

MW451
Theological Reflection on Technology and Digital Culture
W. Hall Harris & John Dyer

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

DTS Catalog: "This course examines the place of technology in the biblical drama and in modern culture. Students will critically reflect on how technology affects their personal lives and ministries, analyze various theories of the nature of technology and how those theories contribute to and/or influence our understanding of what it means to be human, and investigate how selected Old and New Testament passages contribute to a biblical theology that can offer ethical guidance on current and forthcoming technologies."

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. Cognitive Objectives

1. Recognize the importance of tools, media, and creativity in the biblical story
2. Know the basic contours of the history of technology and media development
3. Understand the major philosophical and sociological frameworks for interrogating technology

B. Affective Objectives

1. Desire to use technology and media in a way that honors God and his people
2. Appreciate the promise and peril of technology in one's own life, in relationships, and in ministry and work

C. Skills Objectives

1. Analyze current social-technological trends using the four frames of media ecology, philosophy of technology, sociology, and theology.

III. COURSE MATERIALS

A. Required Textbooks

Campbell, Heidi and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture*. Baker Academic, 2016. (192 pages).

Dyer, John. *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*. Kregel, 2011. (192 pages).

Okorafor, Nnedi. *Binti*. Tor, 2017. (90 pages).

Kelly, Kevin. *The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future*. Viking, 2016. (336 pages).

B. Required Articles

Media Ecology

McLuhan. "The Medium is the Message" in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1968.

Postman, Neil. "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change," 1998

Ong, Walter, "Writing is a technology that changes thought" in *The Written Word*, 1986.

Jacobs, Alan. "Why Bother with McLuhan?"

Philosophy of Technology

Borgmann, Albert. "Focal Things and Practices" (22 pages)

Ellul, Jaques. "On the Aims of a Philosophy of Technology" (5 pages)

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Twentieth Century." (26 pages)

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology" (15 pages)

Media, Religion, and Culture
(forthcoming list)

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Class Readings

1. *Required Reading.*

From the Garden to the City (192 pages)

Networked Theology (192 pages)

Binti (90 pages)

The Inevitable (336 pages)

Articles (200 pages)

2. *Optional Readings.*

B. Technology Experiment & Reflection

1. *Technology Experiment.*

Over a period of 5 weeks, the student will engage in a “technology experiment” where he or she changes a long-held media habit in some way or tries a new one. This might involve using an alternate media source (reading actual newspapers), starting a blog, engaging in a “fast” from a particular social media (Facebook), trying a new spiritual practice (10 minute daily mindfulness meditation), or another professor approved activity.

2. *Reflection Journal.*

Each week, write a short reflection paragraph (2-300 words) and conclude with final reflections on what you learned from this new pattern and how it may influence your future behavior.

3. *Discussion.*

The student will share this experiment with the class in week 8.

C. Technology and Theology Presentation

1. *Research Subject.*

Each student will select a technology research topic (see complete list of suggested past, present, and future issues in appendix), select readings for the class, and prepare a 25-minute presentation on the subject, followed by a time of discussion with the class. Each presentation should cover (1) the background historical or technological development, (2) how the technology has shaped society / culture and how humans have in turn shaped it, (3) the spiritual implications of the technology, (4) how the technology is informed by and informs our theology, (5) recommendations for faithful embrace.

2. *Discussion.*

Students not presenting will be expected to read whatever the presenting student assigns prior to coming to class, in order to fully engage in the discussion.

D. Synthesis Papers: Religion, Media, and Culture (6)

During the semester, there will be six synthesis papers of approximately 1,500-2,500 words that will offer students the chance to synthesize readings from the previous weeks and create a well-researched, but accessible document you could send to a friend.

1. Apply Postman’s “Five Things” to a current issue technology in the church (social media, online services, screens, etc.)
2. Find three articles (at least one by a Christian) on a technology issue and critique their approach using what you've learned from our three frames: media ecology, philosophy of technology, and sociology.
3. What critical technologies, issues, and considerations are missing from Dyer’s *From the Garden to the City*?

4. Has technology made the world a better place?
5. How is technology portrayed in the story of *Binti* and how does it differ from ideas in Western/American culture?
6. Consider 1 or 2 future technologies and explore how they might display and diminish expressions of the kingdom of God.

D. Assignment Workload Hours

For each credit hour of a graduate course, a student is expected to do two hours of work outside of class. For a 3 credit hour course over 14 weeks, this comes to 84 hours of outside work. The times below are approximate values, estimating it takes 2-3 minutes to read each page of a book.

