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# TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN NATURE

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When I was in high school I read a short science fiction story about a village of people who were forbidden to create anything circular. Of course, soon enough, certain citizens realized how much easier all their tasks would be if only they could transport hay/food/people etc. on carriages that had wheels. In spite of the fact that they had been indoctrinated on the evils of such technology, and knew that the punishment for carrying out such undertakings would be great, they couldn't resist the temptation of discussing their ideas or trying the new invention. To this day, while I forget the title and author (and a great many details), the story haunts me. It was at once a warning about the force and velocity that technological innovations could have and a commentary on our inability to completely control the flow of ideas and consequences of technological advance. Like the wheel itself, when put in motion, there is a momentum attributed to the changes which technology brings about that is reminiscent of that famous "Looney Tunes" road runner: the one who zooms ahead with great speed only to pull himself back with a screeching halt when he is already in the middle of the street or on the edge of a cliff. The tension between moving forward and pulling back (in order to reflect on the consequences of our actions) is an ever present element in what it means to be human - especially with regards to the uniquely human capacity for technology.

The human drive to create has always inspired narratives of hope that propel us forward and prophecies of doom that warn us of the potential pitfalls of our creations. Religious narratives are also deeply embedded in our culture and inform us, often without our being fully conscious of it. It is therefore important to reevaluate the very significant and prominent doctrine of the *imago Dei* in relation to the role our development of technology plays in our scientific and cultural evolution.

Throughout my paper I will be using a very broad definition of the term technology. For my purposes, I will focus on technology ranging from the very simple to the extremely complex. A basic anthropological definition refers to technology as such:

The body of knowledge available to a society that is of use in fashioning implements, practicing manual arts and skills, and extracting or collecting materials.<sup>1</sup>

This definition adheres to a traditional understanding of "*homo faber*" (which refers to the human faculty of controlling the environment through tools). However, in this day and age, our definition of technology includes many more functions than those listed in the

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<sup>1</sup>Michigan Association for Media in Education, *Media Spectrum* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1990), 28.

above definition. In his book, *Pandemonium Tremendum*, James E. Huchingson contends that a computer also qualifies as a tool in what he names “the tool-driven revolutions”; a term which manages to convey both the evolutionary value of a “tool” and the “power” that technology has in the realm of societal transformation.<sup>2</sup> These two perceptions of technology are reflective of two very different focal points for interpretations of the *imago Dei*; that of Genesis and that of the New Testament. To put it rather simplistically: the focus of the first category is on our control over our environment, the second interpretation concentrates on our cultural reality.

What it means to be human, from a theological perspective, has often been defined in terms of the *imago Dei*. How do we interpret the biblical passage in Genesis that states that we are created in the “image and likeness” of God? How do we interpret the doctrine of the *imago Dei* in terms of Jesus’ life and death in the New Testament? These questions impel us to seek answers about the nature of humanity and how our nature helps us to understand how we should act. In *The Human Factor*, Philip Hefner proposes an understanding of human beings within a “bio-cultural evolutionary model” and proposes that our scientific knowledge should be taken into account when we interpret our religious narratives.<sup>3</sup> This is the task I will be initiating with special attention to technology. The technological predilection of humans is a core reality in our bio-cultural makeup and it

can tell us something about who we are and why we are here.

Holmes Rolston, in his book, *Genes, Genesis and God*,<sup>4</sup> discusses the theory that humans have what is termed a “dual-inheritance system” and it is closely related to Hefner’s “bio-cultural” model. The proposal is that human beings are firmly placed within the ecosystem and are a product of nature; our central nervous systems store genetic information like all other living beings. However, within the natural process of evolution, human survival became inherently dependent on the adaptive mechanism to observe, interpret and change their environment. Therefore, human beings inherit characteristics both genetically (through DNA) and culturally (through the transmission of information to others). Both Hefner and Rolston draw on this reflection by geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky:

Human genes have accomplished what no other genes succeeded in doing. They form the biological basis for a super organic culture, which proved to be the most powerful method of adaptation to the environment ever developed by any species.<sup>5</sup>

Hefner defines culture as the “form that human freedom has assumed in the evolutionary history of the species”<sup>6</sup> and states that science and technology are a natural outcome of this cultural evolution.

