

**Toronto School of Theology  
Wycliffe College**

**WYP 2810: Ministry and Technology**

**Summer, 2020**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Is it legitimate to use technology to communicate the gospel? This course examines the function and use of the tools of technology in the varied ministry of the church. It asks critical questions about technology and its use. In the context of addressing issues such as virtual community, media arts and worship, internet-based ministry, Christian education and youth ministry, and spirituality online, it seeks to equip students with discernment in this new area of ministry.

**TEXTS, READINGS, & RESOURCES**

Required Textbook:

Shane Hipps. *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). [Abbreviated below as Hipps, *Hidden*]

The text is available at the University of Toronto Bookstore, Law School branch. Contact information: Heather Weir, Manager, Faculty of Law Bookstore | [hweir@uoftbookstore.com](mailto:hweir@uoftbookstore.com) | 416.978.6906 78 Queen's Park, Room P125, Toronto, ON, M5S 2C5.

Supplementary readings, videos, and other resources (referred to in the class schedule) will be found on the course website.

A bibliography of print and electronic resources will be on the course website.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Participation in the discussion forums (value: 4 x 10%=40%).
2. Choice of doing either the two short assignments (value: 2 x 20%=40%) OR a major project/paper (value: 40%).
3. Biblical Verses Exercise (value: 20%).

Further details for each are as follows:

## 1. Discussion Forums

Value: 40% (10% per forum)

Students will participate in 4 discussion forums based on an issue, problem, or case. Each forum will last two weeks. The first week of each forum will be devoted to discussing the topic. Everyone should post an initial response of about 250 words (do this early in the week); reading the posts of other class members; and making a least one response to one other member's post. The second week will be taken up with writing up your considered response to the topic (incorporating your initial post and taking account of the posts of others) and submitting your paper. Everyone is expected to read the "Forum Guidelines" available on the course site. The topics for the 4 discussion forums are as follows:

### •Forum 1 (Weeks 1 and 2)

Forum topic will be assigned from among the following options:

How would you define technology? Are there ways in which technology defines you? (C. Detweiler, *iGods*, 43).

"Where shall we express our hopes and fears? If we post our concerns on Facebook, we may forget to cast our cares on the Lord, the one who sustains us in our sorrows." (C. Detweiler, *iGods*, 5).

According to Marshall McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), technology is never neutral. Do you agree or disagree with this contention? What examples can you cite from religion or spirituality in support your point of view? Is the pervasiveness of technology in modern life attributable to the decline in the influence of religion? Or stated differently is technology a new religion that allows us to make sense of the world?

"The WWW [World Wide Web] is miraculous. It is theological creativity in action." (Ralph Abraham).

### •Forum 2 (Weeks 3& 4)

"A church is the only organization that exists primarily for the benefit of non-members" (W. Temple). How does this apply to online evangelism?

•Forum 3 (Weeks 5&6)

Forum topic will be assigned from among the following options:

“Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” (J. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, I, 9). Can this assertion by Calvin be legitimately applied to the online church?

“The online church fulfills the functional definition of church as the intersection of community, worship and mission.” (Robert Warren). Agree or disagree?

•Forum 4 (Weeks 7&8)

Technology allows for the rampant expression of prideful behavior, narcissistic claims, and exaggerated opinions, especially about oneself. In the Christian tradition the virtue of humility has been considered a counter to such pervasive pride.

We want to avoid humility at all costs because it involves putting aside the preferences of our own sinful nature: our ambition and conceit. This is what makes humility a discipline because we realize that we can only access God's grace by humbling ourselves. How can the discipline of humility and self-control be regained and practised in the context of a pervasive and ubiquitous technology?

## 2. Short Assignment

There are two short assignments value: 20% each. Whatever choices you make the due dates are:

Short assignment I: 29 May, 2020.

Short assignment II: 26 June, 2020.

The purpose of these assignments is to give you the opportunity to develop your understanding of the technology and ministry in new ways. In other words, they are intended to stretch and challenge you. Thus, for example, if you have already had experience of doing a sermon using power point, don't choose that option here. Do something new. That applies to the other choices as well. If you have difficulty deciding, please be in touch with me for advice.

