in the simulated heaven of a computer server. The computer does not dominate the will of humanity, enforcing universal peace through fear of annihilation as in the movie *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), but assimilates humanity digitally and recreates it in its own image or highest ideal. The robots are not taking over, rather humanity is surrendering its will and decisions to the computer in tired resignation of life which has become too difficult by its own design.

9. "O LORD . . . What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4, 5). "Angels," Elohim (God) in Psalm 8:5 refers to the divine visitation (theophany) mentioned in verse 4, the Angel of The LORD, i.e., Genesis 18; 19; 22:15;

32:24-32; Exodus 12:12, 13. Humanity was made highest in God's created order, below the creator and above the angelic host in the chain of being; "Don't you know you will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). Angels are "ministering spirits sent to minister to the heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

10. We are not saying one cannot reduce a complicated argument, book, movie etc., to its main points in outline form. We are saying that reduction does not replace the original, as somehow "better." A well-done outline does not alleviate the audience's responsibility to discover for itself, to pick up and read, but will inspire the audience to do so. Reading Calvin's *Institutes*, or Augustine's *City of God* or Thomas' *Summa Theologica* in PowerPoint or Cliff Notes is comparable to watching the Super Bowl in highlights instead of in its entirety from kickoff.

The proliferation of the digital camera as appendage to the cell phone has created the absurd phenomenon of reduction of reduction in the class room. As the PowerPoint slide has allowed professors to reduce all learning to three pertinent bullet points per slide, so students have followed their cue in picturing the text (taking a picture of the slide). Instead of suffering the laborious and tedious task of jotting down a simple outline in a note book, a helpful mnemonic practice, they take a picture of it, reducing the slide to digital acknowledgement and temporary storage before deletion, in order to make room for the pictures of tomorrow night's Harry Potter costume gala. Education isn't what it used to be, it just isn't!

11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 166 ff.

12. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: HBJ, 1986), 43.

13. The projections of visual media may have their origins in "the desert of the real" as Baudrillard puts it, but what the

spectator sees on his screen, monitor or photograph should not be confused with "reality," but recreated reality mediated through an electronic medium. Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim for media analysis, "The medium is the message," undergirds this critical understanding of media technology. Any fan of live entertainment or sports knows immediately that TV broadcast of a live venue is an entirely different event than being there live behind home plate or on the fifty yard line. Preference for the surreal, sterilized, cartoonish, Apollonian images on TV and in film, rather than seeing the actual blots, blemishes and facial scars of people, perspiring athletes or hearing the crack of the bat is not the central moral issue, which does not come down to preferences, which are already conditioned by excessive media exposure at an early age. The failure to distinguish between reality and hyperreality constitutes the greatest dangers of the technological simulacra. When the general audience mistakes or confuses the hyperreal for reality, it allows itself to be deceived. When it believes what it sees on TV to be the literal unbiased truth, when in fact TV broadcasts a highly opinionated reconstructed version designed to transport its audience to a dream-like existence, the audience loses touch with reality and becomes immune to moral conscience, guilt and remorse for its actions—for example, war, ecological destruction, racism, etc. Group deception and delusion is rooted in personal inability to distinguish fact and fantasy, reality and illusion creating a strange self-hypnotic mass psychosis, easily persuaded by the predominate image projected into its thinking. "Brainwashing" or "mind control" are not the best choice of words, yet the terms still resonate for many people in describing the immediate effects of visual media on the audience. Electronic media bypass the rational process and speaks directly to the emotional or subconscious. Media effects the shaping of behavior through mass appeal of image, a reproduction of reality framed in drama and grounded in the erotic (sex appeal), moving the mass to do something (doing is being), buy, give, join, fight, etc., without the ballast of

critical reflection that will spare a people from rushing headlong into disaster. The irrational nature of the emotional appeal was the cause for Plato's expulsion of artists, musicians and dramatists from his fictional utopia *The Republic*. By allowing irrational appeal free reign, the public loses the appeal to critical reason as the measure of truth and the people become prone to deception and mass manipulation by a tyrant. Likewise Jesus urges all to pause in rational reflection, "to count the cost" like a king going to war or building a tower, before deciding to follow him (Luke 14:25-33).

The failure to discern the difference between reality and illusion in mass and social media is due to the intoxicating effects of hyperreality and the loss of critical reason in the public's media consumption. Electronic media numbs awareness to reality and allows escape to fantasy, as the universal *soma* (perfect drug from Huxley's fictional tale *Brave New World*). The condition of intoxication or "drunkardness" is one of self-induced madness, so the self-hypnotic condition of electronic media creates a similar neurosis. Karl Marx criticized religion as "the opiate of the people," accurate for the masses living in the industrial conditions of the 19th century, but obsolete as a description of the masses since the invention of television, which has replaced religion as the opiate of the people.

When image dominates a societal mindset and learning, emotional (sex) appeal moves the population in mass conformity or group behavior that ousts critical reason in herd mentality, subject to the whims of the image makers, propagandists, clergy, advertisers, etc. Ellul noted two orders of thinking determined by the means of learning: image and language. Image learning presents knowledge as a totality, each image is a world, complete and ready-made, certain of its own truthfulness, imparting its information instantly so long as we occupy the same space as the image. "The image conveys

to me information belonging to the category of evidence, which convinces me without any prior criticism" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 36). The image impresses itself on the character of the learner through unconscious acceptance that does not follow the logical sequence of language from start to finish, beginning to end but produces a haphazard collage of contradicting light totalities that appeal immediately to the moment (instant gratification). Image based learning produces a monolithic mentality or stereotypical thinking and prescribed behavior. Critical reason is never allowed to assert differences; extremes are normalized so that everything is accepted. This is very apparent in the current PC orthodoxy widely accepted in the Millennial generation, the first generation raised on the computer, that stupidly pontificates that any assertion of difference between sexes, races, religion, etc., etc., amounts to "hate-crime." For example, the gay lifestyle is no longer an acceptable alternative to monogamy but now has legal sanction as part of the mainstream establishment, despite its irrational and unnatural character. Islam is accepted as a religion of peace and compatible with Western democracies, yet no proof is ever offered to support this claim from the history of Islam. And the universal inanity of technological neutrality that provides the false sense of individual control over technological use, rapidly degenerates to technological necessity and inevitability of technological progress in actual daily behavior. Technology cannot be both neutral in its character under control of human choices and necessary or not under control of human choices, but autonomous (developing according to its own inner logic) at the same time; yet this inherent contradiction is completely ignored by all advocates of unlimited technological progress, Transhumanists, Futurists or simply all those who feel invested in the latest innovation: intellectuals, preachers, writers, professors, technogeeks, technognostics and technophiles. The smartest people in society appear completely oblivious to the contradiction of believing that technology is neutral in its

essence yet necessary in application, rationalizing its rapid acceleration, not because they are bad people but because their thinking is dominated by the image of unlimited progress and human perfectibility projected onto them from the computer, rather than a rational way of thinking growing out of the book and lecture. Computerization of all human life creates the cardinal value of speed for its own sake (faster is better), which necessarily leads to nonlinear or irrational (emotional) learning through images because it is easy, instant, and unconscious, producing stereotypical categories and behavior. The word expressed in speech and writing produces opposition to image domination of the computer because it is slower, linear and critical.

The second order of thinking Ellul says comes from language or the spoken and written word which must follow an arduous task of connecting letters, words, sentences and thoughts to each other through the process of speaking, reading and writing which follows the contours of logical sequence in step by step growth in knowledge and reason. Language learning does not begin with the self-asserting certainty of the totalitarian image, but develops progressively from "the unknown to uncertain and then from the uncertain to the known." (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 36); dialectically including doubt, objection, protest or difference in the attainment of knowledge. Language is rational, self-aware or conscious, certain of what it knows but never exhaustive in its claim to absolute total knowledge, therefore it remains critical or open to differences of opinion and further learning; there is always something new to learn, discover and explore. Language allows for personal identity through individual choices that are free but never absolute or final beyond correction or criticism. In the total world imposed by the image, knowledge is absolute with nothing new possible, therefore it must be accepted uncritically.

Because language is rational it also produces the highest



standards in ethics and morality-rooted individual values and beliefs. Rationalism always produces the greatest moralism. In the ancient world the rational school of philosophy (Stoicism) based on their belief in logos (universal reason) was also the most ethical in their practice of universal peace, and equality. In world religions Buddhism stands as the most rational in its beliefs of simple universal truths leading to practical moral behavior (Four Noble Truths: life is suffering, suffering is caused by selfish desire, suffering is alleviated by limiting selfish desire, curb selfish desire through the practical application of the Eightfold Path). Modern Rationalism culminating in the 19th century was also one of the profoundest in moral character in all strata of society, education, politics, economics and religion. The ethic of love rooted in the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man was considered the essence of Christianity in the 19th century (Harnack, *What is Christianity?*). The Jewish rabbinical approach to learning through language is legendary for its rationalism and strict legalism as well as its Islamic counterpart in the Muslim devotion to the Koran, Sharia Law and iconoclasm.

In the second order of language, ethics are grounded in personal choices as a product of rational criticism, which allows for meaningful differences of opinion and the free creation of values. In the first order of image learning, all views are standard and all behavior an expression of group conformity. "The image tends . . . to produce conformity, to make us join a collective tendency" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 35). Thus the two orders of thinking are opposed to each other. The first order in totalitarian fashion is in the process of eradicating the second order through purging critical reason from the mindset of the population like a mass spiritual lobotomy that removes part of the brain that contains the higher function of reason and abstract thought process. The image overwhelms the word through reduction and then removal and remaps the collective mind to think

accordingly, freedom of thought is left open as possibility only because most people cannot think for themselves but are programmed through media saturation. Note the drift in social media from glorified email responses on Facebook to the forced shrinkage of the word to 120 characters on Twitter, to finally pictures only on Tumblr, and Instagram. The second order in critical toleration of the image does not want to eradicate it, but put image in its place, not as an expression of truth or reality but a simple illustration in service of the word and higher critical function of human nature through which humanity creates its self-definition, limits and significance. The second order of language thinking does not separate rational discourse in philosophy from a dramatic presentation in literature, or the arts, film or TV, etc. The Twentieth Century French Existentialists demonstrated the compatibility of rational discourse through abstract prose and exposition and the concrete embodiment of their ideas in dramatic forms such as plays, novels and movie illustrations. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel wrote the most penetrating philosophical analysis of the modern condition of alienation as well as the greatest poetic description of modern despair and hope, for example, compare Sartre's tome Being and Nothingness with his play "No Exit" or Camus' essay on The Myth of Sisyphus to his novel The Stranger. Theologian Paul Tillich argued likewise that art serves as the spiritual barometer of culture. Through rational analysis of art, literature and drama the church will gain a better read on the spiritual climate of the society it hopes to evangelize and better tailor its message of the gospel to the concrete situation expressed through peoples felt needs. Even Jacques Ellul the leading social critic of visual media and advocate of word over image adopted a similar method of point and counter point as the existentialists by pairing the most penetrating sociological analysis of technology, raising the question how to limit autonomous technique and answering it with an allegorical interpretative method of the biblical text under the respectable umbrella of Barthian theology through

his ethic of limits or nonpower. Compare The Technological Society to his biblical exposition of Genesis in The Meaning of the City.

