Technology and the Conservative Anabaptist Church:
An Analysis in 2007

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Technology has become a subject provoking different reactions within the Christian community. In general, the mainstream church in the West has embraced the new levels of electronic conveniences, from communication via wireless methods to bulleted PowerPoint™ projected lessons to Podcasting of sermons. Another side of the Christian church has eschewed many forms of technology. The most recognized of this group is the Amish community, who has forgone most modern forms of technology to remain in an era similar to two hundred years ago. But many other conservative Anabaptist groups have also debated and engaged the technology discussion, and decided to adopt a level of technology much less than the wholesale acceptance of modern churches.

In particular, the Anabaptist community has had many technology issues thrust upon it by the rapid pace of change. The process will only become worse as the rate of change continues to increase. It is estimated there is a doubling of human knowledge every (20) years, and this time period continues to shrink for each doubling. Every five years there is a new generation of technology and equipment available, and it continues to grow more interconnected than previous generations. As technology becomes more pervasive, it has and will become increasingly difficult to avoid objectionable material that can be fed to us in not one or two but a dozen ways.

The past methods of handling technology for Anabaptists have been generally avoiding certain types and cautiously adopting others after periods of internal discussion and trials. Typically, the normal way technology has been avoided is by implementing a set of rules within congregations. Today one can find a large number of rules related to internet usage, email, television and radio, these either being banned completely or controlled in some manner. It is apparent that the key has been to *control the technology itself* in these rules. One congregation may not allow the use of television and radio, but allow email and allow business use of the internet. Another may not allow access to any of these. There is a clear intent in the rules, but oftentimes the changes in technology can muddy the waters of application or obsolete them outright.
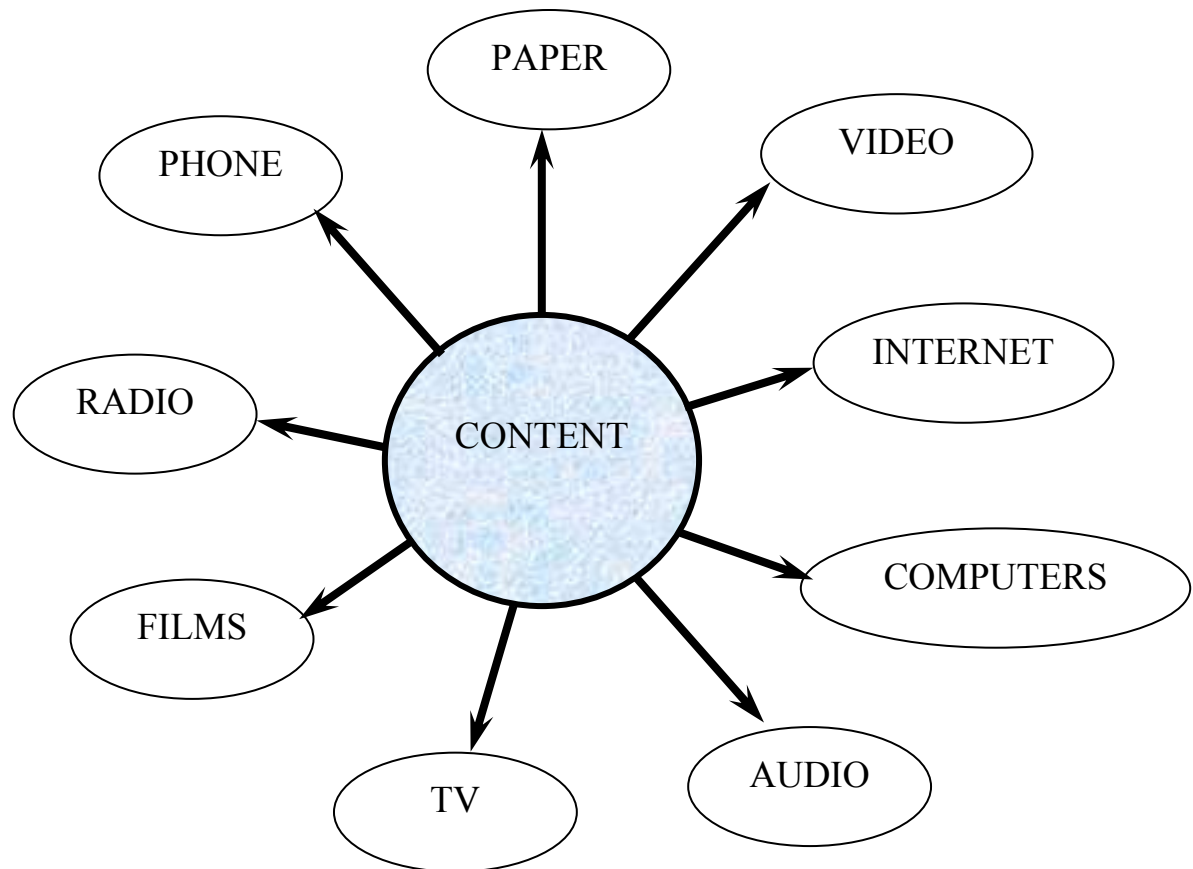
With this background, this paper seeks to examine the nature of the relationship between Anabaptist churches and the rapidly changing world of technology.