Choose from any two of the following categories: [NOTE: Links will be active on the course website]

1. Chat Exercise This has two stages:

a. Christian Chat. Define your spiritual type at Beliefnet by completing the 25-question quiz. Then join in one of the discussion groups and talk about your findings (see questions under b. below).

b. Chat for Christ. Logon to ChristianChat. Enter one of the chat rooms on the site. Participate in some discussion. Log on to some different types of chat rooms. Here are some to try: Patriot, Strike, Circanet Listen in to the conversation. Then try entering into discussion!

For a. or b. answer these questions:

- What were your reactions and those of the participants?
- What sort of person is most likely to be suited to chat room ministry?
- How does it vary according to the type of user?
- Why is a combative spirit counter-productive to effective witness?
- What might be the benefits of such an online chat?
- What would the drawbacks be?

Point out potential dangers in chat room witness. Could your church train people for chat witness? In response to these questions, record your impressions, think critically about the experience, and write a report (1200 words or 4 pages double spaced), and send it to me as an attachment.

## 2. Testimonies.

There are two choices in this assignment:

a. Visit PowertoChange or Stonewall Revisited. Read the testimonies on these sites. Evaluate whether these personal stories are effective bridges to the Internet generation. Record your impressions, think critically about the experience, and write a report (1200 words or 4 pages double spaced), and send it to me as an attachment.

b. Read the testimony-writing tutorial. Then write your testimony (1200 words, 4 pages double spaced), avoiding all jargon and elements which are not appropriate for non-Christians. Send it to me as an attachment.

## 3. General Website Evaluation.

Key to this exercise is to put yourself in the mind of a site visitor who is not a Christian. Search online, and locate and evaluate two websites based on the evaluative criteria. Ideally, you should locate and evaluate two sites: one that fulfils the criteria for an effective website; the other, one that is deficient in this respect. You can evaluate two websites on the same topic if you like. Ideally they should be on different topics. Some sites are suggested, but check out others for yourself. Use the checklist as the basis for your evaluation.

· Online bible study resources: Bornagain, Unbound, Wbsa, JesusWalk, NewChristian, Bible, Crosswalk. · Youth ministry: Christianteens, Teenmania, Home.

· Postmodernism: JordonCooper.

Seeker friendly ministries: Harvest

· Testimonies: PowertoChange, Stonewall Revisited.

· Other Topics: Sunday School material; Christian site that evaluates movies; World Vision Canada; Personal journals; Online prayer ministry; Spiritual and Devotional material.

#### 4. Church Website Evaluation

Here are some well-designed church sites:

- Willow Creek · Morningside
- St. Mary's Cheadle · Oakland UMC
- Trinity Nazarene
- Ginghamburg
- Berean · Ebenezer
- ToonGabbie
- Fellowship Church4
- Westover Hills Church
- Pinecrest Church
- Elizabeth Church of Christ
- The Bridge Church

Use the evaluative criteria (in terms of the Dos and Don'ts) and the checklist as the basis on which to structure your evaluation. Key to this exercise is to put yourself in the mind of a site visitor who is not a Christian. Analyze both content and design. Compare the different approaches used. Submit the report to me as an attachment.

#### 5. Online Church.

Visit one of the following online churches and join in one of their prayer groups, chat, online bible studies, or worship services:

Zchurch,

First Church of Cyberspace,

BethesdaChurchOnline,

Cyber-Church,

CalvaryChurchOnline,

TheVirtualChurch,

WebChurch,

I-Church,

Seacoast VirtualChurch (Kids),

Web-Church,

Church of Fools,

Liturgy Chapel Online Churches,

St.Pixels.

Write a critical report (1200 words, 4 pages, double-spaced) on your impressions and experience. This can be general or (preferably) on a particular aspect of the online church (e.g. worship, sermons, sacraments, pastoral provision, etc). Send to me as an attachment.

#### 6. Article Critique.

Read the article entitled: "The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion in Multi-User Virtual Reality". Provide a critique of the article by answering the question: Is the cyber-worship discussed by the authors a viable alternative to "real" church?