14. On Facebook, friends can number into the thousands. New friends are just a click away; you don't even have to know them or even meet them to be friends. Aristotle said that friends are the people we eat with every day. Simple enough to grasp, but what does an ancient Greek philosopher know compared to the moguls of social media?

15. Baudrillard and Eco validated Gasset's thesis in *Revolt of the Masses* that science and technology sows the seeds of its own demise by elevating the mass of humanity through its values of discovery, invention and discipline, yet the mass revolt against those values that brought them to dominance. This is the same basic thesis that argues we are the victims of our own success as applied to capitalism and the accumulation of wealth. One generation works to achieve a level of wealth that the next generation inherits with all the benefits of wealth but none of the sacrifice of the previous generation. Therefore it squanders it not knowing the value of wealth not having to work for it and being raised in privilege.

Gay Marriage is another recent example of simulacra. The hyperreal replaces the real with a copy made in our own image. Contemporary society is under a spell, thinking it can remake the institution of marriage founded in the Bible between one man and one woman (Genesis 2 and Matthew 19) to include its opposite or whatever the courts deem acceptable; eventually the courts will accept the union of people and their pets. Already the Disney Corporation has changed the name of The Family Channel to Free Form, an ominous precursor to the dissolution of meaning to the sacred word family in American popular culture and its reprobate legal system.

16. Reality and Truth are not coequal or synonymous terms, but

signify different metaphysical orders. Ellul noted that the unity of reality and truth expresses "the unity of being" (Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 96), or the right relationship between the Creator and his creation. Truth belongs to God's essence alone, as the One Eternal Absolute. Reality expresses the multifaceted finite human concrete situation. When our reality aligns with God's truth we experience the peace of redemption that passes understanding, harmonious being. Reality is the realm of sight that leads us away from the truth of the invisible God who cannot be seen and is found only through the word (speech, talk, conversation, discourse, lecture, song). The visible is the realm of false idols incarnated as very real visible powers (gods): Money, the State, and Technology (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 94, 95). The order of reality is the order of human life which Nietzsche argued may include error. "Life no argument—We have fixed up a world for ourselves in which we can live—assuming bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith, nobody now would endure life. But that does not mean that they have been proved. Life is no argument; the conditions of life could include error." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 177 [121]). Iconoclasm then becomes the mission of the church as it proclaims the gospel and demolishes spiritual strong holds which is the battle for the mind "destroying speculations . . . raised up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6); "iconoclasm is always essential to the degree that other gods and other representations are manifested . . . Today reality triumphs, has swept everything away and monopolizes all our energy and projects. The image is everywhere, but now we bestow dignity, authenticity and spiritual truth on it. We enclose within the image everything that belongs to the order of truth" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 94, 95).

17. In terms of an ethic of technology biblical truth

translates as limit before use or law before license. For example, When adults set time limits on media use for their children anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour of screen time be it TV, computer or cell phone, they are practicing an ethic of technology.

Social critic Jacques Ellul stated; "The 'yes' makes no sense unless there is also the 'no' . . . the no comes first, death before resurrection. If the 'No!' is not lived in its reality the yes is a nice pleasantry, a comfort one adds to one's material comfort, and as Barth has conclusively shown the No is included in the gospel" Quoted in Lawrence J. Terlizese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Cascade: Eugene, OR, 2005), 127; Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, 25.

18. Original Divine Command: "From any tree of the Garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17 NASB).

Satanic Recreation of the original command: "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'"(Genesis 3:1 NASB).

Imperative turns into question through a simple shift in voice emphasis, "Don't eat!" to "Don't eat?", inciting disobedience instead of obedience as its effect, confusing the knowledge of good and evil.

19. The hyperreal replaces the real with a copy made in our own image. A copy is never greater than the original and to believe that a glorified reduction, a snap shot somehow surpasses the original shows just how far along the popular delusion has advanced. Simulacra is portent to antichrist: "The one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this

reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness”(2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Mass media qualifies as “a deluding influence”: remaking the image of God in the image of an image. “Language is unobtrusive in that it never asserts itself on its own. When it [mass media] uses a loudspeaker and crushes others with its powerful equipment, when the television set speaks, the word is no longer involved, since no dialogue is possible. What we have in these cases is machines that use language as a way of asserting themselves. Their power is magnified, but language is reduced to a useless series of sounds which inspires only reflexes and animal instincts” (Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 23).

The first commandment teaches that “You shall not make any graven images . . . you shall not bow down to them nor worship them (Exodus 20:4, 5). The construction of image is always a reduction from an original and imperfectly copies what it claims to represent; presenting a false image of God, an idol. The idol transforms its worshipers into its own image. All those who worship idols become like them (Psalms 115).

By worshiping the creature humanity dehumanizes itself by bowing down to the created order lower than itself. The prohibition against worshiping idols is meant to spare God’s people from corrupting God’s glory by reducing the invisible Creator to the visible creation and enslaving themselves to the works of their own hands. Idolatry exchanges “the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . .” (Romans 1:23). The idol is the construction of man, representing his ideal of God (image) in his own image, which in turn recreates man as slave in the image of the idol. Here we see perfectly in the biblical model of idolatry, the same Transhumanists enterprise of constructing an ideal image (cyborg) in the image (mankind) of an image (the computer), leading not to human ascendance or godhood but dehumanization

or slavery by placing humanity lower than its own creation (the cyborg condition). Man builds an idol he thinks represents God which in truth is a reduction of the glory of God into the image of the creature and lowers himself through worship of the false image of God making himself a slave to a thing that appears real but really does not exist outside of humanity's faith in its own self-projection.

The first commandment prohibits "graven images" the invisible God cannot be seen in the works of human hands (Acts 17). All images of God are an affront to his holiness and danger to his children. Idols reduce God to the false image which then further reduces worshipers.

Iconoclasm is the central liberation mission of the church in its declaration of the gospel.

"No one can see God and live" (Exodus 33:20). "Images are incapable of expressing anything about God. In daily life as well, the word remains the expression God Chooses. Images are in a completely different domain—the domain that is not God and can never become God on any grounds" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 91).

20. Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 96.

21. God's revelation comes only through the spoken word received by faith never through sight, which must remain subservient to the oral, spoken invisible message. "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). "We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen . . . By faith we understand . . . Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11). "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as

it is written; 'The righteous live by faith'" (Romans 1:17). "Set your mind on things above [the invisible Christ, "the way, the truth and the life"], not on the things that are on earth [the visible, material, tangible, concrete reality of the present world]." "Fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). The aural, auditory sense or put simply the ear is the organ of perception and faith never the eyes. Sight brings only doubt; despite popular opinion seeing is not believing, but unbelief. The desire to see the truth is rooted in doubt and unbelief; "Unless I see . . ." doubting Thomas said, ". . . I will not believe" (John 20:25). "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). "Sight played an enormous role in the Fall and caused all of humanity and language to swing to its side. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the Bible so often relates sight to sin. Sight is seen as the source of sin, and the eye becomes the link between reality and the flesh. The eye is seen as the focusing lens of the body (but only of the body). The Bible speaks of the lust of the eye and of the eye as the source and means of coveting. Now we know that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair, since sin always depends on it. "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20: 17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes everything—all the other sins" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 100, 101). Because Eve looked upon the fruit, she lusted after wisdom, the knowledge of good and evil, a possession she desired but did not work for or earn that did not belong to her. "Eve coveted equality with God . . . She coveted autonomy of decision" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 101). Lust is born from sight of the material possession. The Tenth Commandment lists a prohibition of desire on what does not belong to us but is rightfully our neighbor's: his wife, house, domesticated animals and servants, all must first be seen before desired. Today we call these possessions status symbols, spouse, house, cars, money, etc., etc., all the objects of consumer desire that dominate our visual horizon through advertising, commercials and the all-pervasive world



of image, which fills us with materialistic greed.

22. Technological convergence brings TV, computer, cell phone, video game (telecommunications) together as one medium. Professor of Philosophy Andy Clark notes that the cell phone is the gateway to the cyborg condition: "The cell phone is, indeed, a prime, if entry-level cyborg technology" (Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 27). The cell phone has evolved from a clumsy mobile phone into a sleek microcomputer that puts the full resources of the internet at the fingertips of the user.

The computer medium heralds the absolute closing of the human mind and cultural diversity by subverting all ends to its means it creates the condition necessary for total domination of the human spirit. All total systems subvert ends to means in their revolutionary beginning, such as the Napoleonic empire, fascism and communism. "By any means necessary," or "for the good of the cause" becomes the motto of the radical on the road to totalitarian paradise (Serfdom). The computer coopts all nontechnical areas; in the form of "technical aid and support" subverting their ends by overbearing means. As the absolute single point of convergence for all humanity the computer fixes its own organizational categories on every person, discipline (field) or organization that uses it. The passage of admission to digital utopia is technical conformity (surrender). All nontech people and fields must soon learn the ways of the computer, if they expect to survive in the new universal cyber regime (the technological order). Liberal Arts, for instance no longer exists as a separate track or discipline in a dialectical counter balance to Science. Beholden to the computer for success it has sold its spiritual birth right as moral conscience through cultural critic or prophet to the rational establishment. By way of apt analogy, in the past when churches received State support through official recognition as the established religion they became

in effect the court prophets, chaplain's to the king. They "sold out" to the powers that be, forfeiting their divisive voice. Dissent is never allowed in any total system by definition, otherwise it would not be total. Those who profit from the system are not in a position to disagree with its direction without mortal endangerment. The old maxim "never bite the hand that feeds you" was rigorously applied by the official religions in the past. Likewise, rarely is a critical voice heard today through the prodigious production of liberal arts in media, except for science fiction film. The old dichotomy of art and technology embodied in the Intellectual verses the City model has resolved itself in the computer. Chilton Williamson, Jr. noted the subtle reeducation the older generation of writers must endure in order to practice their craft using the computer. "Writing ought to be, technically speaking, among the simplest and natural of human actions. The computer makes it one of the most complex and unnatural ones. It is nothing less than a crime against humanity, and against art, that a writer should be required to learn how to master a machine of any kind whatsoever in order to write a single sentence. But no writer today can succeed in his craft if he does not learn to become a more or less skillful machine operator first." ("Digital Enthusiasm" in *Chronicles* [June 2014, 38.6], 33). The end or goal of writing (to be read by others) has been subverted by means of the computer (Subversion: to corrupt an alien system for different ends from within, for example; primitive Christianity was subverted by the political forces of the later Roman Empire, creating Christendom). Computer subversion of humanity has been repeated simultaneously with writing since the digital revolution in the 1990's.

