Prayer in a High Tech World

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> Just in terms of time resources, religion is not very efficient.There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning.[1]
>
> Bill Gates

> He who is controlled by objects
> Loses possession of his inner self.[2]
>
> Chuang Tzu

What is the Problem?

Many cultural influences currently challenge our spiritual lives. This article will focus on one of these influences, the recent flood of new communication technologies, and their impact on one aspect of the religious life, prayer. I am well aware of the complexity of this problem as a Catholic intellectual employed at a public, engineering university.[3]

Thomas Merton's writings on the intersection of faith and technology provide important insights for this exploration. Let us begin with the primary goal of a Christian life as defined by Merton. Laboring under the "truth and the judgments of God," Christians seek "the manifestation of God's transcendent and secret holiness." The "truth and the judgments of God" also apply to our temporal actions. Hence, Christians have a prophetic role in assuming a "critical attitude toward the world and its structures" because, Merton argues, many of the claims of the world are fraudulent. One source of falsity is a technological mentality that can become an autonomous imperative without any grounding in ultimate reality. In exposing and confronting this technological mentality, there are serious traps and dangers in discerning and expressing the "truth and judgments of God." For example, the truth of God may more often than not reflect the prejudices of the interpreter. Such caveats provide valuable warnings, but they are not a call to inaction. Unless we select the "Amish option" of attempted seclu-

sion, we can not isolate ourselves from engaging the world; the world will come in anyway.[4]

Although prophetic at times, Merton's style is not that of the ancient Hebrew prophets. His slashing criticisms of technology are often mixed with humorous observations.[5] Technology can be a source of wry amusement, because its promoters are unaware of its limitations and ironies. Merton was asked by two teenage girls if he could write a prayer to a computer. His bemused response was:

> Write a prayer to a computer? But first of all you have to find out how It thinks. *Does It dig prayer?* More important still, does It dig me, and father, mother, etc., etc.? How does one begin: "O Thou great unalarmed and humorless electric sense..."? Start out wrong and you give instant offense. You may find yourself shipped off to the camps in a freight car. Prayer is a virtue. But don't begin with the wrong number.[6]

The stance of prophet and amused observer was balanced by an admission, particularly in his later years, that technology was an inevitable aspect of our world. He once observed in a lecture as novice master that

> the first thing that we have to make quite clear: there is absolutely no point whatever in monks or anybody else standing back and saying we are not going to have any technology... There's no way around it. We are living in a technological world."[7]

Technologies and their applications allow for mixed possibilities, dependent on the wisdom or folly of our choices in development and application.

> Technology could indeed make a much better world for millions of human beings. It not only can do this, but it must do it. We have an absolute obligation to use the means at our disposal to keep people from living in utter misery and dying like flies.... What I am "against" then is a complacent and naive progressivism which pays no attention to anything but the fact that wonderful things can be and are done with machinery and with electronics.[8]

In his personal life, the judgment on a technology was determined by its compatibility with the monastic vocation. Merton initially

detested the camera as a tool of prying visitors to the Abbey of Gethsemani who wanted a picture of the famous monk of *The Seven Storey Mountain.* Yet, he eventually discovered that the camera could become a vehicle for art, for capturing moments of divine creativity present in our daily lives. On his many walks, he photographed whatever came across his path, particularly the random object, as its Creator had left it. The "Zen camera" then became a "catalyst for contemplation." It could create a "heightened awareness very similar to meditative prayer." [9]

Merton's stance, that I would term prophetic ambivalence, remains a thoughtful approach for assessing technologies with all of their profound dangers and constructive possibilities. Employing this paradigm, I will delineate some observations about prayer in a high-tech world. If I am successful, there may be some insights for a broad range of persons struggling to nourish their spiritual lives within our current cultural context.