<sup>2</sup>James E. Huchingson, *Pandemonium Tremendum* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 16-17.

<sup>3</sup>Philip J. Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Holmes Rolston, *Genes, Genesis, and God: Values and their Origins in Natural and Human History*. (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup>Hefner, *The Human Factor*, 118, quoting from: Theodosius Dobzhansky, *The Biological Basis of Human Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

<sup>6</sup>Hefner, *The Human Factor*, 146.

Experts agree that human beings have not evolved, biologically, in any considerable way for approximately 300,000 years. But we did not cease to evolve. All the evolution that we have undergone since has been cultural. We have adapted to our environment in increasingly complex ways over time. Religious narratives can also be seen as reflective of our cultural evolution. The most overt references to the *imago Dei* are in Genesis 1:26 – 1:28, where it is explicitly stated that man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God. Interpretations of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* often either disregard the fact that these lines are given in conjunction with the concept of dominion and focus on the Christ narrative or they stress the concept of dominion over and above other aspects of the *imago Dei*. The evolution of our relationship to the environment, especially with regards to technology, might give us a new perspective which connects these two emphases in a holistic way.

Holmes Rolston states that all organisms are “cybernetic<sup>7</sup> systems”:

...their know-how to solve problems evolved biologically. This is true in natural history; coyotes know how to hunt for ground squirrels. It is true in cultural history; humans evolved brains that could figure out how to make tools to hunt. Natural selection is typically thought to be the key determinant of those events; better knowledge gave better survival power.<sup>8</sup>

So, where humans are handicapped corporally, they make up for it intellectually. To a cer-

tain extent, this integrates a substantive interpretation of the *imago Dei* (the substance that makes human beings like God - usually related to the intellect) and a functional interpretation<sup>9</sup> (which focuses on behaviour and the dominion of human beings over other forms of life).

Marshal McLuhan’s description of technology as “extension of the body,”<sup>10</sup> where tools enable us to do what our bodies cannot, demonstrates the particularity of human nature and how our intellect has provided us with survival strategies. Tool-making is traditionally viewed as one of the key features of human uniqueness. This has been debated; some primates have been observed making simple tools. However, in *The Prehistory of the Mind*, Steve Mithen comments that in the 30 years of study of primate tool-use “there have been no technological advances.”<sup>11</sup> He goes on to say that while chimpanzees do occasionally create tools to adapt to their environment, they are using what he calls *general intelligence* rather than *technical intelligence*, which he claims humans possess (along with other forms of intelligence that I will refer to later). He comes to this conclusion because the manufacturing of a tool for chimpanzees requires the same acts that the instinctive acts of feeding require (removing twigs from bushes, stripping leaves, biting them into smaller pieces). Therefore he believes that the process

<sup>7</sup> Huchingson describes human beings as “kybernatai” from which the term cybernetics originates, meaning “steersman”; Huchingson, *Pandemonium Tremendum*, 179.

<sup>8</sup> Rolston, *Genes, Genesis and God*, 119.

<sup>9</sup> These categories, as well as the category “relational interpretation” are discussed in chapter 3 of Van Huyssteen, Wentzel. *Alone in the World?: Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006.).

