

Technolatry By David Feddes

In the year 1898, Morgan Robertson wrote a story about a splendid ship 800 feet long—far bigger than any that had ever been built at that time. Fourteen years later, a real ship was built over 800 feet long. The ship in the novel was triple screw; the real ship was triple screw. The ship in the novel could reach speeds of 25 knots; the real ship could reach 25 knots. The ship in the novel could carry about 3,000 people; the real ship had room for about 3,000. The ship in the novel had lifeboats for only a fraction of its passengers, but nobody cared, because the ship was considered unsinkable. The same was true of the real ship.

The ship in Robertson's story started across the Atlantic with many rich, self-satisfied passengers, struck an iceberg one cold April night, and sank. The real ship started across the Atlantic with many rich, self-satisfied passengers, struck an iceberg one cold April night in 1912, and sank. The real ship was called *Titanic*. The imaginary ship in Robertson's novel of fourteen years earlier was called *Titan*.

Kind of spooky, isn't it? It's almost as if the novel prophesied what would happen in real life. But Morgan Robertson did not claim to be a prophet offering error-free prophecy inspired by God, and he did not have a direct, God-given vision of future events. His novel about the *Titan* contained some striking similarities to the *Titanic*, but there were also differences. The author knew enough about shipbuilding technology to see where trends were headed in the next decade or two, and he knew enough about human nature to sense what could happen if people weren't humble and careful, if they trusted technology too much and arrogantly assumed nothing could go wrong. Perhaps, in God's plan, Robertson's novel about the *Titan* even served as a kind of warning against pride, a warning that went unheeded a few years later when the *Titanic* was not supplied with enough lifeboats and someone foolishly said that even God could not sink the *Titanic*.

Titanic Tyre

Morgan Robertson's novel about a doomed ship was not part of Bible prophecy, but the Bible does include an important prophecy about a doomed ship. In the book of Ezekiel, the Lord confronted the city-state of Tyre. Tyre was a Mediterranean port city about 100 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was a center for shipping and international trade, with an excellent fleet of ships and access to inventions and luxuries from all over. The people of Tyre were educated, skilled in business, prosperous, and *proud*. Tyre had such a thriving economy that the people thought they'd always be wealthy, and they had such a strategic position that they thought Tyre could never be conquered.

But God was tired of Tyre. In Ezekiel 27, the Lord pictured Tyre as a ship: splendid, strong, well built, manned by experts, loaded with luxury and goods of every sort—but doomed to sink. Tyre was like the *Titanic*. People marveled at its luxury and technology and thought it was unsinkable. But God said to Titanic Tyre, "Your wealth, merchandise and wares, your mariners, seamen and shipwrights, your merchants and all your soldiers, and everyone else on board will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of your shipwreck" (Ezekiel 27:27).

God also had a message especially for the king of Tyre. In Ezekiel 28, God told this arrogant ruler,

"In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god...' But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god... By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself... By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth, and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud" (Ezekiel 28:2-5).

With technology, trade, transportation, and tentacles controlling financial interests in many countries, Tyre was like a modern multi-national, multi-billion dollar corporation. It took quite a man to run the whole thing, a man as talented as a god—at least that's what the king of Tyre thought. God, however, was not impressed. He told the king that because he thought himself as wise as a god, he would be destroyed: "You will be but a man, not a god, in the hands of those who slay you" (Ezekiel 28:9-10).

Did God enjoy sinking Tyre or destroying its brilliant king? No, God says in Ezekiel 18:32, "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone." God's final words about Tyre and its king are a lament. Tyre had so much talent, expertise, beauty, and riches, so many of God's good gifts, that it was a tragedy for them to be destroyed. The ruin of such a grand civilization and such a brilliant ruler was tragic, but they had to be judged for their pride and evil (Ezekiel 28:11-19). Like one of its great ships, Tyre and its technology would go down. That prophesy came true. The proud city and its king perished.