The Communications Tsunami

Before considering Merton's approach on the issue of prayer, I will briefly outline our current predicament. The first point is perhaps an obvious one. We have experienced an accelerating explosion of communication technologies since the passing of Thomas Merton in 1968. Consider the following list:

The Media Explosion-Communication Devices

1968	2007		
Telephone	Telephone-cellphone	Laptop Computers	Palm Pilot
Telegraph	Internet/email	Power point	Fax
Television	Television-cable/ satellite	I-Pod	Cassette player
Radio	Radio	CD	Blackberry
Record player	Personal computer	MP3 player	

There are not only more devices, but each new technology reaches a majority of the population much faster. It took sixty-seven years for the telephone to reach 75% of the American population. In contrast, the VCR reached 75% of the American population in twelve years. Internet usage went from 15% in 1994 to 73% by 2006.[10]

These rapidly spreading devices are used by millions of people in the United States who receive massive amounts of largely unfiltered data in every conceivable form in their i-pods, the internet,

etc. What is the cognitive impact of these devices and their messages? Some experts believed that computers would ride to the rescue of education, but like earlier proposed technological "cures" such as film and television, they do not seem to be producing more intelligent or better-informed students. Vast amounts of data can now be accessed by students, but there is little filtering of the form or content. Blogs are used as equivalent citation sources with peer reviewed journals or texts. Partly for these reasons, some school districts are dropping their laptop programs.[11] Outside of the classroom, the communications flood is also expanding. Consider these statistics:

- College students spend 11 hours per day engaged with media;
- College students spend 3.5 hrs per day emailing, instant messaging and web surfing;
- 34% of college students reported spending at least 10 hrs a week on-line.[12]

By way of contrast, the average child in the United States spends only forty-five minutes per day reading. Less than 6% of adult Americans read more than one book a year and 60% of adult Americans do not read a book of any kind during a year. Daily newspaper readership in the United States has declined from 67% in 1965 to 31% by 2000. The loss of serious reading to the new technologies has assisted the decline in basic levels of common knowledge. Less than half of Americans know that the earth revolves around the sun in a year. Such intellectual decay is matched by declining levels of critical thinking or imagination. The positive impact on such skills from examining serious works of literature, philosophy, etc. is often replaced in the best-case scenario with challenging movies and at worst with computer games, Utube, and South Park.[13] The sociologist, Todd Gitlin, in his book, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our World,* describes the impact of this constant massaging of our collective psyches.

> The most important thing about the communications we live among is not that they deceive (which they do); or that they broadcast a limited ideology (which they do); or emphasize sex and violence (which they do); or convey diminished images of the good, the true, and the normal (which they do); or corrode the quality of art (which they also do); or reduce lan-

> guage (which they surely do)—but with all their lies, skews, and shallow pleasures they saturate our way of life...streaming out of screens large and small, or bubbling in the background of life, but always coursing onwards. To an unprecedented degree, the torrent of images, songs, and stories has become our familiar world.[14]

This immersion in battering waves of questionable sights and sounds is quite common, but it is only fair to consider that such devices also provide manifold means to communicate worthwhile information and projects to other human beings and this impulse might provide a powerful counterweight to cultural diminishment. And to be fair, there are some wonderful instances of charity and human connection because of these technologies. Yet, the evidence of a significant negative impact remains troubling. Ironically, in an age of so many communication possibilities, there seems to be a greater isolation of individuals and unhealthy social development. Mental health problems among the communications generation continues to spiral upwards. In one of the wealthiest and most politically stable societies in the history of the world, the use of psychotropic drugs in the United States by children tripled in the 1990s. A rising tide of mental health problems, including suicides and violence, is hitting our college campuses.[15]

There are other less severe, but still worrisome problems. The communication age allows us to be more anonymous, selecting the images we wish to view and answering only those e-mails and text messages that we wish to answer. Teenagers can text message their feelings to one another without the same fear that arises from expressing themselves before an embodied reality that can not be immediately shut down or discarded. These contacts may produce less meaning, but they also require less emotional exposure.