<sup>10</sup> Jim Andrews, “McLuhan Reconsidered.” <http://www.vispo.com/writings/essays/mcluhana.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Steven J. Mithen, *The Prehistory of the Mind: The Cognitive Origins of Art, Religion and Science*. (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996.), 77.

of trial and error is more responsible for their ability to make tools than an innate, adaptive predisposition for technical intelligence.<sup>12</sup>

Philip Hefner provides us with a theory of human beings as “created co-creators”.<sup>13</sup> The created dimension of human beings refers to their biological nature. (I will discuss the co-created dimension later). In terms of the *imago Dei* in Genesis, God created man with a certain nature. Hefner provides an understanding of human nature based on the teleonomic axiom:

The structure of a thing, the processes by which it functions, the requirements for its functioning and its relations with and impact on its ecosystem form the most reasonable basis for hypothesizing what the purposes and meaning of the thing are.<sup>14</sup>

Sociobiologists study the structure of the human body with regards to the genetic determinants in culture. They highlight the fact that genetic determinants are there to promote the survival and multiplication of genes. Our genetic and cultural systems have coevolved in such a way as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to determine to what extent which guides which. However, this accent on the promotion of survival and the multiplication of genes has import in the Genesis account. In Genesis 1:28, God instructed humans to: “...*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*” It is advantageous to examine these commands within context. In the ancient

society of the Old Testament, struggle for survival would have been great. Especially when one considers the dry weather and rocky terrain of the Middle East, one can see how this shaped the vision of the environment as something that needed to be subdued.<sup>15</sup> Any one of us can attest to the fact that, at different times in our individual lives, the “bodily” component of our being will take over. Hunger, cold, and fatigue are but a few examples. “In the beginning”, this “bodily” component was likely to take over more often because of the greater number of threats to our survival coupled with limited technological advances.<sup>16</sup> The creation of tools, as extensions of the body, was a bio-cultural adaptation that humans needed in order to survive. Human beings share the innate desire for reproduction and survival with other creatures. However, structurally, their ability to survive depends on their distinctive and highly developed capacity to “create”.

Where Hefner contrasts the animal nature of the human being to the divine nature by using the terms *created* and *co-creator*, Huchingson uses the terms *imago mundi* (image of the world) and *imago Dei*.<sup>17</sup> Essentially, both models attempt to capture the tension that we live with as human beings. We are neither beastly

<sup>12</sup>Mithen, 74-77.

<sup>13</sup>Hefner, 27.

<sup>14</sup>Hefner, 40.

<sup>15</sup>Theodore Hebert discusses the context of Genesis 1 in terms of dominion in his article, “Rethinking Dominion”. Hiebert, Theodore, *Direction Journal* 25, no. 2 (Fall, 1996): 16-25, <http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?922> accessed 2007.

<sup>16</sup>As Stanley Grenz comments, the Hebrews were not likely the first to invent the concept of humans as divine image but if anything, this strengthens my argument that the narrative is based on a time when the environment was seen as an opponent that human beings were to overcome. Lints, Richard, Michael Scott Horton, and Mark R. Talbot, eds. *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 79.

<sup>17</sup>Huchingson, 179 -180.

nor divine. Huchingson uses the label *kybernetai* (“steersman”) for human beings and he does this to convey how the *imago Dei* and the *imago mundi* are in continuity:

As mortal offspring of the earth, persons are kybernetai. They absorb tremendous variety from the natural and social environments and utilize it as the fundamental stuff of self organization and the generation of complex experience. The brain, the organ primarily but not exclusively involved in this process, takes sensory input, assesses its significance, and responds appropriately, first through the body and then through tools.<sup>18</sup>

The strong emphasis on using the land for survival in Genesis, although many believe it has contributed to an attitude which has led to ecological distress and other evils, needs to be appraised in context. We used tools in order to survive. However, the use of tools meant that we had a control over the environment that designated us as “steersmen”. The making of those first tools to “work the earth and keep the land” led to a technological evolution that not only changed the world but the way that we viewed it and, as a result, the way we would have to “steer” it.