Where is technology moving?

Since technology is rapidly changing, it would help to understand more about the nature of this change. If the methods churches use today to adapt to change are having difficulty, then it is best to first understand the nature of this change and determine what principles from Scripture apply.

If one examines the history of technology development, one finds there has been a need within humanity that was either difficult or not possible to meet. This would be a physical need of some type, as technology deals primarily with satisfying physical needs. At some point, an individual or a group of people creates a solution to the problem. Sometimes, commercial issues are responsible for driving this innovation; sometimes military has driven technology changes (in fact, this has been a primary driver for many centuries).

What this needs-solutions model has created is a series of technology developments over the years in an enormous number of fields. But these have primarily been developments that are unique and unconnected unless they are in a narrow field of interest. In the area of communication, this has resulted in technologies such as paper (for the past two millennia), the telephone (since Alexander Graham Bell), audio recording/playback (from Edison's wax cylinders to today's CDs and DVDs), video recording/playback (since the advent of VCRs), television, films/movies, radio, computers and the internet. Initially, these technologies not only developed separately but also remained separate until recent years. Figure 1 is a schematic depiction of how these technologies all draw content to send to an individual.
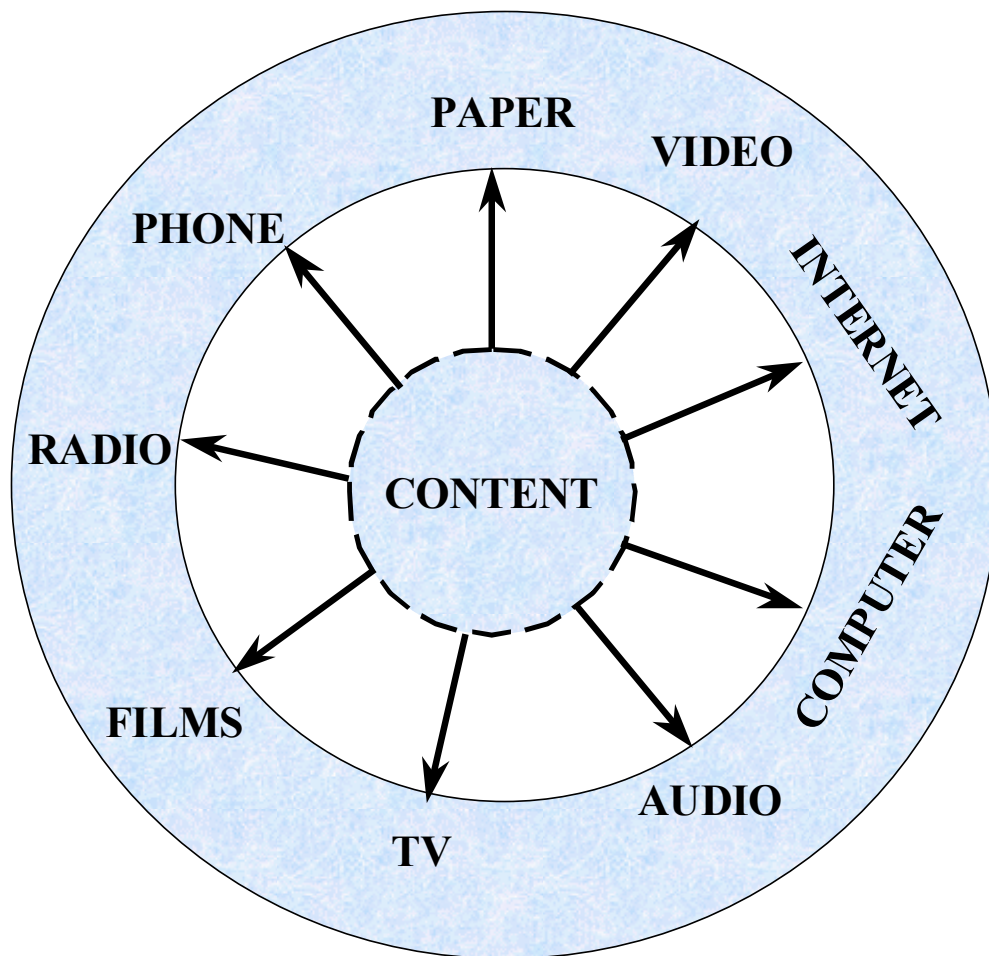

