

BOOK REVIEWS

I-GODS: HOW TECHNOLOGY SHAPES OUR SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL LIVES, by C. Detweilerby, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013, 256 pp., \$ 13.86.

Craig Detweiler provides a thoughtful guide for parents, teachers, and pastors to engage various dimensions of the technological landscape with his book, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. He examines technology in general, Apple, the internet, Amazon, Google, Social networking, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Each topic is introduced with a brief history and description. Detweiler describes the services provided by each dimension and then reflections on uses, misuses with cautions about idolatry and over use. He encourages the reader to move from the use or abuse of data to a life of wisdom.

Through an etymological and theological study, Detweiler connects technology to Jesus and to Art. Technology is valid expression of stewardship and a worthy field of vocation. At the same time, he warns that many facets of applied science can shift our attention and motivation from the Glory of God to the Marvels of Man. We can move to having faith in technology and unwittingly accept some of its forms as idols in our lives.

He provides a brief history of Apple, focusing on the life and person of Steve Jobs. It is interesting how the person of Steve Jobs is such a central feature of corporate growth and efficacy at Apple. His forming of the company, its years of initial growth, his departure in 1985, his return in 1998, and his relentless leadership, focusing on good design, revolutionized personal computing. In a world of iMacs, iPods, iPhones, and iPads, technology seems to be available everywhere and touch everything. These devices present access to data previously unimagined and temptations to idolatry on many fronts. "Unfortunately, all that power in our pocket has proved irresistible. We can't live without it" (Detweiler, 2013, p. 65). Detweiler advocates unplugging, perhaps in a sabbatarian rhythm.

In the chapter on Amazon, Detweiler draws some comparisons between Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, and Steve Jobs. There are similarities in their personal histories and in their modest corporate beginnings in a garage. However, Bezos is a gentler leader than Jobs and is content with steady progress. His goal is making a "place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online" (Detweiler, 2013, p. 87). Detweiler calls for a theology of abundance. The temptation to gluttony in the midst of the availability of so much stuff is very real. Craig calls us to the Garden of Eden for a look at abundance or to the feeding of the multitudes. We can move from a perception of scarcity to one of abundance, but we must not make an idolatry of things. We need to employ long-term thinking and a theology of abundance.

Detweiler provides an introduction to Google with its mission to "organiz[e] the world's information" (Detweiler, 2013, p. 115). Of course, he points out that as Google is organizing and providing information, it is also gathering and selling information. The blessing and the curse of

Google are found in the multiple roles it plays. It certainly provides many types of information, but a question of authority remains. Who decides what is worth knowing and how the algorithms function to sift through seeming endless amounts of data? How is the data collected on each individual user stored and used? In an age of data mining and big data, will we be content to consider reality and even our metaphors for God as simply a collection of facts?

The book addresses Facebook in a similar manner to the previous topics, introducing us to its founder, Mark Zuckerberg, and to its early history at Harvard. While Detweiler recognizes the benefits of connectivity that Facebook affords, he provides a good critique grounded in the idea of presence. He rightly recognizes the thin society that can arise from a limited online context. He also notes that there are possibilities for misunderstanding. It was particularly insightful that a common problem arises when someone creates an online persona and communicates items in a comprehensive way, expecting that everyone is keeping up with the updates. When posting information is perceived as communicating completely with all of one's friends, miscommunication is bound to occur. He also does a nice job of connecting with some of Bonhoeffer's thoughts from *Life Together* (Bonhoeffer, 1954).

The sequence of *iGods* concludes with a chapter on YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Again we meet the innovators and receive a basic description followed by some reflective criticism. Much of the reflection is thoughtful and grounded in holistic considerations of personhood and community.

Perhaps the best chapter of the book is the final chapter. In this chapter Detweiler deals with technology in general and his reflections address the purposes and effects of technology. Should we value newer, faster, and smaller. Does our technology own us? Should we escape to the wilderness or embrace the technology of the city? Detweiler encourages us to ground our responses in a godly fear of the Lord. This chapter resonates with the earlier book, *Technopoly*, by Neil Postman (1992). Although Postman's work is not explicitly Christian, it would be a thoughtful resource for those looking to go a bit deeper.

In general this is a worthwhile book that does a fine job of introducing readers to the histories of various technologies and raises thoughtful questions about use and misuse of the various tools. I think an improvement in the text could be made by rethinking some of the scriptural and faith-based references that seem less deeply considered. There are moments when Detweiler quotes proverbs that seem artificially connected to his critique. There are also times when attempts to connect technology with faith activities, e.g. YouTube and discipleship, seem too thin. But this type of reflection is alongside deeper and more thoughtful considerations, making this criticism relatively minor.

Questions for discussion are included at the end of each chapter. Although the questions may be helpful, they do not seem to have the same level of thought as the general work of the chapters. Readers, who are leading a discussion, will want to augment the two questions that appear at the end of each chapter in number and in content.

In addition, the illustrations at the start of each chapter can be strange. The visual depictions of Jesus with a laptop or of Jesus with the face of Steve Jobs are at least distracting if not a bit disturbing. A number of the illustrations should be rethought or simply eliminated.

I can heartily recommend this book for its intended audience of pastors, teachers, and parents. It provides thoughtful and well-grounded introductions to the world of technology and most of Detweiler's reflections will serve as good catalysis for personal reflection and action.

WORKS CITED

Bonhoeffer, D. (1954). *Life Together*. New York: Harper and Row.

Detweiler, C. (2013). *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

Postman, N. (1992). *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Knopf.

J. Hall
Covenant College