Write a report (1200 words or about 4 pages double spaced), and send it to me as an attachment.

#### 7. Newsletter.

Very few evangelistic websites have a newsletter which is designed for non-Christians. Sample the following sites:

- ToTheNextLevel
- IamNext
- WomenTodayMagazine

Subscribe by email to one or all of these to see the approaches they use. Then write a report 5 (1200 words or 4 pages double spaced) on your impressions and experience. Send to me as an attachment.

#### 8. Online Prayer Ministry.

Create an account and complete an application at the Mentor Center (<http://truthmedia.com/thementorcenter/what-is-tmc>). Before doing so view the introductory video: (<http://truthmedia.com/thementorcenter/introvideo>). You will receive online training in online ministry. It is secure and easy to use. No special skills are required. The easiest way to get started is to become a mentor yourself. Mentors choose the types of questions they want to answer and how many emails they want to receive. Once you have gained some experience, write a critical report on the training and the general experience of online prayer ministry.

#### 9. Giving 30 minutes for Jesus.

Sign up at <http://www.give30minutes.com> and agree to give 30 minutes to chat about Jesus on the Internet or to give 30 minutes to pray for those who are chatting. The week is divided into 3 thirty minute sections and you are asked to commit to giving 30 minutes a week at a time of your choosing. The goal is to fill all of the slots so that there is someone witnessing in a chat room (of their choice) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and someone is praying for them while they do. Keep a journal of your experience and write a report of this ministry.

#### 10. Sermon.

Write a sermon for presentation using PowerPoint for which you include hyperlinks to Scripture, images, video and audio clips etc. This may be one developed for another course but presented differently or one written from scratch for the purposes of this assignment. The equivalent text should not be more than 10 pages. Submit the slides, audio/video, and the text of the sermon.

#### 11. Gaming

Sign up for a virtual game (e.g. Ultima Online, EverQuest) where you will have to create a character (avatar). Write a critical report on your experience incorporating the critiques listed in the course unit.

#### 12. Website Development.

Research and create a basic website in some area of ministry. Develop it according to the principles and best practices we have discussed. These will be used as the basis of the marking scheme for your submission. It should be for outreach to the Christian or non-Christian community. It should be a website that shows a Christian engagement with issues like: sex, movies, music, atheism, technology, social media culture, science fiction, or spirituality. Submit it to me as an attachment.

See the following free web-development sites:

SpareSpace: <https://www.squarespace.com>

Wix: <https://www.wix.com>

Weebly: <https://www.weebly.com/ca>

### 13. Technological Integration.

Write a report assessing the potential for integrating technology into the church setting where you currently are. If it already exists, then do a critical evaluation. If it does not yet exist, then draw up a plan for its implementation. Use the criteria we have reviewed from Schultze.

### 3. Major Paper/Project.

Value: 40%

Here you have choices:

- (a) An extended treatment of some issue that arises in the four forums.
- (b) A topic of your own (please submit to me for approval)
- (c) An extended treatment of some of the issues treated in the course units.

Whatever the topic, you need to submit a paper proposal and outline (1 page minimum) with beginning bibliography.

Length: 12 pages (1.5 spacing) or 8-10,000 words.

Due Date:     i. Outline/Bibliography: 29 May, 2020.  
                  ii. Final Paper: 26 June, 2020.

### 4. Biblical Verses Exercise.

Due Date: 10 July, 2020.

Value: 20%.

Compile a list of 10 verses or passages from Scripture that are pertinent to a Christian understanding of the nature and use of technology. For each provide the following:

- i. The Scriptural reference to the verse/passage e.g. Luke 5: 37-38, but not the full text.
- ii. Short (paragraph length) commentary on the meaning and significance of the verse(s) or passage for our understanding of technology in a Christian context.

## ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION FORMAT

For each assignment follows this procedure:

Name the document with your initials and the abbreviation for the particular assignment: e.g. tpsa1, where “tp” is Thomas Power and “sa1” is Short Assignment 1.