Many interpreters of the *imago Dei* now shun a substantive or functional interpretation where the focus is on either the unique intellect (with regards to the reasoning function) or behaviours (in this case I have been focusing on the technological capacity) of the human being. Interpreting the *imago Dei* in terms of *homo faber* can be perceived as reductive and too limiting in this day and age. As a sole explanation of the *imago Dei*, it is. As Rolston contends:

Biological survival and reproductions are valuable achievements warranting all due respect, and if the intellect is put to work supporting survival, well and good. But a problem arises if the intellect can do nothing more than support survival and reproduction.<sup>19</sup>

John Polkinghorne laments Hefner’s emphasis on survival in his essay, *Evolution and Information: The Context*, “As far as survival is concerned, it would seem that a little arithmetic and Euclidian geometry would be sufficient to cope with the physical environment.”<sup>20</sup> When he goes on to say that other human intellectual powers cannot just be “a happy accident, some fortuitous spin-off from mundane evolutionary necessities,”<sup>21</sup> he ignores the fact that it is the human’s adaptive facilities that resulted in an accumulation of information that, in turn, led to further cultural advances. We cannot overlook the fact that some of the same cultural adaptations that negotiated survival evolved and complexified to facilitate the communication of multifaceted levels of reality within communities and to other communities.

In his assessment of the various studies that were done with primates, Steve Mithen remarked that most animals who were observed making tools were making them as a result of human teaching. This is significant because it points to the fact that intentional teaching is another highly evolved feature in human beings. Rolston states:

<sup>19</sup>Rolston, 121.

<sup>20</sup>John Polkinghorne, *Evolution and Information: The Context*, (Chicago: Christ Seminary-Seminex, 2001), 248.

<sup>21</sup>Polkinghorne, 248.

<sup>18</sup>Huchingson, 17.

What is missing in primates is precisely what makes a human cumulative transmissible culture possible. The central idea is that acquired knowledge and behaviour are learned and transmitted from person to person, by one generation teaching another, ideas passing from mind to mind, in large part through the medium of language, with such knowledge in a greatly rebuilt or cultured environment.<sup>22</sup>

Here we come to technology with regards to the relational message of the *imago Dei*.

Alongside the making of tools as a feature of human uniqueness is “symbolic behaviour”. Archeologists and anthropologists document a sudden increase in symbolic behaviour in the upper Paleolithic populations.<sup>23</sup> Terrence Deacon defines symbolization as the “translation of social behaviour into symbolic form.”<sup>24</sup> Here we can see how that first definition of technology as “the body of knowledge available to a society that is of use in fashioning implements, practicing manual arts and skills, and extracting or collecting materials” takes a step in the direction of information transmission. Deacon describes symbolic references as a tool for memory storage and communication to other members of society. The creation of symbolic references by Upper Paleolithic humans could not have come about without the technological expertise described above. Technology permitted basic survival but it also allowed human beings to store a variety of information outside of their bodies.

<sup>22</sup>Rolston, 111.

<sup>23</sup>Paul Mellars, “Major Issues in the Emergence of Modern Humans.” *Current Anthropology* 30, (06, 1989): 349-385.

<sup>24</sup>Terrence William Deacon, *The Symbolic Species : The Coevolution of Language and the Brain*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

The transmission of ideas from one to another was usually done through the medium of language. Genesis 2:19 states:

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof.

While this passage is not directly linked to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, the naming of the animals by Adam suggests something about how humans were created differently from other creatures and what communicative powers were given to them. The feature of language as a feature of human uniqueness is the one most focused on by behavioural interpreters of the *imago Dei*. Seen in terms of control over the environment, language can suggest a different kind of dominion. In order to understand the environment, early humans had to classify the different forms of life they were dealing with. Some type of language was necessary in order to do this. Adam used symbols or speech in order to “name” the animals. From a biological perspective this could be a taxonomical task; but in addition to that, Huchingson proposes;

The intention of this scene is clearly to promote the status of humankind as that creature who completes the essences of all other creatures by giving them names. In the ancient world, names were more than simple taxonomic labels. They were keys to the souls of individuals. To name individuals is to complete their nature, their creation, and hence to control them.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, the act of “naming” was strongly suggestive of creation. This type of creation is of

<sup>25</sup>Huchingson, 188.

a very different nature to the creation implied by the label *homo faber* or the label of the creation given to God. When Hefner applies the title “co-creators” to humans he is expressing the fact that we *create* the images and narratives that guide our actions within and towards nature. The implication is that our acts of creation are also acts of communication.