This ability to shape our communications allows us to believe that we can organize our lives and create our identities in our own auto-culture. Even in his life, Merton observed this phenomenon, declaring that modern life nurtured the belief that every person can act like a "little autonomous god, seeing and judging everything in relation to [ourselves]". We seek to make our individual lives interesting and controlled as we abandon community bonds with their tiresome demands and requirements. As Robert Putnam explored in *Bowling Alone*, participation in the community and civic life of the United States has been in decline for several decades

and the media torrent, albeit not the sole cause, has contributed to the precipitous decline of our common life.[16]

Why do we accept this atomization of our selves? The truth is that we have been impacted by a series of new communication processes dating back to the printing press. Isn't this current phase just one more turn of the inventive process? The exponential increase of the scale and speed of communication technologies, however, is unprecedented. We have reached the epoch of the nanosecond. "Speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man" laments the Czech novelist Milan Kundera, who concludes that modern man is "caught in a fragment of time cut off from both the past and the present; he is wrenched from the continuity of time; he is outside of time...."[17]

The speed and pervasiveness of the media torrent has too often distended our sensibilities and alienated us from our fellow human beings, but it is seductive because we can now construct a virtual world of our own imagining, full of entertainment and sensation signifying virtually nothing. This communications environment is not particularly hospitable to ancient truths and religious practices. Indeed, the media offensive washes such positions in a cynical acid and refuses to allow special efficacy to anything except forms that can pierce the relentless background noise with new forms of stimulation. The trend in movies reflects this reality as they become louder, more vulgar, more violent, and more cynical each year. If you doubt this fact, then randomly select and watch five movies in the same genre that are at least forty years old. The difference is startling. A recent attempt of Christianity to compete with this nouveaux sensationalism, Mel Gibson's, *The Passion of the Christ*, seeks to beat the current trend at its own game by its graphic violence, its luxuriating in pain. Such efforts are at best a mixed blessing for the faithful. The Church will not win in any effort to produce more visual sensation than Hollywood and would no doubt become a sorcerer's apprentice in the attempt. God's kingdom, whatever it may be, is not likely to be revealed in such a sensationalistic movie.

Christianity and other religions must recognize that the media torrent appeals to an anthropology that reduces human beings to largely autonomous creatures that are self-centered and addicted to the constant massaging of our sensations and desires. The often feckless and infantilizing dimensions of these messages were revealed to Merton when he passed a television one day.

> Once when I did happen to pass in front of a set I saw the commercial that was on: two little figures were dancing around worshipping a roll of toilet paper, chanting a hymn in its honor... We have simply lost the ability to see what is right in front of us: things like this need no comment.[18]

Seeds of Hope

Just as Merton depicted the errors of television, we must speak truth to inanity, superficiality, and idolatry in the current media revolution. Such messages poison our mental ecology in which we seek to pursue our faith, including our prayer life. To counter such trends in our culture, we must effectively present the case for thick forms of religious life that can sustain our faith such as art, literature, ritual, charity, contemplation, natural and spiritual cycles, sacraments, study, moral reflection, and of course prayer.

Let me begin with the prophetic task of critique. There are a number of possible paths. Humor, drama, critical thinking, and the development of community can help us to resist the worst aspects in the drift of contemporary culture. In the development of critical thinking, the Jesuit theologian, Bernard Lonergan, privileges the act of the intelligent agent who appropriates the cognitive path to understanding that sustains our resistance to a culture that presents "superficial minds with superficial positions" and can ignite "flights from understanding."[19]

Perhaps the religious artist also has a special duty to awaken us from the numbing influence of the surrounding white noise. The novelist, Walker Percy, advised that a Christian novelist has a unique role and approach in such a context. To pierce the simulacrum of false cultural idols, "he calls on every ounce of cunning craft and guile he can muster from the darker regions of his soul. The fictional use of violence, shock, comedy, insult, the bizarre are everyday tools of his trade. How could it be otherwise?" Percy noted that if such strategies awaken us to our plight then we have taken the first steps on the road to being a "sovereign wayfarer," of entering into the pilgrimage of the Christian in a disoriented post-modern age.[20]