Type	Details	Hours
Reading	<i>From the Garden to the City</i> , 192 pages	5 hours
Reading	<i>Networked Theology</i> , 192 pages	10 hours
Reading	<i>Binti</i> , 90 pages	2 hours
Reading	<i>The Inevitable</i> , 336 pages.	10 hours
Reading	Selected Articles	12 hours
Experiment	Activity & Reflection Paper	10 hours
Presentation	Research, writing, paper, presentation	15 hours
Summary	Synthesis Papers	15 hours
Total		~80 hours

V. COURSE SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

A. Non-discrimination policy

“DTS does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the operation of any of its programs and activities. To avoid discrimination, the student is responsible for informing the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities and the course instructor of any disabling condition that will require modifications.”

B. Use of gender-inclusive language in assignments

All written submissions should strive to use gender-inclusive language. While this has become standard academic practice, this request is not merely an attempt at “political correctness.” As a gospel-shaped, gospel-centered community of learning, we have compelling reasons to think, write, and speak in such a way as to ensure that none are either intentionally or inadvertently excluded by our use of language. Consider using “humans,” “persons,” “humanity,” or “humankind” rather than “man” or “men” when referring to human beings in general. Consider alternating between the use of “he” and “she” as generic pronouns or substituting the use of the plural (“they,” “them,” “their”) when appropriate.

VI. GRADING

A. Letter-Number Grade Scale

A+ 99–100	B+ 91–93	C+ 83–85	D+ 75–77	F 0–69
A 96–98	B 88–90	C 80–82	D 72–74	Sub-zero!
A- 94–95	B- 86–87	C- 78–79	D- 70–71	

B. Weighing of Course Requirements for Grading

Assignment	Details	Percent
Readings	Read all material	10%
Class Participation	Interaction on readings and presentations	25%
Experiment	Activity and reflections	15%
Presentation	Leading class discussion	20%
Final Paper	Synthesis papers	25%
Total		100%

C. Terms of Assignments

1. *Late Assignments*

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, are to be posted by the due date. Please note that it is the server time listed in the upper right of any web page that marks the proper time for papers due. Please keep your GTA well informed of reasons for delay (trips, pregnancy, sickness, emergencies). Without a valid excuse, late assignments will be penalized 15% per day.

2. *Assignments Related to Previous or Parallel Course Work*

Work that has been done (or is being done) for other classes may not be used to earn credit in this course. Nor is use of any work done by others permissible without full documentation. Take note that plagiarism (copying from Internet, articles or books) or any other form of deception is strictly prohibited and can be grounds for expulsion from the Seminary. All sources should be fully documented and quotation marks used when appropriate. All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students.

3. *Graduating Students*

All work of graduating students is due as marked in the course schedule below unless otherwise oriented by the GTA and/or professor.

VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Topic
Introduction, Approaches, and Frameworks	
Week 1 Aug 29	Introduction Student introductions, syllabus overview, address major issues in technology and media.
Week 2 Sept 5 Dyer	Media Ecology <i>Reading</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McLuhan, Marshall. “The Medium is the Message” in <i>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</i>, 1968. • Postman, Neil. “Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change,” 1998 • Ong, Walter, “Writing is a technology that changes thought” in <i>The Written Word</i>, 1986. • Jacobs, Alan. “Why Bother with McLuhan?” <i>Assignment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1) Apply Postman’s “Five Things” to a current issue technology in the church (social media, online services, screens, etc.)
Week 3 Sept 12 Dyer	Philosophy of Technology <i>Reading</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borgmann, Albert. “Focal Things and Practices” (22 pages) • Feenberg, Andrew. “What is Philosophy of Technology?” (26 pages) • Heidegger, Martin. “The Question Concerning Technology” (15 pages) <i>Assignment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Week 4 Sept 19	Sociology of Technology