By giving children at the earliest age possible a computer to play with and master, turning work into play, the technological oligarchy has guaranteed that they will grow to become computer technicians in some degree and has successfully circumvented the nasty reeducation process

necessary to all revolutions in the past. As the product of the digital revolution the Millennial generation has inherited the onerous responsibility of being the first generation raised on the computer as their defining characteristic. They are the first non-national generation, identifiable by digital acuity, video game addiction and the cell phone, rather than by race, gender or creed. The world that they create will ultimately prove their humanity or not.

One machine that can do everything controls everyone, even now as I write an unsolicited advertisement appears on my computer screen telling me that "Technical support is designed to monitor your system for issues." Positively Orwellian! No greater insidious subtlety to seduce the human spirit than the emerging global technological order has appeared since the Tower of Babel!

All total systems are inherently corrupt and eventually self-destruct.

23. Philosopher Michael Foucault builds on Jeremy Bentham's purposed panoptic system theory by arguing that Bentham's proposed universal prison surveillance system that kept prisoners under constant watch has been extended to contemporary society through media saturation. Law Professor Jerry Rosen argues that through social media society has entered a condition he describes as "Omniopticon" where we are all watching each other (*The Naked Crowd*); Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 152; Reg Whitaker *The End of Privacy: How Total Surveillance Is Becoming a Reality* (New York: New Press, 1999).

24. Hyperreal communities, churches, schools, dating sites do not allow for individual charisma, personal persona, flamboyancy, speech impediments, warts, blemishes, ugliness, beauty, intelligence, everything thing that makes an individual unique disappears behind the brilliance of a cartoon reality.

The modern socialization process once reserved for family, church and community in traditional society has been usurped by media and the State. Socialization is the rather sensitive and all important process through which values are imprinted on youth. Socialization is everything! Society receives its understanding of right and wrong, good and evil in a word normalcy through socialization. In the mission of the church socialization is equal to evangelism. If the church successfully evangelizes a society, converting everyone to the Christian faith, it must then pass those values to the next generation, if it fails to do so it must then start the whole evangelization process over. Regrettably, the American church is learning this lesson the hard way, after surrendering the socialization process of Christian youth to media, and public schools. The most media saturated and technologically adapt generation in human history is rapidly becoming the most nihilistic since late antiquity.

Media transmits collective values directly to the social body by passing the individual consciousness. Mass media transmits its own values of consumption and materialism that traditional family, church and community as social agents cannot compete with according to social critic Herbert Marcuse. Media transmits the values of "efficiency, dream, and romance." "With this education, the family can no longer compete." The father's authority is the first traditional value to fall. (Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry to Freud* (New York: Vintage 1955, 88).

25. John L. Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 19.

26. The only reason people give as to why they use media technology is because of its convenience, it is easier to send an email or text than write a letter and use a postage stamp. However, ease of use and convenience shows lack of understanding as well as accountability. "I use it because it

is easy" is hardly a thought-out moral defense for one's action! And here is where the trap lies for all of us. The history of technology demonstrates that convenient and pervasive use over time slowly turns into necessity. What was once done because it was so easy to do, eventually must be done. TV, computer and most recently the cell phone, these technologies never appeared as necessities but convenience, but now they are irresistible necessities. Convenience turns into necessity because it was so easy to send a text, or email, we have forgotten how to communicate in any other way, or refuse to relearn those old ways. Convenience dulls the spirit and numbs the mind, producing stupidity and apathy by removing all other practices from our intellectual horizon. Beware of anything thing that looks so easy, it is nothing more than a hook to necessity. The old saying, "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is," applies to technology as well. "Whatever appears to make your life easier right now in the long run may make it more difficult." Convenience turns into habit, habit turns into need, need turns into addiction.

27. The friendships forged in traditional institutions create the social support network for an individual throughout his professional career. As an online professor I did not know how to write a letter of recommendation for a student I have never met in person. Education has become so dominated by technical learning, all students in essence are studying to be engineers in their field whether teachers, medical practitioners, social workers etc.; they are taught efficient methods as administrators or managers of large groups of people.

28. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962).

29. Quoted in Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society*, 43.

30. Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 122. "Even more, it [the camera] keeps me from proceeding to cultural assimilation, because these two steps can be taken only in a

state of availability and lack of preoccupation with other matters – a state of “being there.” (Ibid).

31. In line with Baudrillard thesis on the orders of simulacra, popular cell phone use, namely texting, demonstrates regressive effects of the latter stage of simulacra: metastasis or reversal of effects. It is quite common to see people texting and even preferring texting to any other mode of communication, especially phone calling, when it is obviously easier to call and talk than it is to text, time wise and in terms of context and amount of content necessary for successful conversation, yet texting is preferred because of its impersonal nature; people prefer the harder task of texting because it is impersonal, however, impersonal communication is less effective to the point of communication.

32. *Radio Times* (January 2016). Hawking said bluntly, “I think the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.” Quoted in “Rise of the Machines” in the *Dallas Morning News* Sunday, February 14, 2016, 1P. Recognizing and controlling the dangers of progress is a call for limits and boundaries to technological acceleration possible only through negation.

33. The fear of living without the necessity that controls us reveals the modern condition of technological determinism. In confronting determinism we must appeal to “the individual’s sense of responsibility . . . the first act of freedom, is to become aware of the necessity” (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxiii).

Necessity (whatever we fear we cannot live without) is always a limitation placed on human nature, such as the basic biological needs to eat and sleep. Necessity limits freedom and therefore power and ability. Death is also a necessity, without which new life and growth cannot take place. However, death is the last enemy, which is defeated finally in the

resurrection of the saints (1 Corinthians 15:50-58). To believe as Transhumanists do that death can be overcome through technological enhancement can only result in abomination. Professor of Computer Science Matthew Dickerson prophetically asks, what if the Transhuman “transformation is based on something that is not true? What will we be transformed into?” (*The Mind and the Machine: What it Means to be Human and Why it Matters*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), xiv.

34. A campaign to “JUST SAY NO!” to further technological advance that threatens human existence, such as artificial intelligence, must be a collective effort for the entire human race, but begins with our own personal individual choices in limiting technological use, i.e. TV, computer, cell phone, and automobiles, and set boundaries to consumption on all consumer products. Resist the digitalization of traditional life through technological transfer of community to the online medium. Despite the convenience of a total online education it is unconscionable and detrimental if online students never encounter a real college classroom, talk face to face with a professor and argue in group discussion with peers. Likewise, the church cannot remain the Body of Christ by shunting its responsibilities to parishioners, new members and seekers by declaring online and televised services equal to a live one. “Do not forsake the assembly of yourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25) prohibits a total digitalization of Christian worship and community. Christ said, “Where two or three have gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The bodily presence necessary for community conveyed in these passages must not be allegorized by techno-gnostics who equate physical isolation in front of an electric screen to be “just as good” as being there.

35. We are enslaved to what we fear we cannot live without whether it be money, sex or technology. The rich young ruler did not follow Christ because he could not imagine life

without his wealth, the security, comfort and power it bestowed was greater than the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24). The disciples were in shock at Jesus’ utter intolerance to devotion to anything other than God: “You cannot serve God and money [technology, power]” (Matthew 6:24). Knowing their own attachment to wealth, they despaired, “Who then can be saved?” (Mark 10:26). It appears impossible to give up what we fear we cannot live without. “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:25); the perennial anxiety and pursuit of the faithless and fearful enslaved to material (bodily) necessity; “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing [enhancement]?” (Matthew 6:25). “For after all these things the Gentiles [unregenerate] seek” (Matthew 6:32). “But Lord Jesus, we cannot live without cell phones and computers, any more than we can live without money! Get real, be reasonable—Lord you are asking the impossible of mortal sinners.” And Jesus agrees, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27).

36. Louis Armstrong – *What A Wonderful World* Lyrics | MetroLyrics

37. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxi.

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# Truth: What It Is and Why We



# Can Know It

*Rick Wade explores truth from a biblical and philosophical perspective. Despite what many believe, it IS possible to know truth because of the role of Jesus Christ as creator and revealer of truth.*

## The Loss of Confidence



Did you see the movie *City of Angels*? Nicholas Cage plays an angel named Seth who has taken a special interest in a surgeon named Maggie, played by Meg Ryan. Maggie's lost a patient on the operating table, and she is very upset about it. Seth meets her in a hallway in the hospital, and gets her to talk about the loss. Here is a snippet of the conversation:

**Maggie:** I lost a patient.

**Seth:** You did everything you could.

**Maggie:** I was holding his heart in my hand when he died.

**Seth:** He wasn't alone.

**Maggie:** Yes, he was.

**Seth:** People die.

**Maggie:** Not on my table.

**Seth:** People die when their bodies give out.

**Maggie:** It's my job to keep their bodies from giving out. Or what am I doing here?

**Seth:** It wasn't your fault, Maggie.

**Maggie:** I wanted him to live.

**Seth:** He *is* living. Just not the way you think.

**Maggie:** I don't believe in that.

**Seth:** Some things are true whether you believe in 'em or not. [\[1\]](#)

What did he say?! "Some things are true whether you believe in 'em or not"?? Are you kidding?!? That's crazy talk these days! I have a right to my own opinion, and if I don't believe it, if it's not my opinion, it's not true . . . for me, anyway.

The meaning of *truth* has changed in recent decades. Whereas once it meant statements about reality, today it often means what works or what is meaningful to me. This kind of language is heard primarily in the context of religion and morality. We have lost confidence in our ability to know what reality *is*. So much emphasis has been put on knowledge through sense experience that anything outside the boundaries of the senses is considered unknowable. Moral and religious discussions frequently end with, "Well, that's *your* opinion," or the more colorful, "Opinions are like belly buttons. Everyone has one." It's assumed that opinions can't be universally, objectively true or false. Each person is his or her own authority over what is true. Truth is a personal possession which is why people get so offended when challenged. A challenge is taken personally. "This is *my* truth. Don't touch it!" Strong challenges are even taken as a sign of disrespect.

What does it mean when truth is lost? In philosophy, the result is skepticism or pragmatism. In society in general, one sees a degeneration from skepticism to hypocrisy to cynicism. First we say no one can know what is true—that's skepticism. Then someone says "I have the truth" but then speaks or acts in a way not in keeping with that "truth" (if truth is

uncertain, it can change with my moods)—that’s hypocrisy. Then we stop trusting each other—that’s cynicism. In politics, power and image are what count. In matters of morality, there is no standard above us; social consensus is the best we can hope for, or “human solidarity,” according to Christopher Hitchens. Justice has no sure footing. Might becomes right.

[Elsewhere I have written](#) that we don’t have to give in either to the demand for absolute certainty or to the skepticism of our day.<sup>{2}</sup> We can be confident in our ability to know truth even though not exhaustively. In this article I want to look at the nature and ground of truth, for these are of utmost importance in regard to the question of reliable knowledge.