In *Communication in History*, Crowley and Heyer reflect on the media of early civilization:

What was the first communication medium? This question may be impossible to answer scientifically. However, it is not impossible to imagine. Almost as soon as our prehistoric ancestors made tools of wood, bone, and stone to help them physically adapt to a changing environment, they probably made “tools for thought” as well. Perhaps the earliest device of this kind was a simple stick, notched to indicate the number of deer in a nearby herd, or some rocks or logs arranged to mark the significance of a given territory. What was important was the process. Humankind enlarged its sphere of communication by creating communications.

...our early ancestors communicated through non-verbal gestures and an evolving system of spoken language. As their world became increasingly complex they needed more than just the shared memory of the group to recall important things. They needed what is sometimes called an extrasomatic memory, a memory outside of the body.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the communicative realm of human beings evolved. Most probably, the communication that was prevalent in earlier times was a more survival-based communication. The naming of the animals in Genesis 2 could

indicate a managerial function in human beings. Again the image of persons as *kybernetai* or “steersman” could be conjured. But the structure of a human being (as seen in the teleonomic axiom described above) is suggestive of purpose, and the capacity for technology is an open-ended one.

Hefner’s proposition that the label “co-creators” refers to the way in which we use information to create a narrative of the world around us, when viewed in terms of cultural evolution, suggests that this narrative will become more and more comprehensive and complex. Our manner of organizing our universe *transforms* our universe, in a type of ever growing spiral. In fact, Magorah Maruyama, a well-respected systems theorist, uses the very word “universe” in defining three different types of world views based on information organization. He calls the first the *classificational universe*, the classic or traditional view of the world which is based on categories and subcategories. This is based on substance in a similar way that the substantial interpretation of the *imago Dei* is. The next is the *relational universe* which is event based, and maintains a less static view of the world and is rooted in dynamism and context (again a comparison could be made to the relational interpretation of the *imago Dei*). The last is the *relevential universe* and it:

...consists of the concerns of the individuals of the world (where)... the most important relevential information often comes from individuals having themselves experienced the same need as seekers and for whom this information was at one time crucially relevant.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>D.J.Crowley and Paul Heyer, eds. *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*. (New York, N.Y.: Longman, 1991), 7.

<sup>27</sup>Huchingson, 13.

Huchingson points out that the internet, and the aptly named “world wide web”, is a prime example of the relevential universe. The modern (or post-modern) world is a web of connections and personal history. Huchingson makes a critical observation, however, when he points out that the relevential system of the internet works because it was based on the principles of the classificational universe.<sup>28</sup> Each of our creations is built on former creations. Each of our world-views is built on former world views. But as our technology and communication evolve, it is where and how we direct our attention that changes. It is interesting that the microscope and telescope are often cited as examples of revolutionary tools; they are appropriate symbols for the way in which our cultural narratives change. It is our focus and scope that are redirected.

The focal point for the *imago Dei* in the New Testament is Jesus Christ. Again, we must first examine the New Testament in context. A very general knowledge of history allows us to presume that, as a rule, the struggle for survival in the time of the New Testament was not comparable to the one which early human beings must have undergone. Technology had advanced and societies had become more complex. The classic literary conflict described as “man against nature” was not as predominant; people had gained a certain amount of “control” over their environment. My goal here is not to speak of context in specific terms but merely to indicate that the Christian narrative is much newer than the Hebrew one and that the construction of a new narrative was reflective of the growing

concerns of the time.