Merton would certainly appreciate the paths of Lonergan and Percy. He did not exclude a path through study, reflection, or literature and indeed was a contributor to these approaches. They

could oppose communication technologies like television that fostered "a descent to a sub-natural passivity" when the goal should be a "supremely active passivity in understanding and love." The desire to reject the numbing passivity of the media barrage present in Lonergan and Percy is thus keenly felt by Merton.

> Therefore, if a man is going to make authentic judgments and do some thinking for himself, he is going to have to renounce the passivity of a subject that merely sits and "takes in" what is told him, whether in class, or in front of the TV, or in the other mass media. This means serious and independent reading, and it also means articulate discussion.[21]

As Merton suggests, it is not enough merely to be cultural critics. Another part of the solution must be to develop alternatives, thick spiritual communities where the mental ecology will be more compatible with a contemplative life. We must redevelop our sense of community with neighbors, parishes, civic associations, clubs, and families. Instead of autonomy, solidarity should be our watchword. What would be the impact of giving preference to communal activity over the hours in front of the television and computer or on the cell phone? Merton provides other antidotes to this cultural affliction such as reviving the measured and creative craft traditions like those of the Shakers.[22] These actions could help to foster a true community and reawaken a sense of the transcendent in our midst.

The most powerful antidote, however, would be contemplation. It is in the moments of quiet reflection and prayer that the loud hum of the 24/7 media buzz invading our senses is silenced and the soul can seek comfort, rest, and connection to the divine. Merton has his doubts and is not certain that contemplation can "still find a place in the world of technology and conflict which is ours." Admittedly, the path will not be easy. We must place ourselves outside the convenient illusions and facile seductions of the media onslaught. Instead, we must struggle and make "one of the most terrible decisions possible to man: the decision to disagree completely with those who imagine that the call to diversion and self-deception is the voice of truth...." The call to superficial diversions, so prominent in our world, is problematic because they block our connection to our "inmost truth—the image of God in [our] own soul." The movement to a dedicated prayer life as part

of this contemplative choice is thus a counter-cultural act that calls upon each of us as spiritual agents to seek a different path.[23]

The technological mentality of our age nurtures still another harmful dimension that blocks our contemplative path. While a consumer mentality may foster a "sub-natural" passivity in the recipients of the deluge of images, the production of all these images, sounds, etc. are also the consequence of a hyper-productive mentality of an age of global competitiveness. The creation of so many products including diverse communication forms is the result of technological innovations that are pushing forward at astonishing rates. The epigraph of Bill Gates for this essay reflects the impact of this restive desire for product development. Gates is frustrated that religion seems so inefficient, so unproductive. Who can blame him? Gates is used to results, concrete tangible results—new products, market share, profits. What does a religious service or prayer give you? Merton abhorred such a mentality of productivity that had at times even infected the monastery, with monks running out to their fields like a football team to maximize productivity. Likewise, he mocked the seriousness of efforts to sell monastic cheese. Behind these humorous observations, he detected troubling assumptions. The monks who worked with the machinery had a special difficulty adjusting to silence. With the advent of a technological mentality, "everything becomes centered on the most efficient use of machines and techniques of production, and the style of life, the culture, the tempo and manner of existence responds more and more to the needs of the technological process itself."[24]

Indeed, the spirit of productivity, formulas, and efficiency can enter into prayer life. This is true even of spiritual directors, whose calling is to assist the life of prayer. While they should be guides and sources of questions and insights, they have often assumed a technological mentality of expertise in their counseling.