## **Truth: The Significance of Its Loss**

Let’s look more closely at what it means to lose confidence in knowing truth. One problem is that we become closed up in our individual shells with each of us having his or her own truth. Theologian Roger Nicole notes that the loss of truth means the loss of meaning in language; if we don’t know whether a proposition means what it seems to mean or its opposite, then language is impotent to convey reliable knowledge. And we get caught up in contradictions. As Nicole wrote, those who deny objective validity “presuppose such validity at least for their denial!”<sup>{3}</sup>

Problems are also created in the realm of morality. Historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto wrote this:

*The retreat from truth is one of the great dramatic, untold stories of history. . . . For professional academics in the affected disciplines, to have grown indifferent to truth is an extraordinary reversal of traditional obligations; it is like physicians renouncing the obligation to sustain life or theologians losing interest in God—developments, formerly unthinkable, which now loom as truth diminishes. The trashing of truth began as an academic vice, but the debris is now*

*scattered all over society. It is spread through classroom programmes, . . . In a society of concessions to rival viewpoints, in which citizens hesitate to demand what is true and denounce what is false, it becomes impossible to defend the traditional moral distinction between right and wrong, which are relativized in turn. Unless it is true, what status is left for a statement like 'X is wrong' where X is, say, adultery, infanticide, euthanasia, drug-dealing, Nazism, paedophilia, sadism or any other wickedness due, in today's climate, for relativization into the ranks of the acceptable? It becomes, like everything else in western society today, a matter of opinion; and we are left with no moral basis for encoding some opinions rather than others, except the tyranny of the majority.* {4}

One of the worst problems for a well-ordered society is cynicism. First we say there's no truth. But then we hypocritically push our views on others as though we have the truth. Then people stop trusting each other. "You say there are no fixed truths, but then you push your claims on me." The result is cynicism.

Some people claim that truth claims are suspect because the words we use are changeable; they can't carry fixed, eternal truths. If we don't think it's possible that words convey truth, then words lose their objective meaning, and we start giving them our *own* meanings.

The loss of confidence in knowing truth is significant for Christians, too, who, without realizing it, adopt similar patterns of thought. When such confidence in knowing truth is weakened, one cannot have confidence that the Bible is the true Word of God. Its authority in the individual's life is weakened because what it says becomes questionable. Evangelism becomes a matter of sharing one's own religious preferences, rather than delivering God's authoritative Word. Bible study becomes a sharing of opinions with none being normative. Each

has his or her own opinion and no one is supposed to say a given opinion is wrong.

## Truth in Scripture

What is this “truth” thing we talk so much about? My dictionary has such definitions as genuineness, reality, correctness, and statements which accord with reality.[{5}](#) Truth can also be a characteristic of persons and things. Someone or some thing that is true is genuine or in keeping with his or its nature. And truth can refer to quality of conduct. The Bible speaks of people doing the truth rather than doing evil (cf. Nah. 9:33; Jn. 3:20, 21).[{6}](#)

To help in considering all these matters, let’s look at truth as understood in Scripture, and then at truth considered in philosophical terms.

What does the Bible teach about truth?

In the Old Testament, the word most often translated *true*, *truth*, or *truly* is *’emet* or a cognate.[{7}](#) This word is also translated “faithfulness.” Let’s consider the matter of faithfulness first.

For the Israelites, Yahweh was “the God in whose word and work one could place complete confidence.”[{8}](#) For example, God said through Zechariah: “I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God” (8:8). Nehemiah said to God: “You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong” (9:33). “The works of his hand are faithful and just,” said the Psalmist; “all his precepts are trustworthy” (111:7).

*’Emet* also means truth as over against falsehood as when Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were telling the truth (Gen. 42:16), and when the Israelites were warned to test accusations that people were worshiping other gods to see if they were true (Deut. 13:14). Commenting on Ps. 43:3—“Send

forth your light and your truth, let them guide me”—theologian Anthony Thiselton says that “Truth enables [the writer] to escape from the dark, and to see things for what they are.”[{9}](#)

We shouldn't conclude by these two uses of the word that on any given occasion “truth” always means *both* faithfulness *and* the opposite of falsehood. However, there is a connection between the two. Theologian Anthony Thiselton says the connection depends “on the fact that when God or man is said to act faithfully, often this means that his word and his deed are one. He has acted faithfully in accordance with his spoken word. Hence the believer may lean his whole weight confidently on God, and find him faithful.”[{10}](#)

Thus, in the Old Testament, truth is a matter of both words and deeds. “Men express their respect for truth not in abstract theory, but in their daily witness to their neighbour and their verbal and commercial transactions,” Thiselton says.[{11}](#)

In the New Testament, there is an increased focus on truth as conformity to reality and as opposed to falsehood. The Greek word *alētheia* means, literally, “not hidden.” When Peter was sprung from prison by an angel, he didn't know if it was real (or true) or a dream (Acts 12:9). John the Baptist bore witness to the truth (Jn. 5:33). Jesus used the phrase “I tell you in truth” four times to emphasize the correctness of what he was about to say (Lk. 4:25; 9:27; 12:44; 21:3). When Jesus said “I *am* the truth,” (Jn. 14:6), He was identifying Himself with what is ultimately and finally real.

Truth in the New Testament isn't disconnected from how we live, however. We are to walk in the truth (2 Jn. 4; 2 Pet. 2:22), and we are to obey the truth (Gal. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:22).

One mustn't oversimplify scriptural teaching on truth. However, it's safe to say that truth in the Bible means having the correct understanding of the way things really are, and

living in accordance with this understanding.

## Truth Considered Philosophically

Let's look at truth now from a philosophical perspective, first as what is real, and then as true statements. This is important, because these are the terms according to which non-Christians think about the matter.

First, truth is a characteristic of reality. In short, if something is real, it is true. Or put philosophically, if something "participates in being," it is true. When we say that the God of the Bible is the true God, we mean He really exists and really is God!

By analogy, we might ask if a plant we see in a room is a true or real plant. We want to know if it is organic, and not plastic or fabric. If we say a *person* has exhibited true love, we're saying the person's actions weren't motivated by anything other than concern for the object of the person's love.

Second, truth is a characteristic of accurate statements or propositions. Sentences which express true meanings convey truth. This is what we typically think of when we speak of truth.[\[12\]](#)

We often divide truth in this sense into the categories of *objective* and *subjective*. When we speak of objective truth, we mean that a statement truly reflects what is real, or really the case, apart from ourselves as knowers. And whether we believe it or not. Such truth is public; others can verify it. When we speak of *subjective* truth, we're speaking of truth that comes from us individually, where we ourselves are the only authority. For example, "My leg hurts" is subjective in the sense that I am the sole authority. Or if I claim that "French vanilla ice cream is the best tasting kind there is," that is a subjective truth claim."

Both truth as what's real and truth as objectively true statements are in crisis today. First, postmodernists say we can't know what's ultimately real. In academia this means there is no framework for integrating the various areas of study. In everyday life it results in fractured lives as we find ourselves having to conform to different situations without any integrating structure. French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard had this to say about postmodernism: "[Postmodernism] has deconstructed its entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces—that is postmodern." [{13}](#)

We can rearrange the pieces in a number of different ways, but there is, as it were, no picture on the front of the puzzle box to guide us. [{14}](#) Such a view of truth leaves one unwilling, or unable really, to say what is true about anything of importance, and, as a result, forces one into the rather mindless tolerance demanded today. Dorothy Sayers had this to say about such "tolerance":

*In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.* [{15}](#)

Second, although truth as true statements is still acknowledged today, some important matters are considered subjective which should be acknowledged as objective, such as statements about God and morality. Christians believe we can know what is ultimately and objectively real and true because the One who is ultimately real and true, God, has revealed Himself to us.



# A Foundation for Knowledge of Truth

Now we finally get to the key idea of this article.

Christians claim that they have the truth, a claim that is met with scorn. We are tempted to point to the Bible as our basis for the claim, but critics claim that we're jumping the gun. If no one can have confidence in knowing truth, then what good is the Bible? It isn't the *source* that's the question; not yet anyway. It's the very *possibility* of knowing truth that is questioned. How are truth and the possibility of knowing it even possible?

In a nutshell, we have what philosophical naturalism has given up: we have a metaphysical basis for knowing truth, a basis in what is.

You see, for the naturalist, there is nothing fixed behind the changing world. Three things need to be the case about the world for us to know truth: that it is real; that it is rational; and that there is something fixed behind it. *And* we need to be able to connect with what is around us with our senses and our reason.

Here's the key point: *Knowledge of truth is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the Logos of God, Jesus Christ.* I'll return to this below.

It is not enough that Christians to simply throw their hands up in despair over this. We have a message that is true for all people. But it may not do to just point to the Bible as our source for true beliefs if the very possibility of knowing any enduring truth is in doubt. Upon what basis can we believe we can really know truth?

To have true knowledge of the world outside our own minds, there has to be a solid connection between our thoughts and the world. The world has to be rational, and we have to have the proper sensory and mental apparatus necessary to

comprehend it. Christianity provides such a connection between our minds and reality outside us in the person of the *Logos* of God.

“In the beginning was the Word,” John wrote, the *Logos* (John 1:1; cf. Rev. 19:13). In Greek philosophy, *logos* was the impersonal principle of cosmic reason which was thought to give order and intelligibility to the world. John’s *Logos*, however, is not impersonal; a Person, not a principle. The *Logos*—Jesus of Nazareth—is the intelligent expression of God or the Word of God (Jn. 1:1,14; Rev. 19:13). He is not secondary to God, but is God.

The significance of this for the possibility of knowing truth is this: knowledge is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the *Logos*. Remember that Jesus, the *Logos*, is not only the One who reveals God to us, but is also the creator of the universe (Jn.1:3; Col.1:16,17; Heb.1:2). Because the universe came from a rational Being, the universe is rational. Further, there is no hint in Scripture that the world is an illusion; it is just what it appears to be: real. And because we’re made in God’s image, we’re rational beings who can know the universe.[{16}](#) Also, we can perceive the world around us because we were created with the sensory apparatus to perceive it.

But this is just knowledge of our world. What about knowledge of God? Not only has the *Logos* created us with the ability to know the world, He has also revealed Himself in a rational and even observable way. He is, as Carl Henry put it, “the God Who speaks and shows.”[{17}](#)

Because of all this, it is not arrogance that is behind the Christian claim that truth can be known. We claim it because we have a basis for it: Jesus of Nazareth, the *Logos* of God, the Creator, has made knowledge of truth possible, knowledge of this world *and* of God. Modern philosophy and theology denied God’s ability to reveal Himself to us in any

significant way. But such ideas diminish God Himself. He made us to know His world. He gave us sense organs to know the empirical world; He gave us rational minds to engage in logical and mathematical reasoning and to engage in the many, many deductions we make every day of our lives. He also made us to know Him, and He revealed Himself to us through a variety of ways.