Put this also in the subject line of the email that you are sending the assignment to me as an attachment. Similarly for the other assignments: for example, “tpsa2” (Short Assignment 2), “tpmp” (Major Project), and “tpbv” (Biblical Verses exercise).

For the Discussion Forum papers, the format is, for example, “df1tp” where “df1” is Discussion Forum 1, and “tp” are initials. And so on for the other forums: df2tp, df3tp, df4tp.

This procedure is designed to facilitate the identification, grading, and timely return of assignments, and hence it is in the interest of the student to follow it. Submissions that do not follow this format will be returned with a request to re-submit in the correct format. In such cases, where applicable, marks will be deducted for late submission at the rate of 1% per day.

## COURSE UNITS, READINGS, AND VIEWINGS

### UNIT 1: Society, Technology, and the Church

1.1 Definitions and Themes

1.2 The Challenge of Postmodernism

1.3 Tower of Babel or Noah’s Ark?: Technology and Ministry: For and Against 1

1.4 Tower of Babel or Noah’s Ark?: Technology and Ministry: For and Against 2

#### Reading

Hipps, *Hidden*, 9-17, 21-27, 29-43, 45-61, 63-83.

P. Thompson, "[Ellul and Technology](#)" *Cross Currents* 34:2 (1984), 132-136.

Horsfield, Peter G; Teusner, Paul. "A mediated religion: historical perspectives on Christianity and the internet" *Studies in World Christianity*, 13: 3 (2007), 278-295.

### UNIT 2: From Publishing to Relationship: Web-Based Ministry

2.1 Content

2.2 Design

2.3 Educational Ministries

2.4 A Safe Place for a Dangerous Message: Youth Ministry

#### Reading

Frank N. Johnson, "Effective Church Websites for Emerging Generations" (1-13).

FACTs A new look at the dynamics of growth and decline in American congregations based on the Faith Communities Today 2005 national survey of congregations  
Pew Internet Report on Blogging (Browse for main points. Read summary.)

### **UNIT 3: How Can We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?**

3.1: The Net is the Thing (Dr. Seuss): Internet Evangelism I: Theory

3.2: Becoming Fishers of Men on the Net! Internet Evangelism II: Practice

3.3 Bible Studies and the Online World

#### Reading

M. Bertrand. "Are Bible apps Destined to Purify the Word" *Comment* Summer 2016.

Angela Shier-Jones, "From Transmission to TXT – The Bible in a Digital Age," *The Epworth Review* (Sept. 2010), 32-49.

T. Olsen, "Hacking the Bible: Inside the world of the new Bible coders—and how they will change the way you think about Scripture" *Christianity Today*, 6 Mar. 2014, 29-35.

Explore the Bible (website)

### **UNIT 4: Status Update: Technology & Relationships Online**

4.1 Social Networking and Community Online

4.2 Online dating

4.3 Pornography

4.4 Eucatastrophe: Gaming

#### Reading

Social Media: Fact Sheet (Pew Research Centre)

Social Media Update (Pew Research Centre)

Online Dating & Relationships (Pew Research Centre).

Five Facts About Online Dating (Pew Research Centre)

[Skim or browse the above four sites]

\*R. Hutter, "Pornography and Acedia," *First Things* Apr.2012, 45-49.

\*Adams, Paul C. "The theology of...video games?! Using games to build relationships in your congregation and community". *Word & World* 30: 3 (2010), 291-299.

\*Rhea, Rob; Langer, Richard C. "A theology of the body for a pornographic age" *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*, 8: 1 (2015), 90-103.

Hipps, *Hidden*, 103-122.

## **UNIT 5: Digital Transcendence: The Online Church**

5.1 Worship

5.2 Sacraments

5.3 Cyber Koinonia: Community

5.4 Is it Church?

### Reading

Thomas W. Madron, "Can We provide Holy Communion Over the Web?"

Gregory S. Neal, "Online Holy Communion: Theological Reflections Regarding the Internet and the Means of Grace."

Gordon S. Mikoski, "Bringing the Body to the Table," *Theology Today* 67:3 (2010), 255-9.