Like Tyre, we have a civilization that is marvelous in many ways. We live in the most technically advanced, prosperous civilization in history. We've accomplished things and produced marvels that previous generations could hardly imagine. Wouldn't it be a shame for us to ruin all that and bring God's judgment on ourselves through our pride and disobedience? It would be as tragic as the destruction of titanic Tyre.

In fact, it would be even more tragic, and the judgment even more terrible, in light of the fact that we have much more access to God's truth than Tyre had. Tyre existed centuries before Jesus came, with far less of God's revelation available. We, on the other hand, have the opportunity to learn all about Jesus: his teachings, his perfect life, his astonishing miracles, his death to pay for our sins, his resurrection, his headship over all things. If, despite all that, we still reject him, then what? "I tell you," warns Jesus, "it will be more bearable for Tyre ... on the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:22).

The Bible message of judgment on Tyre wasn't for Tyre only. It's a warning to us all, especially to those of us who have been blessed with learning and technology and wealth. It's a warning to all who ignore God and are tempted to assume man is the measure of all things and the master of all things.

Worshipping Technology

We must beware of the temptation to worship technology. Culture analyst Neal Postman warned about "the deification of technology." He titled one of his books *Technopoly*, suggesting that technology has a monopoly on thinking and living. That may be right, but if we're coining words, an even better word than technopoly might be *technolatry*. Technolatry is a form of idolatry, a way of worshiping technology and technique. In technolatry, we treat our machines and methods as though they are God. If that sounds like an overstatement, consider the following four points.

First, for a great many people, technology, not God, is the ultimate reality, the only absolute certainty. We're not sure whether God is real or just a myth. We're not sure if we're spiritual beings made in his image or only biological accidents. We're not sure if sin is a deadly reality or just a psychological glitch. We're not sure if love is real or if it's just an illusion based on certain chemicals and hormones. We're not sure about life after death. We're not sure about much of anything, but one thing we're sure of: technology. In Neal Postman's words, "Whatever else may be denied or compromised, it is clear that airplanes do fly, antibiotics do cure, radios do speak, and ... computers do calculate." God is no longer the supreme, undeniable reality; technology is.

Second, in technolatrly we no longer look to the Word of God, the Bible, as our highest source of truth and the final authority on how we should live. Instead, we look to scientific experiments and social surveys. If someone begins a statement with "the Bible says..." we brush it off, but if someone introduces a statement with the words "researchers have found..." who can doubt it? If a preacher warns of Judgment Day, based on what the Bible says, we ignore him. But if a scientist warns of global warming, based on a statistic that average temperatures have risen half a degree in the last hundred years, we worry about impending doom and hold international summits to deal with it. The authorities who guide our lives are experts not in Scripture but in statistics. Who cares what the Bible says about greed or sloth or exploitation? We'd rather think in terms of economic indicators and unemployment figures and trade deficits. Who cares what the Bible says about sex? We'd rather hear what researchers have to say, and then we'll see what sorts of technology they can come up with to make sin safer.

A third aspect of technolatrly is the reverence and awe and amazement we feel in the presence of technology and its miracles. I can't count the number of times I've heard people say, "Isn't it *amazing* what they can do nowadays?" That's a common thing to say when we're talking about advances in medicine, such as joint replacements or organ transplants or neonatal units that save premature babies weighing barely a pound. We're in awe when we try out a new computer program, or see cloned animals, or wander through a factory where robots are hard at work. There's no denying that some of the technology really is amazing, and the fact that we're amazed by it wouldn't be a bad thing except that we've stopped being amazed at God. In technolatrly, we find God boring or useless; we're more in awe of the wisdom of science and the wonders of technology.