It's no wonder that the naturalistic philosophy of our time is incapable of having confidence in knowing truth. It has lost a metaphysical ground for truth. Jesus of Nazareth is not only our source of salvation; He is also the Creator. And because of this, we can have confidence in our ability to know truth in general and truth about God in particular.

## Notes

1. *City of Angels*, DVD, directed by Brad Silberling (Warner Home Video, 1998).
2. Rick Wade, "Confident Belief," Probe Ministries, 2001, [www.probe.org/confident-belief/](http://www.probe.org/confident-belief/).
3. Roger Nicole, "The Biblical Concept of Truth," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 287.
4. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 165-66.
5. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed, s.v., "true."
6. John V. Dahms, "The Nature of Truth," *JETS* 28/4 (December, 1985), 455-465. This is parallel to Carnell's triad of ontological truth, propositional truth, and truth as personal rectitude. See Edward John Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), 14-17.
7. Nicole, 288. I am indebted to Nicole's and Thiselton's (cf.

note 8 below) studies for much of what follows.

8. Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); s.v. "Truth" by A. C. Thiselton, III.877, quoting Alfred Jepsen, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, I:313.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 5, *God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 336.

13. Jean Baudrillard, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: 2000), 169.

14. See Groothuis, 170.

15. Dorothy Sayers, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 4; quoted in Groothuis, 170.

16. As Henry says, "As creative, the Word of God is the ground of all existence; as revelatory, it is the ground of all human knowledge." (GRA, 5:334) Also, "The Logos is the creative Word whereby God fashioned and preserves the universe. He is the light of the understanding, the Reason that enables intelligible creatures to comprehend the truth." (GRA 3:212).

17. The subtitle to Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 1.

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# The Church and the Social Media Revolution

*Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese examines social media's massive communication shift, with insights for the church.*

## What is Social Media?

Any media that uses two-way communication as opposed to one-way communication is *social media* rather than *mass media*, such as TV, radio, and print which deliver a message to a mass audience. Mass media is not personal like the telephone, or letter writing; it is directed to the crowd or to a particular niche in the crowd that does not allow for the audience to talk back, with some exceptions. Mass media is not social because it does not permit a conversation with its audience. Social media, such as social websites like Facebook, Twitter, and the new Youtoo Social TV website, allows for dialogue and two-way communication between speaker and audience. It is dialogue rather than monologue. Social media use is not limited to just the popular websites. Any form of electronic communication involving computers and cell phones is part of the social media revolution because these technologies offer the individual the ability to respond.



It is estimated that one-third of the world is now connected to the internet. If you have an email address you are involved in social media. This sizeable amount constitutes a revolution in communication because it changes the way we communicate and it changes *what* we communicate. In calling

social media a revolution we simply mean this is a new way of communicating. It does not mean mass media will be abolished. Media, along with most technological progress, operates in a layering system where a new layer or technology builds on the old one rather than abolishing it. Mass media begins with the printing press. The telephone, radio, and TV come later. Television remains the most prominent mass medium; while the printed word has not disappeared, it is certainly not as central as it was in the nineteenth century. The computer adds another layer to our media and brings them all together. It will overshadow them all, but not abolish them.

With about a third of the actual world online or engaged in social media, it is necessary that the church, which is in the business of communication, makes sure its message is accurately represented there. But the task is not as easy as starting a new profile page since there are certain problems that must be addressed as we communicate.

## **The Medium Is the Message**

Close to 2,247,000,000 people use social media worldwide. This is a remarkable change in just a few years and easily qualifies as a new way of communicating, unprecedented in the history of the world. It is a revolution because it changes the way we communicate from face-to-face individual contact to an electronic mediation with certain advantages and disadvantages.

We have all heard the saying, “the medium is the message.”<sup>{1}</sup> This means the way we say something is as important as what we say, or that the medium affects the content of what is said. Preaching is not unaffected by this principle. Simply because someone preaches the word of God does not mean immunity to the potential negative aspects of his chosen medium just as with radio, TV, and the internet. For example, radio and TV are effective in reaching a mass audience, but this usually must

come at the expense of the quality of the message; it must be toned down to fit these media. Any subject with many ideas and complex logic may work in a book format but not on TV. Telephones put you in touch with a disembodied voice, superior to not talking or letter writing, but still not as good as actually talking to someone in person. Anyone involved with persuasion in business deals where you absolutely must communicate a convincing point knows the importance of body language, tone of voice, eye contact, appearance, and attitude—all conveyed by personal presence but lost over the phone. The phone itself shapes what you say by how it is said. It reduces communication from all five senses to one: hearing. The results are predictable: the phone reduces communication compared to actually being there.

A basic law of media says the wider the audience the less substantive a message simply because it must appeal to the common denominator in the general audience. The more people you want to reach, the less of a message you will have, which means keep it simple when it comes to a general audience so the majority of people can understand it. This is the drawback of instant and mass communication. We sacrifice quality of thought and depth of analysis for instant access to a mass audience and for immediate applicability of a general principle. In other words, we are telling people what to do without reflection, which is time consuming, slow, and simply awkward. Analysis is meant for the personal level, and mass communication is not personal. The reductionist trend in media can be circumvented to some extent through niche audiences which many social media sites actually represent. This is a fair reflection of actual communities. What is society but the collection of smaller groups put into a whole?

## **Disembodiment**

Social media represents a disembodied form of community. This of course is the nature of long distance relationships and

communication. The reduction of knowledge to its simplest forms brings with it the sense that knowledge or community is simply information. The gospel can be communicated as information but it is more than that. The same is true with traditional forms of preaching, books, or even TV. We know after all has been said there still remains a side of the gospel that must be experienced or encountered in real people. The gospel must be embodied and not simply read about or talked about. This was the gist of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: "you are a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3-4). We might as well say written not electronically on the transient screen with flickering pixels, but in flesh and blood and in one-to-one encounters with friends, family, and neighbors. Media, as good as it is, cannot substitute for personal experience of God and fellowship with others. This brings the idea of an online community, church or school into question. There is no doubt that people communicate effectively this way, even on Facebook, and they can learn through this medium just like any traditional means, but there is a doubt as to how qualitative one's learning or one's community will be if there is no personal encounter. Can long lasting bonds and relationships form strictly through electronic means?

Social media is excellent at giving you a wide audience just like TV and radio and even meeting new people, but it is not a replacement for face-to-face contact. Media technology may best be seen as an excellent supplement to relationships and community, but not a replacement. It can be used to stay in touch and keep people connected, but it cannot ultimately replace our community and social network of actual people. I think the goal of an online church should be to get people out from behind a computer and into contact and fellowship with others. Social media can facilitate friendship, but it cannot replace it. We are warm-blooded creatures and need other warm-



blooded people to have community, something a computer screen cannot provide. Social media serves as a supplement to community, not a substitute!

## **Social Media and Privacy**

What happens in Vegas stays on Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter. Privacy is dead. The computer killed it, and no one cares. Every step forward in technological progress has a price to pay. We have moved forward in creating social media which enables us to communicate with a wider audience, but society has paid a terrible price with the loss of privacy. The computer remembers everything. This reality should cause some pause and reflection on what we say simply because it can be potentially recalled and even used against us. Employers routinely check Facebook pages of potential employees. Creditors use Facebook to collect debts. The police use Facebook to find people and build cases against them. We think of social media as fun and games, much like a video game, when in fact it is much more serious. All social media communication such as email or texting exists in a nether world between an illusion of privacy and the potential public access by everyone. The user falsely assumes his message is private without realizing it may be available to anyone. Future generations will archive and access all that we say today.

Even more seriously, the NSA is currently building a supercomputer called the Utah Data Center scheduled to go online in 2013 that will monitor all your digital actions including email, cell phone calls, even Google searches.[{2}](#) It will be able to track all your purchases electronically. Whatever you do digitally will be available for scrutiny by the government. I know you wanted to hear how great social media is for communicating, evangelism, and so forth, and it is great, but there are pitfalls and dangers that we must also confront. Let's not get so swept up with our enthusiasm for

social media that we stick our head in the sand when it comes to the dangers. This is the greatest problem I see Christians make when they analyze technology. They see only the advantages and positive sides of their technological involvement and refuse to consider what may go wrong. It will not create a damper to analyze the potential problems of our technology use, rather it will make us sober-minded as we are commanded to be (1 Peter 1:13, 4:7 and 5:8).

## **Dialogue vs. Monologue**

Social media does offer a great advantage over the traditional means of mass communication that the church has used in print, TV, and radio. Social media represents a democratization of media including TV. Mass media is traditionally one-sided communication or monologue where one powerful voice does all the speaking, especially on TV. Social media allows for multiple voices to be heard at once and in contrast with each other, allowing for a dialogue and conversation as opposed to the pedagogy of monologue. This is significant because, as we are told by media experts like Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul, propaganda is usually the result of only one voice being permitted in a discussion or the absence of dialogue, much like in a commercial where only one view point is promoted. McLuhan notes the importance of dialogue with media: "The environment as a processor of information is propaganda. Propaganda ends where dialogue begins. You must talk to the media, not to the programmer. To talk to the programmer is like complaining to a hot dog vendor at a ballpark about how badly your favorite team is playing."[\[3\]](#)

Really, for the first time in history does the general public have a chance to talk back to knowledge brokers and those creating information and to those creating faith. A few tell the many what to think through mass media; through social media an individual tells the mass what he thinks. Social media offers a multitude of voices on all topics. It may

appear chaotic and directionless at times, and at other times there appears incisive wisdom. Social media reflects the turmoil and sanity of its users. Social media is many things, but unlike its big brother mass media, social media is not propaganda. The church needs to soberly join this conversation.

## Notes

1. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).
2. James Bamford, "The NSA is Building the Country's Biggest Spy Center (watch what you say)" in *Wired* March 17, 2012.
3. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967, 142); Jaques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

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# A Probe Mom Looks at Halloween from a Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin takes a hard look at Halloween celebrations, applying a biblical worldview. As Christians, we cannot shield our children from this popular cultural event, but Sue provides some ideas on bringing a Christian perspective to this time of year.*

A number of articles are available advising Christians to have

nothing to do with Halloween. And I do agree that Christians have no business *celebrating* a holiday that glorifies something that delights the enemy of our souls. And potentially opens us up to demonic harrassment, to boot!

But if we've got kids, especially kids in public school or who hang around other kids in the neighborhood, it's entirely possible that parents can feel pressured to do *something* about Halloween. After all, it's pretty hard to hide under a rock for the whole month of October. A number of houses on our street are more decorated for Halloween than for Christmas!

It seems that the costume manufacturers have really cranked up production of all sorts of costumes to a degree we've never seen before. Gone are the days of burning a cork to blacken a face, put on some thrift-shop oversized clothes and dressing up as a hobo. (There's probably some politically-correct term for "hobo" these days anyway. . .)