Figure 1: Separate Technology Paths

What is happening today is more than just a development of new technologies in these areas of communication; there is now a *coalescing* of technologies to bring similar types of content to the end user via many paths. This change is the largest change in technology that has occurred in the history of human communications, and the reason why the methods Anabaptist churches have used become obsolete.

The typical method many congregations have adapted is to prevent the use (ban) of the technology. This method is frequently chosen when the large majority of content the medium delivers is objectionable – as is the case with television, radio and to some degree, the internet. This method essentially breaks the arrows shown in Figure 1 from the content to the technology. This method has some advantages, as we have an easy measurement for compliance (one has/uses it or not).

But this method has some great disadvantages that are now appearing in Anabaptist churches. Changes in technology are growing to merge the different methods of content delivery. Today most organizations and people have internet and world wide web access. The internet is similar to a highway that allows content to move, but this is becoming more pervasive as the devices used by people become more internet-capable. Today it is not only the computer that accesses the internet, but cell phones and television/video systems are capable. "Smart phones" are available today that combine the functions of telephone, email, basic computing, audio player (MP3), camera and basic television. Within the decade many household appliances (such as refrigerators) are predicted to have internet capability for premium models, and they will integrate with a household computing system. Perhaps these will even be controlled from one's smart phone.

This convergence of technologies is shown in Figure 2. The technologies are integrating their functions so single devices can perform a multitude of tasks. Even if a device has one predominate mode (such as phone, computer, etc.), it will have many other functions built into it so it delivers content in several different modes.

Figure 2: Merging Technology Paths

Here is the dilemma for churches which desire to control worldly influences from certain types of content delivery systems: the system today that is not allowed for use can and is shifting its content to delivery by another system to the end user or consumer. Content from television is now readily available through the

internet – even the most current programming. The most popular television programs today are now available for download to a computer after the program is broadcast its first time over the airwaves. The ABC network sells such content for a small $1 fee. In areas outside North America, where cell phones and their networks are more advanced video content is now becoming a major feature in cell phone use.

A new type of video content model is becoming available in late 2007. The service, known as Hulu (www.Hulu.com) has been created by NBC and Fox television to create an online television experience equivalent to current high definition broadcast systems. The Hulu network is initially offering episodes of some 90 television shows (selected episodes) that will be viewable with a web browser and containing advertisements for generating revenue. Whether or not Hulu is successful as a business, the process of challenging traditional television content delivery with online viewing and new options is expanding and growing as entertainment companies realize the need to meet the changing American consumer.

This merging trend will only intensify over the next several years. Content providers are pushing the networks to advance the available bandwidth as fast as possible because they see the enormous economic revenue potential. Network providers are also trying to earn more revenue, and know they will do so when their networks can support more content at high download speeds.

Also, some technology developments change the way people receive their content. Nearly every month the media are reporting stories about a decline in newspaper readership, or broadcast television viewership, or other media that has been a staple for many years. It was recently reported (early 2007) that television viewership among young people (under 25) is 20% lower from where it was a generation ago. These youth have not abandoned video content, but rather learned to receive their desired content in another manner. Today, such services as YouTube, Google Video, and other video services provide video content for youth through the web. Quick messages are often sent via text messages on cell phones or instant messaging on computers, further changing how communication commonly occurs among youth.

In November 2007 Yahoo! news reported that in Japan the functions of personal computers were being added to so many other devices that demand for PCs is actually shrinking, the first industrialized nation to report such a trend. The only reason such a trend can happen is because the tasks performed by PCs in the past are now possible on other platforms – such as cell phones and large digital display screens – and the need for a PC is much less to a Japanese youth than previous generations. Such a trend only highlights the coalescing of the technologies as shown in Figure 2 to deliver almost any form of content via any channel.