> The "director" is thought to be one endowed with special, almost miraculous, authority and has the power to give the "right formula" when it is asked for. He is treated as a machine for producing answers that will work, that will clear up difficulties and make us perfect.... Such spiritual direction is mechanical, and it tends to frustrate the real purpose of genuine guidance. It tends to reinforce the mechanisms and routines with which the soul is destroying its own capacity for a spontaneous response to grace.[25]

Merton's warnings ring especially true for me because they remind me of a silent retreat that I took many years ago. During the retreat, I was committed to not speaking or watching television, but I wanted to schedule my spiritual life. I created a detailed list of structured activities for each day that included reading, prayer, religious services, walking, lectures, etc. I yearned for constant structure and activity, because I was pressing to be productive and ward off the silence. My objective was to get something more—grace perhaps—than others by maximizing my efforts, efficiently using my time. I would leverage my spiritual assets and obtain an optimal effect. And of course I did not.

A "sub-natural passivity" or a "Six Sigma" approach to the spiritual life are both problematic for nurturing a contemplative life. God will not provide streaming video of the divine nor are spiritual outcomes improved through the refinements of technique as though we are doing a systems analysis of a production line. Merton offers some guidance to mitigate and perhaps elude these contemporary traps. First, we must develop a sense of what is meant by prayer. Prayer is the "raising of heart and mind to God." By the act of prayer, we enter into a mystery. This process is difficult because we are comfortable with the glitzy, constantly mutating images of our daily bath of media. In contemplative prayer, there is a move away from images and sounds. Instead, we must focus our attention on the mystery which is the "presence of God and ... His will and His love." We will not be given exact images or sets of images which would be a form of idolatry. Indeed, God is "infinitely beyond our comprehension." It is only through a purgation of all objects such as images that we can recognize the divine in reality beyond our nothingness.[26]

In addition to praise, meditative prayer or a prayer of the heart is not a search for God, but "a way of resting in him whom we have found, who loves, who is near us, who comes to us to draw us to himself." This form of prayer requires the finding of a person's deepest center, an awakening of our deepest being in the presence of God. The climate for this type of prayer is one of "awareness and gratitude and a totally obedient love that seeks nothing but to love God." Solitude is critical so that there can be a void that can be then filled by God's presence. We must put aside the "emptiness and futility" of those forms of "distraction and useless communication" which do not contribute to a life of prayer.[27] So, the enervating flow of images and sounds of the media deluge is not a

hospitable environment for such a prayer life. Moreover, our mental habits developed while absorbing these images and sounds may make our efforts at prayer much more difficult. For example, if praise is at the heart of prayer, the concept of praise may be troubling because of its cultural associations. The praise that is so imprinted in our minds is that of advertising. Praise becomes "cheap" when it is associated with the "official hollow enthusiasm" of an announcer for a variety of "gadgets which are supposed to make life more comfortable." Who can use this term when it is associated with the praise of trifles, useless objects?[28]

There are still other dimensions of prayer at odds with our cultural assumptions. A contemplative connection with the divine in prayer is a gift. We are afraid of this process because we can not control it or obtain it by technical means, nor can we remain numbly passive as we do with the torrent of media images. The contemplative process requires us to abandon the software of our current communication experiences and enter into a new form of experience. We must learn how to wait, watch, and listen attentively. Because of our life of streaming images and communications, the contemplative prayer life at first may seem boring, empty, and dry. The process may even seem pointless and unproductive for quite some time. Indeed, prayer life is not terribly productive in our current sense of the term.

> In technology you have this horizontal progress, where you must start at one point and move to another and then another. But that is not the way to build a life of prayer. In prayer we discover what we already have. You start where you are and you deepen what you already have, and you realize that you are already there. We already have everything, but we don't know it and we don't experience it. Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess.[29]

Thus, in our prayer life, we must be willing to let go of our false sense of control. In the end, progress in this endeavor is not within our command. This is also a foreign concept to an age in which we seek our own self-help answers at every turn. We are comfortable with our ability to know ourselves through our own actions. If we just get the right book, the right technique—all will be well. So, we may not be thrilled with Merton's suggestion that "progress in prayer comes from the Cross and humiliation and whatever makes

us really experience our total poverty and nothingness, and also gets our mind off ourselves."[30] The false self, the self of diversions and control that must be annulled in order to open us to being filled with a divine reality restrains us.