Is there anything intrinsically wrong with dressing up in a costume and getting a bunch of candy from consenting adults? I don't think so; hey, the Bible tells us that God instructed the children of Israel to ask their neighbors for silver and gold their last night in Egypt in a VERY early version of "Trick or Treat" (Exodus 11:2). But we can cooperate with the forces of darkness, however unwittingly, by participating unwisely in Halloween festivities.

It is essential to exercise discernment in how we handle Halloween. If you can get away with ignoring it, wonderful! That would be the best solution. But you may find yourself in a place where you want to provide some way for your kids to have fun in a Halloween-immersed culture without compromising on our Christian values and beliefs. For instance, your child's school may invite all the students to dress up in a costume on October 31. I know a number of Christian schools that do this. May I make these suggestions:

# Halloween Don'ts

God gave us some very strict guidelines for our own protection, commanding us to stay away from items and practices of witchcraft and divination in Deuteronomy 18. These “doorways to the occult” make us wide open to the influence of Satan and the demons. For more information on this, click [here](#).

So stay away from anything that glorifies:

- **The occult.** Witches, warlocks, sorcerers and sorcery, casting spells, mediums, magic, ouija boards, crystal balls, tarot cards, and astrology are doors to the kingdom of darkness. Satan/Beelzebub masks and costumes have no place on a Christian or in a Christian family—not even “adorable”(??) little baby devil costumes complete with horns and pitchfork.
- **Darkness.** Satan and the demons are the rulers of darkness (Eph. 6:12). There's a reason so many people are afraid of the dark; it is a fearful thing both physically and spiritually.
- **Death.** Satan has had the power of death over people (Heb. 2:14) ever since the Fall, and he uses it to control people through fear. Death is an enemy of God (1 Cor. 15:26), not something to flirt with. Vampires, ghosts, goblins and gargoyles (concepts rooted in the reality of demons) are all figures of death.
- **Fear.** Fear is both a feeling and a reality where Satan dwells. It is one of his most effective means of spiritual warfare against us. When we use Halloween events, decorations and costumes to cause and build fear in other people, we are cooperating with the sworn enemy of God and of God's people. This would include anything spooky, such as cemeteries, haunted houses, and scary stories. You can now buy “The Scream” masks that are as disturbing as Edvard Munch's original painting; their purpose is to make people afraid,

even if they don't know why.

Anything gruesome falls in this category as well; you can buy special effects like fake slash wounds, hanging eyeballs, and stakes through the forehead. Blood and gore are neither funny nor godly. Needless to say, slasher movies and horror films that deliberately terrorize and stir up fear are a tool in Satan's hand. Scripture tells us that God does not give us a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7), nor does He want us to be a slave again to fear (Rom. 8:15). That's Satan's arena.

Note: there are a number of churches that use the legitimate fear of an eternity in hell, separated from God, as a platform for drawing people into a creative presentation of the gospel. Many young people have been saved as a result. This is a God-honoring use of fear, not glorifying fear for fear's sake.

- **Worldliness.** Costumes that glorify some of the world's heroes and heroines can shape our values in ungodly, unchristian ways. Little girls dressing like female pop stars, exposing their midriffs and looking as sexy as possible, is completely against biblical values. God calls girls and women to dress and act modestly, decently and with propriety (1 Tim. 2:9). Costumes of movie and TV characters that represent anti-biblical values are inappropriate for believers (and believers' children).

## Halloween Do's

- If your church sponsors a Halloween alternative event such as a fall festival, that's a great idea to allow kids to have fun within pre-set boundaries. (Note: it's important to specify what kind of costumes are NOT welcome!)

- [Child Evangelism Fellowship](http://www.cefonline.com) (www.cefonline.com) has reported that Halloween has been the best time of year for children to trust Christ, simply because the spirit of fear that pervades our culture at this time makes them more open than usual to

hearing a good news of the gospel. Halloween is a great time to sponsor Good News Clubs and invite kids in your neighborhood to hear stories that will comfort, rather than terrorize, them.

- [American Tract Society](http://www.crossway.org/group/ats) (www.crossway.org/group/ats) has some terrific kid-friendly tracts to include with the candy you give out. This year, ATS has introduced the most practical Halloween evangelism resource yet! The Halloween Rescue Kit includes candy, bags, stickers and tracts – everything you need to reach 31 kids this Halloween. They suggest (and I think it's a great idea!) that if you expect kids to actually read the tracts once they get home from Trick-or-Treating (instead of tossing them out unread with the empty candy wrappers), that you tape them to popular candy bars that kids actually want. (Find out what kids in your area consider "cool" candy.) Or make your own tract kit by putting a tract plus quality candy inside sandwich bags. Either way, it forces kids to handle the tract in order to get to the candy. Sounds like following the Lord Jesus' command to be "shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16) to me!

I know several families who have purchased tracts for the neighborhood ADULTS, and when their kids go trick-or-treating, when the adults give them candy the kids will hand them a tract (aimed at adults) and say, "Thank you for the candy. Here's a treat for you!" How often do people open their doors and make themselves open to this kind of opportunity?

- [Let the Little Children Come](http://www.letthelittlechildrencome.com) (www.letthelittlechildrencome.com) has a wonderful "Is anything better than candy?" Box-tract. Give out more than just candy this Halloween! This attractive pumpkin shaped Box-Tract is designed to contain children's favorite candies. More importantly, the pumpkin opens up to answer the question, "Is There Anything Better Than Candy?" Yes, there is something much, much better than candy. It's being God's friend!

- Look for teachable moments to relate the things of Halloween to spiritual truth. Talk to your kids about the way fear is glorified at Halloween, and teach them what Jesus said about it: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27), and “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Talk to your kids about [“God’s no-no list”](#) in Deuteronomy 18 and have them help you identify those things when they see them advertised or used as decorations. (You might keep a running total of all the witches you’ll see just to quantify this concept.) This is probably the best way to prevent your children from getting desensitized to things of the occult. Help them identify all the Halloween items that strike fear in them, and encourage them to take a stand against their power by saying out loud, “God has not given me a spirit of fear!” Show them this verse in their Bibles (2 Timothy 1:7) so they know they are using the sword of the Spirit against one of the wiles of the enemy.

This story making its rounds on the internet is a good pumpkin-carving object lesson:

A lady had recently been baptized. One of her co-workers asked her what it was like to be a Christian. She was caught off guard and didn’t know how to answer, but when she looked up she saw a jack-o-lantern on the desk and answered, “It’s like being a pumpkin.”

The co-worker asked her to explain that one.

“Well, God picks you from the patch and brings you in and washes off all the dirt on the outside that you got from being around all the other pumpkins. Then he cuts off the top and takes all the yucky stuff out from inside. He



removes all those seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc. Then he carves you a new smiling face and puts his light inside of you to shine for all to see. It is our choice to either stay outside and rot on the vine or come inside and be something new and bright.”

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries Mom

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## **Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths – Evangelical Views Declining**

### **National Study of Youth and Religion**

The National Study of Youth and Religion (Wave 3) contains the detailed data from which Christian Smith presented a summary of the results in his book, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. My prior article, [“Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America,”](#) summarized some of the important results reported in his book. One of his results showed that the number of young adults who identify themselves as not religious or as a religious liberal has grown from one in three young adults in 1976 to almost two out of three young adults in 2008. This huge difference in beliefs reflects that the dominant culture has changed from supporting Christian beliefs to now being basically counter to them. Today’s emerging adults are immersed in a postmodern culture that “stressed difference over unity, relativity over

universals, subjective experience over rational authorities, feeling over reason.”[\[1\]](#)

This culture has produced a set of young Americans who may still claim to be associated with Protestant or Catholic beliefs but in reality have accepted the view that God and Christ are potentially helpful upon death, but are of little value until then. As these young adults moved from teenagers into emerging adults, Smith found that over four out of ten of them became less religious over a five year span. However, he did find that about one in three would identify themselves as evangelical and probably continue to identify themselves that way for the foreseeable future.

However, to look at the data more closely, we can access this study of 18- to 23-year-olds online at the Association of Religious Data Archives.[\[2\]](#) Using this data, we can look at the association between questions in ways that we could not see in Christian Smith’s book. As we studied this data, we found an even bleaker view of the future of the evangelical church than that presented by his book.

Along with general demographic information, the questions asked by the survey can be generally divided into four segments: Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, Cultural Beliefs, and Cultural Practices. When we analyze the data in these four segments, we find a significant disconnect between each of these four segments. One might expect that we would find a small but significant subset that shared an *evangelical* belief and practice *and* that applied those beliefs consistently to their *cultural* beliefs and practices. Instead, what we find is that of 881 evangelicals, a grand total of zero (that is zilch, nada, none) share a common set of beliefs across all four categories. In other words, there is no set of common beliefs amongst these 18- to 23-year-olds who belong to an evangelical church.

It is worth noting here that the 881 evangelicals discussed

here are down from the 1064 evangelicals in the study of this same group as teenagers. The 881 includes 728 who were among the 1064 plus 155 new evangelicals. The new evangelicals were about one-third from mainline protestant, one-third from catholic, and one-third from not religious or non-Christian religions. Of the 336 who left evangelical Christianity about half went to other Christian religions and the other half went to nonreligious or indeterminate religious beliefs. Almost undoubtedly, if we were to include these original evangelicals in our evangelical statistics we would get even worse data. We should also note here that this group was 18 to 23 in 2008 so now they are 20 to 25. However, we will refer to them as 18 to 23 in this article.

## **Religious Beliefs**

Let us begin by first considering the data on religious beliefs. By itself, this is very interesting. First, we find that four out of five of those associated with an evangelical church believe in God as a personal being and Jesus as His Son who was raised from the dead. Unfortunately, it also means we are starting with one-fifth of those still associated with an evangelical church who either don't believe in God or in Jesus as His Son. It is interesting to note that one-third of mainline Protestants and nearly half of Catholics have this same attitude of unbelief. However, the number of evangelicals who believe in God and Christ is still a significant number and is 28% of the total population of 18- to 23-year-olds in America. When we add in the mainline and Catholic believers, we find approximately half of all young adults have a correct view of God and Jesus at this very basic level. Although half is not what we would like, it is probably more than we would expect to find with active Christians.

But when we add in the concepts that only people whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ go to heaven and that there is only one true religion, the number of

evangelicals in this age group who agree drops to 38%. Thus, only one in three ascribe to the most basic beliefs of evangelical Christianity. When we add in mainline Protestants and Catholics, the percentage of young Americans who believe in salvation only through Jesus Christ drops to less than one in five.

When one adds in the concepts that faith is important, that demons are real beings, and that there are some actions that are always right or wrong, and combine those with attending a worship service at least two times a month, the number among evangelicals drops to less than one in five. That is, four out of five young evangelicals do not agree with these basic concepts. For mainline Protestants and Catholics, the percentages are 9% and 2%, indicating that almost none of them have a basic set of Christian beliefs. Combining these together shows that only 7% of all young adults hold to these basic beliefs.