Behind this change in technology and content delivery methods is an important marketing drive. In the past, electronic content was available according to a provider's schedule. This required the end user to orient his schedule around other schedules. A desired radio or television program, for example, was broadcast on a weekly or daily schedule. A movie would be available at certain times at a theater. The end consumer was required to make that time available so he could receive that content.

In general, this was not the best or most desired model for content. What was desired is something more similar to a newspaper model, where the content was delivered but the end user could decide when to consume it. In the case of a newspaper, that could be in the morning, when the paper was received; at lunchtime during the workday; or later at the end of the day in the evening hours. This model, though imperfect with a paper system, was seen as desirable for electronic content.

This model led to the development of the "on demand" content systems. In the marketing world, the world pushed the mottoes of "I want what I want when I want it" and "It's all about you." These mottoes state the philosophy of content on demand (and in a selfish manner) so the end user can access the desired content at the time when the user wanted it. Today newspapers are delivering content via the web, and updating it frequently. The end user can access the content when desired. Video has allowed time shifting of television content so it can be viewed at a convenient time. Podcasting has done the same with audio content – even radio programs can now be heard when the consumer wants to listen, downloaded via the internet to an MP3 player. Even some college class lectures have been delivered by podcasts rather than in-person classes.

So the world of technology has changed dramatically. The actual technologies are rapidly merging delivery systems into more devices so more varied types of content are available on demand to the end user. The end user has a freedom to choose when to access this content, and in what manner, so it best fits the use of time. Content providers have learned to adapt to these changes and are ever pushing to get the attention of consumers to sell their content (and advertising).

Technology assessment – how is the church affected?

With these numerous and rapid changes occurring, the next issue to examine is how the Anabaptist church has been affected and how it has responded. It is clear the churches are attempting to work with this issue, but the types of solutions and level of success has been varied. Many times the simple discussions have resulted in divisions within congregations, and these should alarm everyone. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul warned believers against divisions in the New Testament letters of Philippians and I Corinthians.

The author has noticed from many discussions with Anabaptist church members that how the technology issue is handled highly depends on the quality of relationships within the brotherhood. Technology, as an issue, will expose weaknesses within a brotherhood. When true loving relationships are present, the issue will tend to be handled in a manner where respect for all members is afforded. A consensus will normally be developed that is beneficial to all, even though many may have to adopt a position that may not be their personal ideal.

On the other hand, a brotherhood with poorer quality relationships often suffers many more issues. When there is less unity among the brethren; when there is less than a full love for one another; when fears from one's life dominate inner thinking (or where love is not preeminent, because perfect love casts out fear) there is a greater tendency to protect personal positions than to reach out in love to brethren. How difficult this makes any discussion of a subject like technology! Where there are internal wounds within a congregation, the lack of trust surfaces between brethren and makes fruitful discussions rare. The author would submit that if a congregation has issues such as these, little or no sound technology discussions can occur. People will be too concerned with protecting themselves. If there are fears, hurts, wounds or histories that color how people view issues and each other, any discussion of technology will be colored by these.

Further, the author has noted two primary divisions that occur in congregations over this issue. The first division is best called an *economic division*. Typically, this is seen in congregations where there are some members who use and need some form of technology for business purposes. This could be as simple as email, or more extensive with email, internet and web access, online advertising, etc. Others within the congregation are normally in a work and life that does not require any use of such technology. Thus two groups develop in the congregation: one who uses technology, and wishes to see it adopted and regulated by the church; and a second group who sees no need for anyone to have it, and wishes to separate from all access to it. Hence this division in a congregation is an economic one. When it is an actual division, neither side is willing to understand the other. Little communication is possible. Those members who favor technology adoption have a fear of losing their livelihood should access be denied; those against technology are concerned with the influence it may bring into the church. Both concerns are real, but when they are amplified by fear it creates the division.

The second division over technology is best termed a *generational division*. Here the line is not found in economic terms, but along ages. Most readers are probably well acquainted with how quickly children and youth adapt to technology. Often a new device is more quickly learned by younger people. This is not a firm rule; today, many grandparents are becoming more capable with technology so they can communicate with grandchildren through emails, pictures and instant messaging. However, the author has found in Anabaptist congregations that there are a smaller percentage of technology-literate people in the senior ages than in the general North American population. Because rules about technology have been in place for several decades, many older brethren fall into a position of not wanting any adoption or a very limited adoption of technology. The youth, however, are growing up in a world filled with technological

innovation, and they see it perhaps more than the average adult does. They have seen some benefits and in general have a favorable impression. Thus a divide occurs along age lines with a congregation. The older group has fears of what could happen with technology adoption, and the youth fear being left behind in a rapidly changing technological world. When both sides remain fixed upon their fears, a natural division results.