Merton's analysis of contemplation can be annealed by the cultural insights of Josef Pieper, an intellectual deeply admired by Merton in his lifetime. We know his esteem for the German theologian because Merton recommended his works as valuable to a fellow Novice Master and in a favorable book review in the journal, *Cistercian Studies*. Pieper proposes the ressourcement of an ancient ideal of leisure in order to heal the cultural milieu of the modern world. Josef Pieper reminds us that leisure is a foundation for a culture that can nourish the contemplative life. Modern culture has become obsessed with work as the central focus of our daily lives and discursive thought as the highest intellectual virtue. The contemporary culture of work and reason assumes an "outwardly directed, active power," a readiness to suffer pain, and "the adoption of a rationalized program of useful social organization." While not denying some merit to these activities, the modern world has lost the best part of life, that of the intellectus, the ability to simply look and be receptive to a more profound vision that encompasses temporal *and* spiritual realities. We can then acquire through our receptive attention in contemplation a very special gift. This divine gift is not a matter of our intellectual or physical labors; it is not the product of a special technique. The gift is an awareness of how God, operates or to use a word favored by Aquinas, "plays" throughout the world, a world of divine festivity. Because of this recognition, we can accept "a whole preserve of true, unconfined humanity: a space of freedom, of true learning, of attunement to the world-as-a- whole."[31]

Finding Space for the Contemplative Life

While Merton's approach and Pieper's insights may be correct about contemplation and the proper form of a culture, we confront the problem of following his path in a media age that is in some fundamental sense oppositional to such a quest. How do we get our minds out of the communication deluge and away from its mental habits such as a numbing passivity or a quest for productivity? The answer is not necessarily to abandon the technological age. Merton came to realize that technology is inevitable in some form and can often be desirable as long as we remember

that, "Technology can elevate and improve man's life only [if] it remains subservient to his *real* interests; that it respects his true being; that it remembers that that the origin and goal of all being is in God."[32]

How do we achieve this subservience? Perhaps, it is prudent to seek intentionally to limit the footprint of technology in our lives and its impact on our cognitive habits and mental states. There must be room for silence, for the presence of the divine. Practically, what might this mean in our daily actions? Perhaps, we could limit or eliminate the use of the media technologies at certain times. How about no television, cell phone or computer use on Sundays? Or for an hour or two, each day? In its place, we could replace it with activities that better nurture contemplative moments such as:

- Spending time in nature or a garden.
- Recreation with friends and family.
- Listening to sacred or inspirational music.
- Reading poetry or a worthwhile book.
- Resting with no goal or objective.
- Waiting, watching and listening for the divine.
- Visiting those in need.
- Prayer.

Merton certainly saw the advantages of many of these kinds of activities as sources for renewal of the contemplative life and prayer, and not just on Sunday. For example, the realization of the divine is possible in our meditation on nature; it can be a form of meditative prayer.

> When your mind is silent, then the forest suddenly becomes magnificently real and blazes transparently with the Reality of God.... And we who are in God find ourselves united in Him with all that springs from Him. This is prayer, and this is glory![33]

So in order to develop a vibrant prayer life in a frenetic age of expanding forms of communication, we must slow our pace when and where we can. We must accept the value of our prayer life and give primacy to those moments. In our lives and in our institutions, we must promote the preconditions for contemplation. Of course, we must begin with ourselves. We can make new choices for our time. For example, Merton observed that "there is

nothing to prevent a layman from taking just one Psalm a day, for instance in his night prayers, and reciting it thoughtfully, pausing to meditate on the lines which have the deepest meaning for him."[34]