Dyer	<p>Introduction to Sociology (Marx, Weber, etc.). Social Shaping of Technology. Digital Religion.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Durhkiem, Emile, "Chapter 1: Definition of Religious Phenomena and of Religion" in <i>Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> (22 pages) • Wajcman - Introduction to Social Shaping of Technology • Campbell, Heidi, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society" (22 pages) <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (2) Find three articles (at least one by a Christian) on a technology issue and critique their approach using what you've learned from our three frames: media ecology, philosophy of technology, and sociology.
<p>Week 5 Sept 26 Dyer</p>	<p>Christian Approaches to Media and Technology Summarize previous approaches and offer a theological layer.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dyer, John. <i>From the Garden to the City</i> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3) What critical technologies, issues, and considerations are missing from Dyer's <i>From the Garden to the City</i>?
<p>Week 6 Oct 3 Harris</p>	<p>Technology, History, and Progress History of Technology. Definitions of Technology, Media, and Culture</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Chapter 15: The Marriage of Science and Empire” in <i>Sapiens</i>. Yuval Noah Harari https://erenow.com/common/sapiensbriefhistory/75.html • “Chapter 4: How Do Historians Understand Technology?” <i>Technology Matters</i>, David Nye • Chapter 1: from <i>Technology, theology, and the idea of progress</i> by David Hopper <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (4) Has technology made the world a better place?
Current Issues in Religion, Media, and Culture	
<p>Week 7 Oct 10 Harris</p>	<p>Church, Ministry, and Technology</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>Week 8 Oct 17 Harris</p>	<p>Technology, Spirituality, and Addiction</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring Report on Technology Experiment and Explain to Class
<p>Week 9 Oct 24 Dyer</p>	<p>Culture, Ethnicity, Gender, and Technology</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Explaining African-American Cell Phone Usage Through the Social Shaping of Technology Approach” • <i>Technology Matters</i> chapter • “Machine Bias” ProPublica https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing • “The Complicated Politics of... Refrigerators” Matthew Wills https://daily.jstor.org/the-complicated-politics-of-refrigerators/ • “When Women Stopped Coding” NPR https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/10/21/357629765/when-women-stopped-coding <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>Week 10 Oct 31 Dyer</p>	<p>Technology in Popular Culture and Media How technology appears in popular films, comics, book, and commercials.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Binti</i> by Nnedi Okorafor <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (5) How is technology perceived in Binti’s world, and how does this differ from American/Western ideas?
<p>Week 11 Nov 7 Harris</p>	<p>Transhumanism</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>Week 12 Nov 14 Harris</p>	<p>Future Technologies</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Inevitable</i>, Kevin Kelley

	<p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (6) Consider 1 or 2 future technologies and explore how they might display and diminish expressions of the kingdom of God.
<p>Nov 14 Nov 28</p>	<p>Thanksgiving Reading Week</p>
<p>Student Presentations</p>	
<p><i>Week 13</i> Dec 5</p>	<p>Student Presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 14</i> Dec 12</p>	<p>Student Presentations</p>
<p><i>Week 15</i> Dec 19</p>	<p>Student Presentations / Conclusions</p>

VIII. Example Student Topics

Students may choose from the following topics to do their research report. If you would prefer to cover another topic, please consult your professors.

1. **Globalization/Urbanization** – examine models that help us understand trends and challenges with migration, immigration, megacities, third place, etc.
2. **New Media Arts** – The use of modern media to produce new kinds of art to challenge and/or humanize society.
3. **Youth and identity formation** – Consider how the last decade of technology has influenced the way young people navigate identity formation.
4. **Race and media** – How do various groups understand local and national issues of race and ethnicity in light of media trends.
5. **Spiritual practices** – Suggest ways spiritual practices can be modified or re-adopted for the digital age.
6. **Sex, Gender** – Expectations of sex in pornographic culture, how gender is constructed today, and how that influences our readings of scripture. Is technology male dominated?
7. **Surveillance/Privacy** – Ethical and moral tradeoff navigating safety vs. freedom in modern recorded society.
8. **Food** – Modern food production, global justice issues, beliefs about what is healthy and its shifts in time. (Understanding of agrarian parables?)
9. **Time** – Shifts in understanding of time since the advent of accurate timekeeping devices.
10. **Justice/Access** – What technologies should be considered human rights? Clean water, toilets, food, wifi? Is installing free wifi an expression of Christian mishpat?
11. **Multi-site Churches** – What are the values of a streaming multisite church? What are the challenges both internally and externally?
12. **Church Media Use** – Choose an area of emphasis on how a church might shape its use of media in services and during the week.
13. **Technology and Education** – How do we evaluate technology in Do iPads increase test scores in elementary school? How can we “renew our minds” (Rom 12)?
14. **Colonization** – In a generation or two, humans may be born and die on Mars. What might change or shift in theology?
15. **Medicine, Reproduction** – Recent discoveries and proposals will take us far beyond IVF. Explore the models and ethics of an upcoming trend.
16. **Transhumanism** – From bifocals to implants, track what it means to be human now and in the future. Where is the image of God?
17. **Artificial Intelligence/Singularity** – map proposed pathways and choose a future device to see how it might evolve. Can robots be “saved”?
18. **Technology in Fiction** – How is technology portrayed, not just in scifi, but in all modern story-telling, books, movies, etc.?
19. **Apocalypse/Redeemer** – How is technology understand both as the bringer of destruction and of utopia?

