

**MW5451**  
**Theology, Technology, and Digital Culture**  
John Dyer & W. Hall Harris

**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.”

**Course Method (Live Stream)**

This course will use a combination of pre-recorded lecture content and online discussion. Each week, students will be asked to watch approximately 75 minutes of pre-recorded lecture, read the assigned materials, and then meet together online for 75 minutes to discuss the lecture and readings.

**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

##### 1. Overview

Dyer, John. *From the Garden to the City: The Place of Technology in the Story of God: Second Edition*. Kregel, 2022. (200+ pages). [Free PDF for students]

##### 2. Practical (choose one)

Noble, O. Alan. *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age*. IVP Books, 2018. (192 pages).

Crouch, Andy. *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*. Crown, 2022. (240 pages)

Wong, Felicia Wu. *Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age*. IVP, 2021. (232 pages)

##### 3. Future (choose one)

Shatzer, Jacob. *Transhumanism and the Image of God*. IVP Books. 2019.

Paulus, Michael. *AI, Faith, and the Future: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Pickwick, 2022. (252 pages)

Smith, Joshua. *Robot Theology: Old Questions through New Media*. Resource, 2022. (154 pages)

##### 4. Fiction

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

#### B. Required Articles

See weekly readings.

### IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### A. Class Readings

*From the Garden to the City* (192 pages)

*One Practical* (192 pages)

*One Future* (178 pages)

*Binti* (90 pages)

Articles (200 pages)

#### 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 20-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 (5 of 7)**

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. These will come in two forms: (1) Exploration: the student applies readings to a current subject, (2) Thesis: the student answers a question and defends the answer. (note: these topics may be changed just before or during the term)

1. Exploration: What critical technologies, issues, and considerations are missing from Dyer’s *From the Garden to the City: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*?
2. Exploration: Apply Postman’s “Five Things” to a current issue technology in the church (social media, online services, screens, etc.)

3. Thesis: Has technology made the world a better place?
4. Exploration: Part One: Summarize your practice book by chapter. Part Two: apply the learning to your work and ministry
5. Thesis: How is technology portrayed in the story of *Binti* and how does it differ from ideas in Western/American culture?
6. Thesis: Does Christian anthropology place limits on human enhancement? What are differences in the ways a Christian and a secular posthumanist would answer the question, 'What does it mean to be human?'.

#### 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: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</i> , ~200 pages	6hours
Reading	<i>Practical Book</i> , ~200 pages	8 hours
Reading	<i>Future Book</i> , ~200 pages	8 hours
Reading	<i>Binti</i> , 90 pages	2 hours
Reading	Selected Articles	12 hours
Experiment	Activity & Reflection Paper	10 hours
Presentation	Research, writing, paper, presentation	15 hours
Summary	Synthesis Papers	15 hours
<b>Total</b>		<b>~80 hours</b>

#### 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%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

### 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

The course schedule has four parts:

1. Frames: Exploring Approaches and Frameworks for Technology
2. Faithfulness: Current Issues in Religion, Media, and Culture
3. Future: What's Coming in Technology
4. (Fabulous?): Student Presentations