To top it all off, a fourth symptom of technolatrly is that we trust technology as our savior. We trust medical technology to save us from disease; we trust military technology to save us from enemies; we trust educational techniques to save us from social problems; we trust economic techniques to save us from financial ruin; we trust therapeutic techniques to save us from psychological ruin; and we trust information technologies like radios and televisions and compact discs to save us from boredom, sadness, and emptiness. British thinker Mary Midgley titled one of her books *Science as Salvation* and wrote brilliantly about misplaced trust in technology. We have a technology or technique to save us from anything.

Well, almost anything. Technology can't reveal God to us or take away sin or help us to live forever, but so what? God and sin and eternal life aren't relevant anyway. Technology is our ultimate reality now. We're more concerned with finding cures for AIDS and cancer than with escaping hell. We put more effort into postponing death than

preparing for life after death. We're more concerned to teach our kids math and science than to teach them virtue and integrity. Technolatriy gives us a whole new definition of salvation and a whole new set of priorities.

So, then, it's no exaggeration to say that many of us are worshiping technology. What else can we call it when something becomes our ultimate reality, our supreme source of truth, our main object of awe and amazement, our primary hope for salvation? Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying technology is bad—but technolatriy is bad. It's okay to use inventions and to learn from scientific research and so forth. But when we worship technology and give it the place that rightfully belongs to God, we're making a terrible mistake.

Worthless Worship

God, and God alone, deserves our worship. He is infinite in power and majesty. He upholds everything that exists; he is absolutely holy and perfectly just; he is the source of all wisdom and beauty; he overflows with goodness and love. And yet we have a horrible habit of making something—anything—that will take the place of God. Some people carve an idol and worship it; others develop technology and worship it. But whether it's idolatry or technolatriy, the result is the same: we cut ourselves off from the great and glorious God and cut ourselves off from everything that makes our lives worth living. Let's look at what the Bible says about old-fashioned idolatry and see how it applies to new-fangled technolatriy.

In Isaiah 44 the Bible says, "This is what the Lord says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no god" (v. 6). The Scripture then says, "All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless" (v. 9). When we worship something other than God, we reduce ourselves to nothing, and everything we touch becomes worthless.

One way idolatry damages us is by making us stupid. Isaiah 44 describes how a metalworker makes an idol for himself out of the stuff he knows best: metal. That metal idol is supposed to make him stronger, but he gets hungry and tired and faint in the very process of making it. The metalworker may be smart when it comes to his technical skill in working with metal, but he is stupid if he worships it. Isaiah then describes a woodworker with a similar problem. His technical ability is in working not with metal but wood, so wood is what this man worships. He cuts a log, burns half of it for a fire, and then worships the other half. What stupidity! "They know nothing," exclaims Isaiah, "they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand" (44:18). They're so busy worshipping the mindless stuff they make from metal or wood that they become utterly mindless themselves.

The Bible makes much the same point in Psalm 115. The Psalm begins, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." Psalm 115 then contrasts this loving, faithful God with man-made idols. "They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see; they have ears but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats." After saying all that, the psalmist adds this chilling statement: "Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them." In other words, you are formed by what you worship; the idols

you shape end up shaping you. If you idolize brainless, lifeless, worthless things, you become brainless and lifeless and worthless yourself. You sink to the level of your idol.

How does this relate to worshiping technology? Well, when you turn from the personal, living God and make technology your ultimate reality, your highest source of truth, the focus of your awe, and the thing you trust for your salvation, you become less like a person and more like a thing. You empty your universe of life and see everything as a machine.

In technolatriy, everything we study becomes a machine. Everything we do becomes a technique. Anything that can't be measured or described with a statistic simply doesn't exist. We take something as complex and wonderful as the human mind, attach a number to it, and call it an I.Q. People become nothing more than a mix of features that can be described with a number.

One especially potent aspect of technolatriy is economic. In technolatriy, we talk a lot about the standard of living, even as we live without any standards. We sometimes think our standard of living is high compared to a previous generation, and we even have numbers to prove it. But what do those numbers really mean? Are we better off and happier than our grandparents were? We have our microwaves and VCR's and luxury cars, true enough. We also have more divorce, drugs, and depression. We have little to do with our neighbors, and we can't get along with our families, but oh, do we have a great standard of living! If you don't believe it, ask the economists—they have numbers to prove it!