Clearly, we have a major disconnect of belief for this age group, even among those who are associated with an evangelical church. As we probe beyond God and Jesus, we find that most of them do not have a set of beliefs consistent with the basic truths of the Bible.

In his book, Smith points out that for emerging adults “evidence and proof trump blind faith.”<sup>{3}</sup> By this he means that most emerging adults view scientific views as based on evidence and truth while religious beliefs are simply blind faith. As one young person put it, “I mean there is proven fact and then there is what’s written in the Bible—and they don’t match up.”<sup>{4}</sup> Or as another young person put it, “You have to take the Bible as symbolic sometimes. If you take it as literal there’s definitely a problem. There’s scientific proof [that contradicts it]. So you have to take it piece by piece and choose what you want to believe.”<sup>{5}</sup>

The interesting result of this belief is that it does not

primarily apply to the extremely small segment of the Bible which some might consider at odds with scientific theories (e.g., creation of the universe). Rather, they apply it to things like teachings on sexuality, the uniqueness of Jesus, and the beginning of life. So they use the excuse of science to modify any beliefs taught by the Bible that are inconsistent with current cultural beliefs.

## **Religious Practices**

Perhaps we have now found the truly religious 18- to 23-year-olds among the one-out-of-four evangelicals that express a set of core religious beliefs. Even if we add another seven questions on belief in things like life after death, heaven, judgment day, and miracles, we still have almost 15% of evangelical young adults who answer correctly. However, if this 15% is the core group of believers, then their religious behaviors will match their beliefs.

If this group of young adults is the core group, we would expect them to pray on a daily basis and to read the Bible at least once per week. When asked those questions, less than one in ten evangelical emerging adults hold the religious beliefs and engage in the religious practices. In fact, nearly half of those with the core beliefs do not read their Bibles or pray. When we add on questions about whether they are interested in learning more about their faith and have shared their faith with someone else, the number drops to less than one in twenty of the evangelical young adults. So, over 95 out of 100 young people affiliated with evangelical churches do not believe and practice their belief. Sadly, if we look at those who do these things and attend Sunday School or some weekday group and have read a devotional book in the last year, the number drops to 3% of evangelicals.

This data clearly shows that, for 18- to 23-year-old evangelicals, beyond a belief in God and Jesus there is no common set of beliefs and practices. Virtually every

evangelical young adult will depart from the faith on one or more basic core beliefs and practices. It appears that there is *no common core group* of dedicated faithful believers among this age group.

As Christian Smith points out, emerging adults view religious ideas as a cafeteria line where you take the ones you like and leave the rest behind. As he says, "People should take and use what is helpful in it, . . . and they can leave the rest. . . . At least some parts of religions are 'outdated.' Emerging adults are the authorities for themselves on what in religion is good or useful or relevant for them." [\[6\]](#) As one of the emerging adults put it, "Instead of fighting various religions, I just kinda combined religious ideas that were similar or sounded good." [\[7\]](#) So, since the emerging adult is the authority on what religious beliefs to accept rather than the Scriptures, their culture determines their religious beliefs rather than the other way around.

## **Cultural Beliefs**

The data from this survey indicates that there is not a set of doctrinally pure religious believers in the 18 to 23 age range. But perhaps they are clearer on cultural beliefs that should be informed by their faith. To make the analysis easier we will consider two different sets of beliefs. The first set looks at their beliefs about creation, waiting on sex until marriage, and respect for religion in America. The second set considers living meaningful but not guilty lives, caring about the poor, and being against unmarried sex and divorce.

When asked about the creation of the world, approximately half of the evangelical emerging adults said that God created the world without using evolution over a long period of time to create new species. Only one in four young evangelicals believe they should wait to have sex and don't need to try out sex with their partner before they get married. Interestingly, only 16% of mainline Protestants and less than one in ten

Catholic young adults believe the same way. As Smith points out, this belief is odd given the numerous studies which show that couples who do not live together before marriage have a significantly greater chance of success than those who do. Forty-eight percent of evangelicals have respect for organized religion in this country and believe it is ok for religious people to try to convert other people to their faith. However when we combine these three beliefs together, i.e. about creation, sex, and evangelism, we find that only one in ten evangelicals, one in twenty mainline Protestants, and only one in a hundred Catholics agree with all three of these areas. Then when we look to see how many have the religious beliefs and practices *and* believe these cultural topics, we find that only 8 evangelicals (< 1%) and no mainline Protestants or Catholics qualify. Thus, we have only 8 people out of over 2500 who have a consistent set of evangelical religious beliefs, religious practices, and cultural beliefs.

Of course that is only a small subset of the cultural beliefs that should be impacted by our religious beliefs. Let's look at few more. Let's consider those who have not felt guilty about things in their life over the last year, who believe their life is meaningful and that they can change important things in their life as needed. We find that approximately one-third of each of the major groups agree with these statements. If we look at how many don't need to buy more and who care about the needs of the poor, we find that about one in four of all young adults agree with these objectives. However, when we combine these two areas, we find that only about one in ten young adults agree. Now add in the idea that unmarried sex and divorce are not okay, a statement with which 28% of evangelicals and 14% of all emerging adults agree. When we combine all three of these belief areas, we discover that only 2% of evangelicals agree with all three areas. If we combine these areas with religious beliefs and practices, we find that only four evangelicals (or less than one in two hundred) agreed.

When we combine both sets of cultural beliefs with the religious beliefs and practices, we find that there is one emerging adult out of over 2500 who agrees with those beliefs.

In both sets of data above, we considered questions dealing with sexual activity. In the first, we saw that the idea of waiting to have sex until marriage was rejected by three out of four of the evangelical, emerging adults. In the second set of data, we saw that a similar number believe that unmarried sex and divorce are okay. These beliefs are clearly counter to the teaching of Christianity, but they are dominant beliefs among evangelical, emerging adults. As Christian Smith put it, “[M]ost emerging adults reduce a certain cognitive dissonance they feel—arising from the conflict of religious teachings against partying and sex before marriage versus their wanting to engage in those behaviors—by mentally discounting the religious teachings and socially distancing themselves from the source of those teachings.” In other words, they discount any religious teachings that would discourage them from doing what the culture promotes as acceptable, contrasted with the Bible which says, “Love not the world neither the things of the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, are not of the Father but are of the world.”[\[8\]](#)

## **Cultural Practices**

Perhaps the disturbing cultural beliefs are belied by the cultural practices. Let’s look at some of the relevant cultural practices addressed in the National Study on Youth and Religion. Let’s begin with the number of people who have not smoked pot or engaged in binge drinking in the two weeks before the survey. Among evangelical, emerging adults over half (54%) have not engaged in these two activities. Of course this also means that almost half of them have engaged in one of both of these activities. Amongst Catholic emerging adults, two out of three have engaged in these behaviors.



How many have not engaged in viewing X-rated videos in the last year or unmarried sex (including oral sex)? This number begins at approximately one third of evangelicals not engaging in unmarried sex but drops to only one fifth when X-rated videos are added. So, 4 out of 5 evangelical, emerging adults are engaged in sexual sin, most of them on a regular basis.

On another venue of behavior, how many emerging adults have given money for charitable purposes, volunteered, and don't admire people based on how much money they have? We find that approximately 15% of evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics have done so. So, over 8 out of 10 have not given of themselves to help others.

Certainly Christians are called to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18) and to "set their minds on heavenly things" (Col. 3:2). So let's consider those who are grateful for the present and sometimes think about the future. This includes about half of all emerging adults. Thus, over half of emerging adults seldom give thanks and rarely think about the future.

Now let's combine these thoughts and actions together and we find that only about 2% of all emerging adults hold to a biblical set of practices. So even though over half hold to a belief in abstaining from drugs and binge drinking, one-fifth affirm abstaining from illicit sexual activity, half hold to an attitude of gratitude for the present and the future, and 15% have given in some way of their time or money, when you combine them together only 2% have done all four items.

If we combine the four categories, Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, Cultural Beliefs, and Cultural Practices, we find that no one holds to the set of beliefs which are most consistent with Scripture.

## Conclusions

There are many conclusions that could be drawn from the data above. Two of the most important conclusions are as follows. First, the basic religious beliefs of emerging adults largely depart from the Bible, and when you add in religious practices and cultural beliefs and practices we find that no one maintains a distinctly biblical worldview. Second, there does not appear to be uniformity in the beliefs of emerging adults. Rather than having a subset of evangelicals, say 15%, holding to a distinctly biblical worldview, you end up with none because they trip up in different areas.

As Christian Smith pointed out, “emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives.”<sup>{9}</sup> This is because religious teachings are not the authority on this world. Rather, it is what you choose to believe that is your authority for the “truth” in your life. As one emerging adult put it, “I think that what you believe depends on you. I don’t think I could say that Hinduism is wrong or Catholicism is wrong . . . I think it just depends on what you believe.”<sup>{10}</sup> This concept results in a set of evangelical, emerging adults who don’t hold to a set of common beliefs about God, Jesus, religion, and cultural practices, but instead hold to a wide variety of beliefs which are counter to the Bible. We must not say because they go to church that they believe the truth of the Bible. This survey shows that almost certainly they do not.

At Probe, we are committed to making a difference in this emerging generation. Over the next decade, we are committed to freeing the minds of 50 million Christians and converting them into confident ambassadors for Christ. If we and others like us are not successful, the children of these emerging adults may have no Christian example to follow.

## Notes

1. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 101.
2. [www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NSYRW3.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NSYRW3.asp), "The National Study of Youth and Religion, [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org), whose data were used by permission here, was generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., under the direction of Christian Smith, of the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame.
3. Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 158.
4. Ibid., 158.
5. Ibid., 158.
6. Ibid., 157.
7. Ibid., 157.
8. 1 John 2:15-16 (NASU)
9. Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 155.
10. Ibid p. 156

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**See Also:**

[Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America](#)

[Emerging Adults A Closer Look](#)

[The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults](#)

[Cultural Captives – a book on the faith of emerging adults](#)

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# Jimmy Williams

yes

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# Steve Cable

yes

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# Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses – Understanding and Responding to False Doctrine

*Dr. Zukeran provides us with a concise summary of the key doctrinal issues in the beliefs taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. Understanding these problems held by their followers in areas such as the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and false prophecies, prepares us to be more effective witnesses for Christ to members of their faith.*

## History of the Watch Tower

One of the most aggressive and fastest growing cults is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Today they have a worldwide organization that numbers about 3.5 million members operating in 205 countries. Several factors account for this rapid growth. The

first is their zealous door-to-door evangelism. Second, we Christians have failed to make a solid defense of our faith against their attacks when they have come to our door. The result is the Witnesses continue unchallenged in the propagation of their organization and deceive many. Third, the rise of the cults are a fulfillment of the prophetic warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles.