Nancy J. Duff, "Praising God Online," *Theology Today* 70:1 (2013), 22-29.

## **UNIT 6: Technology and the Spiritual Disciplines I: The Nature of Sin**

6.1 Sin as Habit: The Need for Spiritual Disciplines

6.2 The Seven Deadly Sins I

6.3 The Seven Deadly Sins II

### Reading

Laura E. Buffardi & W. Keith Campbell, "Narcissism and Social Networking Web Sites" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34: 10 (2008), 1303-1314.

Adam J. Copeland, "The Ten Commandments 2.0" *Word & World* 32: 3 (2012), 217-226.

Lynne M. Baab, "Toward a Theology of the Internet: Place, Relationship, and Sin," in Pauline H. Cheong et al (ed), *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures*. New York: Lang, 2012, 277-291.

Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (Video: 19 mins.)

## UNIT 7: Technology and the Spiritual Disciplines II: Principles and Practice

### 7.1 General Principles

### 7.2 Practices I

### 7.3 Practices II

#### Reading

Beverly Vos. "The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry" *Crucible* 2:1 (November 2009), 1-16.

D. J. Lohrmann, *Virtual Integrity: Faithfully Navigating the Brave New Web*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008, 119-137.

M. Bischof, "The Spiritual Disciplines"

View the list of early Christian values (<http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/genuine-christianity.htm>) Reflect on whether technology (broadly defined) serves to enhance the practice of values listed in the right column, and exacerbates the practice of those on the left column.

## UNIT 8: Principles and Best Practices: Ministry and Technology in the 21st Century

### 8.1 iPastor Skills

### 8.2 iChurch

### 8.3 Being Salt and Light in Cyberspace: Theology of Technology

### 8.4 An Unchanging Gospel

#### Reading

Hipps, *Hidden*, 87-100, 125-143, 165-6.

S. Gardner, "Theology and the New Media" in Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. Oxford: Routledge (2013), 251-265.

E. McIntosh, "Belonging without Believing: Church as Community in the age of digital media" *International Jnl. of Public Theology* 9 (2015), 131-55.

A.L. Cloete, "Living in a digital culture: the need for theological reflection" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71:2 (2015)

Chris Stokel-Walker. "How smartphones and social media are changing Christianity." 23 Feb. 2017.

### Learning Outcomes

COURSE OUTCOMES	COURSE ELEMENT	PROGRAM OUTCOMES
<p><b>By the end of this course, students will have acquired the following levels of knowledge:</b></p>	<p><b>This outcome will be demonstrated through these course elements:</b></p>	<p><b>This course outcome corresponds to this aspect of the Wycliffe College outcomes statement for BD programs:</b></p>
<p>Explain the impact of technology on the church, ministry and culture.</p>	<p>Unit 1, 8 Biblical Verses Exercise Forum 1 Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>M.Div. 1.4, 1.5 (pt.) MTS 1.4, 1.5 (pt.)</p>
<p>Locate, examine, and evaluate, using established evaluative criteria, web-based church ministries.</p>	<p>Unit 2 Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>M.Div. 1.4 MTS 1.4, 2.1, 2.3</p>
<p>Explain and critically evaluate the potential of internet evangelism.</p>	<p>Unit 3 Biblical Verses Exercise Forum 2 Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>M.Div. 1.4 MTS 1.4</p>
<p>Identify and critically evaluate the new challenges around the expression of the spiritual disciplines in an online context.</p>	<p>Units 6, 7 Biblical Verses Exercise Forum 4 Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>MTS 1.2 M.Div. 1.2, 3.1</p>
<p>Critically assess the validity of the online church.</p>	<p>Unit 5 Forum 3 Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>M. Div. 1.6 MTS 1.6, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3</p>
<p>Identify opportunities for online educational ministry.</p>	<p>Unit 2 Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>MTS 1.4 M.Div. 1.4, 1.6, 2.2</p>
<p>Describe the nature of social media and relate their use in church ministry settings.</p>	<p>Unit 4, 8 Biblical Verses Exercise Forum Short Assignment Major Assignment</p>	<p>MTS 2.3 M.Div. 2.2</p>