A great irony of technolatriy is that the more we trust in statistics and technology and technique, the worse our situation becomes. We've never had so many different forms of birth control and abortion, yet we've got more children born out of wedlock than ever before. We've never had such high-tech equipment for police and military forces, yet our world is more dangerous than ever. We've never had so many educational programs, yet literacy and reading continue to slump. We've never had so many "experts" in psychology and sociology, and yet we've never had such widespread psychological and social problems. We've never had so much information and research, yet we're more confused than ever about who we are and why we're alive. Could it be that we're worshiping the wrong gods? Could it be that we're looking in the wrong direction for salvation?

Again, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that technology is bad, or that biology and sociology and psychology and all the other "ologies" are bad. When the Bible attacks the worship of idols made from wood or silver or gold, it's not attacking wood or silver or gold, and it's not attacking craftsmanship. It's attacking idolatry. Likewise, I'm not attacking the practice of science or denying the benefits of new inventions. I admire scientists and inventers, and I appreciate technology, but when we idolize these things, the blessings become curses. Technology and science are wonderful helpers but terrible gods.

If we worship the God of life and love and justice and faithfulness, we become more alive and loving and just and faithful ourselves. If we put our faith in a mechanical process and a mechanical worldview, we become more like machines ourselves. As Psalm 115:8 puts it, "Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them."

Back to God

We need to repent of our technolatriy and turn back to the one true God who created us. What does this involve?

First, we must recognize that the Lord God Almighty is the only ultimate reality. He alone is eternal. Everything else depends on him for its very existence. Before the universe ever came into being, he was God, and after this world disappears, he will still be God. In Isaiah 46, the Lord says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." That's why we're such fools when we try to reduce love and faithfulness and freedom to mechanical and material categories. Before matter ever existed, there was love and faithfulness and freedom, for there was God the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Spiritual reality precedes material reality, for God is spirit.

Second, once we recognize the living God as the only ultimate reality, we must recognize the Word of God as the only ultimate authority. It was the Word of God that brought creation into existence. It is the Word of God written in the Bible that brings us divine truth in a form we can understand. It is the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ that reveals to us the character of God and saves us. Studies and experiments may be helpful and informative in many cases, but the foundation of our lives, our ultimate authority, can only be the Word of God.

Third, we must stand in awe of God and marvel at his majesty and mystery. Anything we make with our technology, anything we measure and explore with our techniques, can't begin to compare to the infinite, splendid God who created all things and gave us minds to study what he has made and make use of it. God, not technology, must be our supreme object of amazement.

Fourth, we must trust in this great and glorious God as the only one who can save us. Our biggest problems are sin and death, and technology can't do much about either one. When it comes to sin, therapeutic technique might help modify some behaviors, but it can't pardon our guilt or remove the sin that is embedded in each of our hearts. It can't heal our broken relationships with other people, and it certainly can't heal our relationship with God. When it comes to death, medical technology can deal with certain illnesses and postpone death for awhile, but it can't ultimately overcome death or give us eternal life. Sin and death are far too serious for technology to deal with. Only God can deal with them. Jesus deals with sin by his blood poured out on the cross. He deals with death through the life-giving power of his resurrection. So trust in Jesus to save you and change you.

When you worship lifeless idols, you become like them, but when you worship the God of life, love, holiness, faithfulness, and truth who has come to us in Jesus, you become more like *him* as his Spirit works within you. You discover your glorious identity as a child of God, and you treat other people with the love and respect that are due God's image-bearers. As God's child, you can enjoy and study creation as his gift; you can use technology for his glory; you can love people as his image-bearers; but you can't worship any of these. You reserve your worship for God, and God alone.

You give technology its rightful place, and you give people their rightful place, only when you give God his rightful place—on the throne of your life.

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