In this essay I want to look at the beliefs of the Witnesses and then give the reader practical witnessing strategies. The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses begins with the founder of the organization Charles Taze Russell. He was a member of the Congregational Church who came to reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment. In 1870, with no formal education, he began a Bible society which eventually named him pastor. In 1884, he founded Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is now the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. Since then they have mushroomed into an organization which produces more literature in one year than the Christian and Catholic churches combined. And, of all the cults, their missionary forces are the most well trained in evangelism.

Witnesses deviate from biblical Christianity in several areas. I will discuss some of their major doctrinal errors. First, like all the cults, they deny the Trinity. They believe there is one God, Jehovah. Jesus, is actually Michael the Archangel, the first of God's creation, who became flesh at the incarnation. After the resurrection, He returned to heaven as Michael the Archangel.(1) The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire.(2)

Second, Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, but instead believe He was raised as a spirit and manifested Himself several times in different materialized bodies.(3)

Third, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment, but believe in total annihilation after death. Only the elite

ruling class, the 144,000, are allowed to go to heaven. The faithful Jehovah's Witnesses remain unconscious after death till they are resurrected in the Millennium. Those who are not in the organization are annihilated after death.(4)

Fourth, Witnesses have a works-oriented salvation. Salvation is not based upon a relationship with Christ, but found in the organization. One must serve the society, and depending on one's faithfulness and absolute obedience, one **may** be saved.(5)

Fifth, they believe that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and established His throne in heaven. At Armageddon, God will destroy all evil, and abolish all the world's governments, and establish a new Paradise on earth. Then the living and resurrected Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit Paradise earth. The 144,000 mentioned earlier will rule with Jesus. At this time all unbelievers who have died will be raised (with some exceptions) and will study under the Witnesses during the Millennium, a period of a thousand years. Studying with them will be the unbelievers who have survived Armageddon. After the thousand years, their faith will be tested because God will release Satan from the abyss. At that point all unbelievers will have to choose between Satan or Jehovah. Those who reject Jehovah will be annihilated.(6)

Clearly the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses deviate in critical ways from sound biblical principles. Next, I want to discuss approaches to evangelizing Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **False Prophecies of the Watch Tower**

One of the most effective ways to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses is to destroy their faith in the Society. Remember, salvation is found only in this organization. The Watch Tower Society is seen as the spokesman for God. If you can show Witnesses the serious errors of the organization, they will begin to have doubts and questions. This can sometimes lead

them to leave the Society.

Attacking the Society's record of false prophecy can cause Jews to question the organization. This approach is effective because they claim to have the true understanding of the end times. If we can show them that the organization has been constantly wrong in the area of prophecy, this will certainly make an impact. When the Jehovah's Witnesses show up at your door again, begin first by asking them, "Are you prophets of God?" Some will say, "Yes." Others may say, "We are prophets in a sense." You must make it clear there is no such thing as "a prophet in a sense." There are only true prophets and false prophets. Some may deny being prophets. If so, show them a copy of the April 1, 1972, *Watch Tower* article on page 197, which states clearly that they are prophets.

Second, define clearly what makes a true prophet and a false prophet using Deuteronomy 18:20-22. A true prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which come to pass. A false prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which do not come to pass. Make sure they understand this, for this is the most critical step.

Third, ask them, "Is there an organization that fits the character of a false prophet?" That's when you say, "Let's take a look at the Watch Tower Organization." Have handy copies of the articles mentioned here. The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true.

Then the *Watch Tower* predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the

apostle in Hebrews 11 to the condition of human perfection.” This proved to be another false prophecy.

The *Watch Tower* made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?*, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library.

Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Here they state, “Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it.” Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the *Watch Tower* will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the *Watch Tower's* false prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to JWs.

(A free PDF file of copies of these false prophecies, as well as helpful information on the invention of the word “Jehovah,” is available here: [JW-False\\_Prophecies](#))

## **The Name of God**

Another effective avenue of witnessing to the Witnesses is in the name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses state that God's true name is “Jehovah.” They say the term “God,” is merely a title, and that the real name for God is “Jehovah.” In fact they go so far as to say that unless one calls on the true name of God, “Jehovah,” one cannot be saved.(7)

Let's take a real close look at the name “Jehovah” and see if it is in fact the true name of God. The term “Jehovah” is actually a false reading of the Hebrew pronunciation of God, or YAHWEH. Allow me to explain where the word “Jehovah” comes



from. The words in the Hebrew Old Testament contained no vowels. The words were constructed of consonant letters only. The Scribes knew what vowels to use in the pronunciation of the words by the construction of the consonants, the context, and memory. It was written this way until the fifth century when the Masoretes added the vowels under the consonants in their version of the Old Testament known as the Masoretic Text.

The name of God in the Old Testament spelled YHWH, was considered holy, and was not to be read aloud. Instead, when the Hebrews came upon YHWH, they would say ADONAY, which means "Lord." In order to indicate this substitution, the Massoretes placed the vowels of ADONAY or the English equivalent of e, o, and a underneath the consonants of YHWH. Later some Christian translators mistakenly combined the vowels of ADONAY with the consonants of YHWH producing the word "Jehovah." Now the term is recognized to be a late hybrid form never used by the Jews. That's the origin of the word "Jehovah." Let's now look at what other scholars say about the name "Jehovah."

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary:* "Jehovah" – False reading of the Hebrew YAHWEH.(8)

*Encyclopedia Americana:* "Jehovah" – erroneous form of the name of the God of Israel.(9)

*Encyclopedia Britannica:* The Masoretes who from the 6th to the 10th century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of Adonai or Elohim. Thus the artificial name Jehovah came into being.(10)

*The Jewish Encyclopedia:* "Jehovah" – a mispronunciation of the Hebrew YHWH the name of God. This pronunciation is grammatically impossible.(11)

*The New Jewish Encyclopedia:* It is clear that the word Jehovah is an artificial composite.(12)

According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 680, vol. 7, "the true pronunciation of the tetragrammaton YHWH was never lost. The name was pronounced Yahweh. It was regularly pronounced this way at least until 586 B.C., as is clear from the Lachish Letters written shortly before this date."

Therefore, for Jehovah's Witnesses to insist Jehovah is the true name of God and that one is saved only if he calls on that name, is an error. When Witnesses appear at your door explain to them the name "Jehovah" and read what the scholars say about Jehovah. Also remember, God uses many names for Himself such as, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega, and others. When JWs realize what the authoritative sources have to say, especially the encyclopedia references, they will begin to realize the need to take a serious look at this error in the organization.

## **The Bodily Resurrection of Christ**

A third subject area for effective witnessing to Witnesses is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Witnesses believe that Christ's crucified body was disintegrated by Jehovah never to exist again. Accordingly, Jesus was raised as a spirit who then materialized and appeared in several different fleshly bodies as the angels had done. Indeed, it was in this form that He appeared to His disciples; i.e., He wasn't in a human body; He just appeared to be human. He ascended into heaven as a spirit and once again became Michael the Archangel.(13) This doctrine can be easily disproved.

First, in Luke 24:36-43, Jesus clearly states in verse 39 that He is not a spirit but a man of flesh and bone. He even ate food to prove that He was not a spirit but had a physical body. In John 20:24-27, Jesus shows Thomas His wounds. Jesus is clearly demonstrating to His disciples that the body previously on the cross had been resurrected. If Jesus had a different body than the one on the cross, He would have been deliberately deceiving the disciples. Ask the Witness, "Would

Jesus deliberately deceive His disciples into believing something that was not true?"

Next, turn to some passages where Jesus predicts the resurrection of His body. In John 2:19-21 Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." See Acts 2:26-27, another prophecy of the Messiah's bodily resurrection. Clearly the prophecies and Jesus' appearances prove a bodily resurrection.

Witnesses cite 1 Peter 3:18 and 1 Cor. 15:44-50 to back up their belief. In 1 Peter 3:18 we read, "Christ died once and for all... he being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit." This verse does not prove Jesus is a spirit. This verse says that Jesus was raised in the Spirit and by the Spirit of God who gives life. Romans 8:11 states that the Holy Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was not raised as a spirit but *by* the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to 1 Cor. 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Since Jesus is in heaven, Witnesses say He must be a spirit.(14) They are correct in saying that the earthly body cannot enter heaven. However, when Jesus rose, He had a glorified body (Luke 24:39). Therefore, He can dwell in heaven because of His glorified state. According to 1 Cor 15:39, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another... There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies." Christ's glorified body allows Him to travel in the earthly and heavenly dimensions. Some verses indicate that Christ exists in heaven in bodily form. "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" Colossians 2:9. The verb "dwells" in the Greek is *katoikei*, and is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus has a glorified body in heaven, the one that was resurrected. Note also 1 Timothy 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus." The verb "is," is a present tense verb also. How can Jesus be a man if He is Michael the Archangel? Seeing these errors may prompt them to seek the truth.

# The Holy Spirit

A fourth avenue of effective evangelism with Jehovah's Witnesses is the subject of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person because they see the Holy Spirit as a force—much like electricity or fire. Here is what Jehovah's Witnesses say about the Holy Spirit.

In their book *You Can Live Forever In Paradise on Earth*, they state, "As for the 'Holy Spirit,' the so-called third person of the Trinity, we have already seen that this is not a person but God's active force."(15)

In their magazine *Why Should You Believe in the Trinity?* they state, "To a certain extent it (Holy Spirit) can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations."(16)

Here are some verses that are effective in proving the deity of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about the amount they sold their land for and the amount they gave to the church. Peter confronts them on this issue and states in 5:3, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?" Peter later states in the next verse, "You have not lied to men but to God." Here the Holy Spirit is called "God" with a capital G both in our Bibles and in the Witnesses' Bible. Another interesting question to ask Witnesses is, "Can you lie to a force like fire or electricity?" The answer is "No." You can only lie to an intelligence, a person.

In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit speaks, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Ask the Witness, "When was the last time electricity or fire spoke to you?" It is obvious only an intelligent person can communicate in language.

Ephesians 4:30 states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Any logical person should realize you can only grieve a living being. Ask a Jehovah's Witness, "How can you grieve or bring sorrow to an impersonal force like electricity?"

When you put all these facts together, the fact that the Holy Spirit is called God, He can be lied to, He speaks, and He can be grieved, the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. When presented clearly, I have not met any Jehovah's Witness who have been able to refute these verses.

God bless and good Witnessing!

## Notes

1. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), p. 39.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
3. *Reasoning From the Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), pp.333-36.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-80.
5. *Live Forever*, pp. 350-55.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-84.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.
8. "Jehovah," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1973 ed.
9. *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 16., 1972 ed.
10. "Yahweh," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 12, 1993 ed.
11. "Jehovah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 1904 ed.
12. "Jehovah," *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1962 ed.
13. *Live Forever*, pp. 143-45.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-46.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
16. *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), p. 20.

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# Redeeming the Culture

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