Week	Topic
<b>Frames: Exploring Approaches and Frameworks for Technology</b>	
Week 1 Aug 29	<p><b>Introduction</b> Student introductions, syllabus overview, address major issues in technology and media.</p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory Articles on Canvas</li> </ul>
Week 2 Sep 5	<p><b>Media Ecology</b></p> <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message" in <i>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</i>, 1968.</li> <li>• Postman, Neil. "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change," 1998</li> <li>• Ong, Walter, "Writing is a technology that changes thought" in <i>The Written Word</i>, 1986.</li> <li>• Jacobs, Alan. "Why Bother with McLuhan?"</li> </ul> <p>Assignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (2) Apply Postman's "Five Things" to a current issue technology in the church (social media, online services, screens, etc.)</li> </ul>
Week 3 Sep 12	<p><b>Philosophy of Technology</b></p> <p>Reading</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borgmann, Albert. “Focal Things and Practices” (22 pages)</li> <li>• Feenberg, Andrew. “What is Philosophy of Technology?” (26 pages)</li> <li>• Heidegger, Martin. “The Question Concerning Technology” (15 pages)</li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i> None</p>
Week 4 Sep 19	<p><b>Sociology of Technology</b> Introduction to Sociology (Marx, Weber, etc.). Social Shaping of Technology. Digital Religion.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campbell, Heidi “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society” (22 pages)</li> <li>• Bielo, James. “Cultivating Intimacy- Interactive Frames for Evangelical Bible Study” (20 pages)</li> <li>• Rakow, Katja “Materiality and Memory: The Bound Bible as Material Anchor for Nostalgia” (14 pages)</li> </ul>
Week 5 Sep 26	<p><b>Biblical Theology</b> Summarize previous approaches and offer a theological layer.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dyer, John. <i>From the Garden to the City: Second Edition [PDF]</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (1) What critical technologies, issues, and considerations are missing from Dyer’s <i>From the Garden to the City: Second Edition</i>?</li> </ul>
<b>Faithfulness: Current Issues in Religion, Media, and Culture</b>	
Week 6 Oct 3	<p><b>Technology and Church: Ministry in a Post-Pandemic World</b></p> <p><i>Reading</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected readings from Campbell, Heidi. <i>The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online</i>.</li> <li>Canvas Articles</li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>
<p>Week 7 Oct 10</p>	<p><b>Technology and Community: Connecting in a Secular Age</b></p> <p><i>Readings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Practical Book</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(4) Paper on practical book</li> </ul>
<p>Week 8 Oct 17</p>	<p><b>Technology and Culture: Race, Gender, and Colonialism</b></p> <p><b>Technology, Colonialism, and Progress</b> History of Technology. Definitions of Technology, Media, and Culture</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Chapter 15: The Marriage of Science and Empire” in <i>Sapiens</i>. Yuval Noah Harari</li> <li>Chapter 1: from <i>Technology, theology, and the idea of progress</i> by David Hopper</li> <li>“Explaining African-American Cell Phone Usage Through the Social Shaping of Technology Approach”</li> <li>“Machine Bias” ProPublica <a href="https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing">https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing</a></li> <li>“The Complicated Politics of... Refrigerators” Matthew Wills <a href="https://daily.jstor.org/the-complicated-politics-of-refrigerators/">https://daily.jstor.org/the-complicated-politics-of-refrigerators/</a></li> <li>“When Women Stopped Coding” NPR <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/10/21/357629765/when-women-stopped-coding">https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/10/21/357629765/when-women-stopped-coding</a></li> <li>Election Engineering</li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>



Mar 9 Oct 24	<b>World Evangelization Conference Spring Break</b>
Week 9 Mar 23	<p><b>Technology and You: Spirituality, Liturgies, and Habits</b></p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBA</li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn in Technology Experiment and Explain to Class</li> </ul>
<b>Future: What's Coming in Technology</b>	
Week 10 Oct 31	<p><b>Technology in Popular Culture</b> How technology appears in popular films, comics, book, and commercials.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articles online</li> <li>• <i>Binti</i> by Nnedi Okorafor</li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (5) How is technology understood in Binti's world, and how does this differ from culture ideas you've been exposed to?</li> </ul>
Week 11 Nov 7	<p><b>Artificial Intelligence</b> Apply theology, media ecology, philosophy of technology, and sociology to understanding Artificial Intelligence.</p> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artificial Intelligence: An Evangelical Statement of Principles</li> <li>• Articles on Canvas</li> </ul>
Week 12 Nov 14	<p><b>Transhumanism</b></p> <p><i>Reading</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shatzer, Jacob. <i>Transhumanism and the Image of God</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Assignment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (6) Does Christian anthropology place limits on human enhancement? What are differences in the ways a Christian and a secular posthumanist would answer the question, 'What does it mean to be human?'</li> </ul>
<b>Student Presentations</b>	
<p><i>Week 13</i> Dec 5</p>	<b>Student Presentations</b>
<p><i>Week 14</i> Dec 12</p>	<b>Student Presentations</b>
<p><i>Week 15</i> Dec 19</p>	<p><b>Finals Week</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No class unless needed for additional presentations.</li> </ul>

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