In *The Social God and the Relational Self*, Stanley Grenz describes the difference between the Genesis account of the *imago Dei* and the New Testament account in terms of Paul’s “*Adam-Christ typology*”. Christ is often referred to as the “*second Adam*” and seen as the fulfillment of the Genesis account of the *imago Dei*. Grenz states that, “for Paul, being “in Adam” and being “in Christ” designate not only two orders of existence but also the way of living that characterizes each.”<sup>29</sup> At another point he also says that “the open-ended character of Genesis 1:26-1:27 clears the way for a move from a creatio-centric to a christocentric anthropology.”<sup>30</sup> The Genesis account directs our attention to nature, but it is in our nature to reflect on our experience – and to communicate this experience. “Adam” has been seen as a corporate term; Genesis does not speak of individual experience. It speaks to us of nature. In contrast, the import of the account of Jesus’ life is found in its form; we see Jesus as an individual and we understand God through His experience. Alexander Marshak speaks of the image-making of early man as a “cultural revolution”<sup>31</sup> and not an artistic one, not, in my opinion, as an argument for what is and isn’t art but because, more importantly, it was indicative of the desire to pass on experience. Some experiences were common and the use of symbolic references was for the purpose of general education. But there is a need for the communication of personal ex-

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Richard Lints, Michael Scott Horton, and Mark R. Talbot, eds. *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 85.

<sup>30</sup> Lints et. al., 80.

<sup>31</sup> Crowley, D. J. and Paul Heyer, eds., 2.

perience too. It helps us build both a *relational* and *relevential* universe.

Huchingson echoes this connection between nature and experience when he describes the evolutionary nature of human beings through the lens of communication theory. He says that:

The structure and capability of the human organism is given a priori to individuals and referred to as “our nature”. But for the human species it is a *posteriori*.<sup>32</sup>

From the cave art of the Upper Paleolithic man to the computers of today, our technology has been devoted to communication. As technology evolved, better transportation and more durable forms of media meant we were able to communicate to an increasingly extensive population. Both the content and the form of the narrative of Christ show that our “universe” was becoming more and more *relational*, and *relevential*; there were a greater number of possibilities for sharing experiences. Tillich spoke of our interconnectedness, the idea of “one world” in the 1940’s. While this is a concept that has even more relevance today, we can see its budding form around the time of the Roman Empire. Our nature had resulted in a growing interaction that changed our way of life and our way of thinking.

The human brain is understood to be the most complex natural system in the entire universe. Steven Mithen argues that a defining feature of the human mind is “cognitive fluidity”; the distinctive ability that human beings have to integrate the multiple intelligences it contains.

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<sup>32</sup>Huchingson, 182.

He contends that “the integration of technical intelligence with the already combined social and natural history intelligences was what constituted the final step to a cognitively fluid mind.”<sup>33</sup> The complex nature of our brains combined with this technical ability allows us to store information and gives us a new understanding of technology as *extension of the body*. It results in a far-reaching community that builds upon other communities and former communities.

In his article, *The Internet, the Noosphere and the Encounter of Religions*, Franklin Sherman discusses Teilhard de Chardin’s description of “*noosphere*” as “the thinking membrane that covers the geospheric reality of the world.” He explains:

...as this process continues, the human consciousness itself, as Teilhard points out, becomes ever more complex, and yet ever more unified – not in the sense of being without conflict, but in the sense of everything being related, in principle, to everything else.<sup>34</sup>

“Complexity” has a variety of definitions, but for my purposes, Carol Albright’s definition will be adequate; “*the presence of a web of interlinked and active communications*.”<sup>35</sup> A greater sensitivity to complexity greatly affects human consciousness which in turn redirects our values.

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<sup>33</sup>Mithen, 184.

<sup>34</sup>Franklin Shermin, *The Internet, the Noosphere and the Encounter of Religions* (Chicago: Christ Seminary-Seminex, 2001) 260.

<sup>35</sup>For a more comprehensive understanding of complexity see Albright as cited; Carol Albright, *Complexity and the Imago Dei* (Chicago: Christ Seminary-Seminex, 2001), 205.