In addition, it is possible to imagine that our institutions could be more compatible with such a life. In Montreal, there is a company, Cordon Bleu, owned by Robert Ouimet, who has installed meditation rooms in his plants where every person of faith is free to seek these contemplative moments in their own way in their breaks at work.[35] Perhaps such openness to spiritual possibilities can become more widespread. Robert Ouimet and Cordon Bleu are very small compared to Bill Gates and Microsoft, yet as is often noted in the Bible, size and apparent power are often illusions. Unusual things can grow from the seeds of spiritual possibility that are always, as Merton noted, with us.

In the end, we all stand before our walls of immanence built in part with the white noise of discordant sounds and transmuting images of our media culture. This wall is one that Merton would recognize, for he too lived in an age of "crisis" of "special searching and questioning." Such an age needs meditation and prayer, because only prayers of "humble supplication" can turn our despair into a "perfect hope." [36] So, we yearn to go beyond the walls and the abyss of sights and sounds they seem to encompass. This action is not a physical one, but a spiritual journey; it is not in the world, but in us. And so we pray. In the end, as Saint Augustine observed, we can feel the pull and respond in prayer because our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, oh my God.

*I would like to dedicate this paper to the deeply religious journeys of so many students at Georgia Tech. Here at the most technological and scientific of institutions, these young people are searching for a spiritual basis for their lives and in doing so remind their elders of the joy and merit of such a quest.

Notes

1. Walter Isaacson, "In Search of the Real Bill Gates" *Time Magazine* (January 13, 1997).

2. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965), p. 137.

3. Strictly speaking, Georgia Tech is an institute, not a university, but I thought this might confuse the reader. If in Atlanta, do not de-

scribe the Georgia Institute of Technology as a university to any student, faculty, or staff there. You may be summarily corrected.

4. Perhaps this humorous style is peculiar to American Catholic intellectuals. Merton once wrote that the Catholic novelist, Walker Percy, had a "merry kind of nausea." He told his novices that he would like to be known as the "Santa Claus of loneliness." Thomas Merton, "Letter to Walker Percy" (January, 1964), *The Courage for Truth*, Christine M. Bochen, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993), p. 282; Thomas Merton, "Poetry and Imagination" (#8 Credence Cassettes, 1994).

5. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 329; Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960), p. 222.

6. Thomas Merton, *Cables to the Ace* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 5,6. This piece was initially prepared in response to the request of high school student, Suzanne Butorovich from Campbell, California, for her "underground" newspaper, the *Clique Courier*. Thomas Merton, "Letter to Suzanne Butorovich" (July 18, 1967) in Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy*, ed. Robert Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989), p. 310.

7. Thomas Merton, The Christian in a Technological World. (Electronic Paperback Series).

8. Thomas Merton, "Circular Letter, Lent 1967" in *The Road to Joy*, pp. 98-99.

9. Thomas Merton, (September 26, 1964) in Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life*. vol. 5, Robert E. Daggy, ed. *The Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 149. The later interest stands in contrast to Merton's boredom with photography in 1939 when he visited a Museum of Modern Art exhibit of Charles Scheeler. The photographs were "so neat and so precise and so completely uninteresting." Thomas Merton, *Run to The Mountain*, Vol. 1. Patrick Hart, ed., *The Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 68; Patrick Hart, "Photography and Prayer in Thomas Merton," *The Merton Seasonal* 7.2 (Summer, 1982), pp. 2-5; John Howard Griffin, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Visual World of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1970), p. 49.

10. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 217; Steve Metz, "Editor's Corner," *The Science Teacher* (October, 2006), p. 8.