20. **Culture Comparison** – compare how two different cultures adopted a technology such as guns, cars, bicycles, clocks, or baby formula.

VIII. SUGGESTED READINGS

Philosophy of Technology

- Borgmann, Albert. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Enquiry*. The University of Chicago Press (1987). 310 pages.
- Borgmann, Albert. *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Century*. The University of Chicago Press (2000). 282 pages
- Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Brazos (2003), 144 pages.
- Brock, Brian. *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*. Eerdmans (2010). 424 pages.
- Ellul, Jaques. *The Technological Society*. Vintage (1970). 449 pages.
- Jardin, Murray. *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity from Itself*. Brazos (2004). 304 pages.
- Winner, Langdon. *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*. University of Chicago Press (1989). 216 pages.

Media Ecology

- Gordon, T. David. *Why Johnny Can't Preach: How the Media Have Shaped the Messengers*. P & R Publishing (2009), 112 pages.
- Gordon, T. David. *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Re-Wrote the Hymnal*. P & R Publishing (2010), 192 pages.
- McLuhan, Marshall and Eric McLuhan, Jacek Szklarek, Jacek Szklarek (eds.), *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion* (2002).
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).
- Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy*. Routledge (2012). 264 pages.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 1985.
- Postman, Neil, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. 1993.

Theology

- Byers, Andrew. *TheoMedia: The Media of God and the Digital Age*. Cascade Books (2013). 254 pages.
- Kallenberg, Brad J. *God and Gadgets: Following Jesus in a Technological Age*. Wipf & Stock Pub (2011). 188 pages.
- Mitcham, Carl. *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis*
- Monsma, Stephen V. (ed). *Responsible Technology*, 1986.
- Noble, David F. *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. Alfred A. Knopf (1997)

Spadaro, Antonio. *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*. Fordham University Press (2014). 160 pages.

Sociology

Brasher, Brenda E. *Give Me That Online Religion*, 1999.

Campbell, Heidi. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. Routledge (2012). 288 pages.

Campbell, Heidi. *When Religion Meets New Media*. Routledge (2010). 232 pages.

Cheong, Pauline Hope, Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, and Charles Ess. *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures*. Peter Lang (2012). 326 pages.

Dawson, Lorne and Douglas E. Cowan. *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, 2004.

Wagner, Rachel. *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality*. Routledge (2011). 266 pages.

Popular

Brende, Eric. *Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology*, 2005.

Boyd, Dana. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale (2015). 296 pages.

Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. Norton (2011). 304 pages.

Lanier, Jarod. *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*. Vintags (2011), 240 pages.

Gardner, Howard and Katie Davis. *The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World*. Yale (2013). 256 pages.

Kelly, Kevin. *What Technology Wants*. Penguin (2011). 416 pages.

Nye, David E. *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With*. MIT (2007). 304 pages.

Palfrey, John and Urs Gasser. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, 2008.

Rainie, Lee and Barry Wellman. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. MIT Press (2014). 314 pages.

Struthers, William M. *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. IVP Books (IVP: 2010). 196 pages.

Thompson, Clive. *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology Is Changing Our Minds for the Better*. Penguin (2014), 352 pages.

Turkle, Sherry, *Alone Together*, Basic Books (2011).

Turkle, Sherry, *The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. Penguin Press (2015).

Wajcman, Judy. *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*. University Of Chicago Press (2016). 227 pages.

Future

Gordon, Robert J. *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War*. Princeton University Press (2016). 784 pages.

Kelly, Kevin. *The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future*. Viking (2016). 336 pages.

Kurzweil, Ray. *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*. Penguin (2000). 400 pages.

Kurzweil, Ray. *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. Penguin (2006). 672 pages.

Ministry with Media

Bourgeois, David T. *Ministry in the Digital Age: Strategies and Best Practices for a Post-Website World*. IVP (2013). 144 pages.

Gould, Meredith. *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*. Liturgical Press (2015). 200 pages.

Schnekloth, Clint. *Mediating Faith: Faith Formation in a Trans-Media Era*. Fortress (2014). 126 pages.

Wise, Justin. *The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication*. Moody (2014). 192 pages.