In *Complexity and the Imago Dei*, Carol Albright states that:

...even the brain does not complete our consideration of complexity. We must think one step further, towards our interaction with one another in our schools and parishes and workplaces and, increasingly, with people around the globe... God is dynamic, and reflecting the image of God involves following a path. Jesus described himself as dynamic. He said, "I am the Way, the truth and the life."<sup>36</sup>

We are to see Christ as an example; not quite as the "image of God, for he *is* divine, but as a direct message to how we should behave as ones who have been "stamped with the divine image."<sup>37</sup> The message is that the *way* in which we act and interact is of fundamental value. The "*way* of living that belongs to the realm of Christ is communal."<sup>38</sup> Jesus Christ's personal experiences connect us to Him through the story; we imagine his experiences and we relate to him as a human being in history experiencing hardships and challenges and growth. He has relationships with others and teaches within the community by example – not merely by transmission of an ideology. Our imagination is called upon to develop a personal relationship with him; we look to him as a role model and desire to follow his example. The impetus here is that a relationship with God is only known through community. Community can be known through story, through image, through speech. A range of technology has expanded our community and our sensitivity to Jesus' message has become more and more

necessary. While our nature or substance is vital to our understanding of the Doctrine of the *imago Dei*, it goes beyond that. Our community, (the connections we make), reflects God in a way that no particular person or substance can.

The message of the Christ narrative as it pertains to the *imago Dei* is twofold. It is relational and revelational with regards to form (the form of personal narrative). But, because Jesus comes down to live among men, this account also changes our view of the nature of God. God interacts with creation; he "plays, so to speak, in the dynamic interexistence of things among themselves. Being involved in "*medias res*" – in the midst of things means that even God must adjust accordingly."<sup>39</sup> This new emphasis on a personal, fluid relationship with God complies with newer visions of reality.

In *The Human Factor*, Philip Hefner abstains from giving a complete definition of God. However, if closely examined, his explanation of God as "what really is"<sup>40</sup>, accomplishes something that not many other definitions can do. It avoids the perception of God as merely transcendent or spiritual and at the same time it avoids purely scientific explanations. "*What really is*" contains all accounts of reality. The fact that Carol Albright capitalizes and italicizes "*Way*" in the above quote connotes an emphasis on process. We do not know what the *truth* or the *life* is. We are not divine. We are to search for "what *really* is" in "what is." We are to find the "ought" within the "is." We know that part of what constitutes "what

<sup>36</sup> Albright, *Complexity*, 209.

<sup>37</sup> Lints et. al.

<sup>38</sup> Van Huyssteen, 135-136.

<sup>39</sup> Huchingson, 187.

<sup>40</sup> Hefner, 33.

is” is our communicative and technological nature. Our abilities have led us to a deeper, more complex understanding of reality that may give us clues as to “what really is.” The narratives that we create attempt to fill in the space between “what is” and “what really is.”

If God is represented in the relational form that the advent of Jesus seems to indicate, then *what really is* must have something to do with all manner of relationships; relationships between different forms of information, experiential relationships and interpersonal relationships. A person can be described as “an open system,” Huchingson states:

All experience, the registration of variety by an open system, is disturbance...Complex open systems, primarily organisms, interdict the flood of variety bombarding them through subtle decision processes by which the variety is blocked or absorbed. The mind, or the brain, constructs itself and manages complexity by foraging on the limitless possibilities open to it that are generated internally by its imagination and externally by its environment.<sup>41</sup>

The evolution of information technology has radically changed our understanding of *what really is* because our universe has become more and more relational and relevant in two ways; information technology has given us greater access to the experiences and knowledge of a diversity of individuals and groups, and we have technologies (namely the computer) that organize this information in ways that enable us to see non-linear, complex relationships that our brains are unable to perceive on their own. In this way we engage in a

relationship with God. We participate in the creation of “*what really is*”.