11. Against the educational trend to viewing computers as the key to improving education and society, there stand a few dissenting voices. Clifford Stoll, *High Tech Heretic: Reflections of a Computer Contrarian* (Anchor Press, 2000); Todd Oppenheimer, *The Flickering Mind: Saving Edu-*

cation from the False Promise of Technology (New York: Random House, 2004); Larry Cuban, *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jessica E. Vascellaro, "Saying No to School Laptops" *Wall Street Journal* (August 31, 2006), p. D1; Winnie Hu, "Seeing No Progress, Some Schools Drop Laptops," *New York Times* (May 4, 2007), pp. A1,A23.

12. Survey by Burst Interactive Media www.burstmedia.com/about/news.

13. Morris Berman, *The Twilight of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 36; Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our World* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), p. 18. The impact of the changing forms of communication has been detailed in the last half century by a variety of prophetic voices. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986); Thomas De Zengotita, *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005).

14. Gitlin, *Media Unlimited*, p. 6.

15. J. Zito, et. al., "Psychotropic Patterns for Youth: A Ten Year Perspective" (157) *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* (2003), pp. 17-25. In a national survey, of the American College Health Association, almost 10% of students had contemplated suicide. A Study at Kansas State University discovered that between 1988 and 2001 the number of students being treated for depression and suicide nearly doubled. Richard D. Kadison, "Mental Health Crisis: What Colleges Must Do" 51 *Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 10, 2004), p. B20.

16. Gitlin, *Media Unlimited*, pp.39-41; There are of course those who claim that there has been the creation of real communities online, but these communities seem very content-thin. Sensation and online visual quests provides a limited basis for human connection. Edward Castranova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life* (April 3, 1965), p. 224; Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962), pp. 14, 30; Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love*. Vol. 6, Christine M. Bochen, ed. *The Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) (October 27, 1966), p. 151; Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), pp. 216-246.

17. James Glieck, *Speed* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1999), p. 6; For a fictional account of the media fog, see Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

18. Thomas Merton, "Letter to Czelaw Milosz" (March 28, 1961) in Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, p. 72.

19. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1957), pp. xii-xvi, 472-475; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1971), p. 317.

20. Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), p. 118.

21. Thomas Merton, "Letter to Mr. L. Dickson" (September 12, 1965) in Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994), p. 169.

22. Judith Flournoy, "Thomas Merton and the Shakers" *The Merton Seasonal* 22.1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 7-11.

23. Merton "Preface" to Japanese edition of *Seeds of Contemplation*" in Thomas Merton, *"Honorable Reader": Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert F. Daggy (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 86; Merton, Thomas. "The Other Side of Despair," in Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), pp. 255-80; Merton, *Disputed Questions*, p. 183. For an incisive analysis of monastic prayer in Merton, see Anne Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 108-120; Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 86.

24. Thomas Merton, "Answers for Hernan Lavin Cerda" 2 *The Merton Annual* (1989), p. 6.

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25. Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), pp. 10-11.

26. Thomas Merton, "Letter to Abdul Aziz" (January 2, 1966) *The Hidden Ground of Love*, William H. Shannon, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985), pp. 63-64.

27. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 32-38.

28. Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1956), p. 5.

29. David Steindl-Rast, "Man or Prayer," in Patrick Hart, ed. *Thomas Merton, Monk: A Monastic Tribute* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1974), p. 80.

30. Merton, "Letter to Etta Gullick" (April 6, 1966) *The Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 376.

31. Thomas Merton, Letter to Father Mark Weidner (April 15, 1959) in *The School of Charity*, 119; Thomas Merton book review of Josef Pieper,

In Tune with the World in 1 *Cistercian Studies* (1966), 108-109; Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 11-27,37.

32. Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 230.

33. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence.* Vol. 2. Jonathan Montaldo, ed. *The Journals of Thomas Merton* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 471.

34. Merton, *Praying the Psalms*, p. 14.

35. This information is based on my visits with Robert Ouimet in Montreal. He holds an annual conference on spirituality and work and I have attended several of the conferences.

36. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, pp. 25, 28.