Thus, our understanding of technology as extension of the body becomes even more involved:

Previous to McLuhan, we had not thought of technologies as extensions of ourselves. The car can be thought of as an extension of the body. Electronic communication systems extend our senses of sight and sound toward the creation of the global village just as our sense of sight is extended to the scales of the very small and large by the microscope and telescope. The book can be thought of as an extension of the mind and memory; we do not have to remember everything but, rather, may remember knowledge to us by way of the book. This allows us to develop extended runs of ingenuity that would be unthinkable were we required to remember the entire of sequence at once.<sup>42</sup>

Huchingson expand this observation to include modern technology:

The metaphysics of strict causal determination has been modified by a metaphysics of complex interdependence...computers alters our understanding of reality itself. The power of the high speed computer lies in its ability to process information rapidly and in great quantity. The result is a virtual world...The prevailing belief about the material world, that it consists of inert and immutable matter is replaced by a new plasticity. Matter melts into massive information... Thus the computer is not only a tool, it is a chief exemplar of the picture of reality it reveals.<sup>43</sup>

If relationships are a focal point of the *imago Dei* in the New Testament, then all manner of

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<sup>41</sup>Huchingson, 108.

<sup>42</sup>Andrews, “McLuhan Reconsidered.”

<sup>43</sup>Huchingson, 20.

information must be related in the sense that Teilhard de Chardin spoke of. Moreover, the moral dimension of information complexifies what Rolston calls the “*genesis of information*” is deeply connected with the “*genesis of value*”:

Another way of interpreting this genesis of information arises from looking at its result (my emphasis); the generation, transmission, and deepening of values. Scientists and philosophers have been much exercised about the generation of values, about how an ought comes out of an is, but it seems pretty much fact of the matter that, over evolutionary history, values have been generated, startling though this may be.<sup>44</sup>

Information, devoid of value cannot constitute “*the way, the truth, the life*” because, as co-creators, we create narratives that guide us. It is impossible to have facts without context; human beings, with their “*cognitively fluid*” brains, make connections and decisions and are therefore moral beings. In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve eat the apple, “the LORD God said, ‘Behold, man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:22). As soon as humans used their freedom to make a decision, they became moral beings.

The doctrine of original sin, according to Hefner, illustrates the tension between our genetic, primordial systems of information that connects us to the rest of nature and the cultural component that sets us apart from the rest of nature. We long to go back to a time where we can respond instinctively to biological impulses; that “Garden of Eden”. For, the freedom of the cultural component of our nature entails that we make decisions and that these

decisions will have consequences. The guilt that we experience as humans is a natural by-product of this freedom. Our corruptibility is related to misuse of power; for knowledge is power. But it is also linked to the fact that we are unable to foresee all the consequences of our actions. “*Don’t eat that apple*” or “*Don’t construct that wheel*” are warnings because, metaphorically or literally, they are actions that will lead to the complexity that freedom generates. Albright says that “...one of the really important hallmarks of complexification is that it gives rise to phenomena that are new – that could not be predicted by their predecessors.”

On the other hand, the fact that we are human dictates that our brain functions in such a way as to make decisions. We, as humans, are to “steer” and “create”. So, the great paradox is that it is built in our biological structure to “eat that apple” or “construct that wheel”. To see technology as counter to nature is a form of Cartesian dualism. Technology is an extension of the body and, as a corollary, of the mind. It is a component of what qualifies us as created in the “*imago mundi*” and it is what qualifies us as created in the *imago Dei*. Technology itself is not a purely destructive force. This is like saying that our bodies are a purely destructive force. The body and technology, as an *extension* of the body, can threaten to overpower us. This is a basic reality; it was a reality for early humans and it is an even more complex reality now. But this does not exempt us from the moral aspect of our nature. If we are to say that we are created in the image of the divine then we cannot use our bodies or technology as sole justification of our behaviour. Our freedom is an indication of responsibility. We control and manage

<sup>44</sup>Rolston, 359.

how we use technology. While we are shaped by them, we are not created by our creations. Some theorists of entropy might suggest that we are riding that Looney Tune road-runner right off the cliff. But, for the moment at least, it is not the roadrunner steering; it is we who are steering, as a community.

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*Forgotten History*

*Melanie Peralis, 2004*

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