Beyond the issue of division, Anabaptist congregations have typically responded by attempting some type of ban on the physical technology. Access may be completely eliminated, such as for television or radio, or restricted with certain rules for usage (VCRs for school usage, but not personal entertainment viewing). These methods are typically rules that attempt to control one of the spokes of the wheel as seen in Figure 1. Restricting access to one or several types of technology has fit the Anabaptist mindset of nonconformity to the world. These restrictions have often been codified in the standards adopted by congregations that also address issues of dress, activities, use of material possessions, etc. Today, with the rapid pace of change and the movement toward the melding of technologies described by Figure 2, these standards for technology rapidly become outdated. If a church adopts standards based solely on the technology, the obsolete standards quickly present a problem. Practices may change so some members in a church adopt newer technology that is not addressed by the standards.

At this point, a church can develop into a position where there are standards but they are not followed by the body. This leads to a difficult situation. Usually, many members see the contradiction between the standard and the practice of the church. This tends to be a particularly difficult problem for youth, as they see this situation as an enormous inconsistency. If the local body attempts to address the situation, it is not uncommon for two discussion threads to develop. One group wishes to return to the standards and live by the original intent. This is often met with resistance if the new technology has some economic benefit to some members. On the other side, a group may wish to modify the standards so certain aspects of new technology may be used. Modifying standards is likely one of the most difficult changes any Anabaptist church attempts; this does not easily happen. If the church is unable to agree on the issue, the rule is likely to remain unchanged and practices are also unchanged, and the situation remains the same as in the beginning.

So because the type of change that occurs in technology is rapid and focused on changing how content is delivered, the types of rules used in congregational standards are now less adept at responding to the changes in the world. Much of the discussion within Anabaptist circles about standards and technology are related to this mismatch.

A Biblical understanding of technology

In order to work toward a solution from these dilemmas, the first step is that Christians must understand what principles we can find in Scripture to understand technology. This depends greatly upon examining the question, "Is technology amoral, immoral or moral?"

Most Anabaptists reading this paper understand some negative consequences of technology today. Because the human unregenerate heart is disposed toward evil, the inventions of man can be used to amplify those directions. The end result is greater evil propagating in the world today than in previous times.

But the key question remains, is the technology invented by mankind a moral agent? Does it possess an inherent evilness or righteousness?

The author's view is that inventions of mankind, in the general sense, are morally neutral (amoral). From the very beginnings of the Old Testament, implements are used for both good and evil purposes. Perhaps the best and earliest example of this is the simple rock. It is perhaps with this simple object that Cain slew his brother Abel (Gen 4). It is also with simple uncut stones that the altars of God were built to honor and worship the Creator of the world. The same object was (possibly) used for two completely different purposes, with different results. The rock itself does not determine the morality of its use; rather, the hand of man (a moral agent) determines this.

And so it has been with most creations of mankind to this day. The reader must be careful to distinguish between a technology and an adaptation or use of the technology in this area. To confuse the two will lead to an improper understanding.

The author heard a good illustration of this confusion at a recent technology seminar. A person commented that if an alcoholic beverage were placed on a table, it would not be difficult to see how some technology is evil (and therefore a moral agent). This unfortunately is not a proper object – the alcoholic beverage is actually a particular *adaptation* of a technology. This point is important.

The actual technology in this case is the ability to make ethyl alcohol from plant material. This technology has evil uses, as in the alcoholic beverage mentioned. But the technology also has positive benefits. Today there is an enormous industrial initiative to develop ethanol; a fuel for automobiles based on ethyl alcohol. Approximately 175 ethanol refineries are under construction in 2007 to meet the expected demand for this renewable fuel that does not come from the volatile Middle East. In this case, the technology to make ethyl alcohol will be used in a proper manner (not evil), and is a good adaptation of the technology.

Even some technologies that seem to be evil can be shown to be amoral when examined more thoroughly. If one were to consider a nuclear explosive device, this would be viewed negatively because most people associate the device with war. If the explosive technology is developed and implemented into a warhead, that certainly is the case. However, several decades ago there was a discussion whether a sea-level canal through another part of Central America should replace the Panama Canal. To accomplish this, different methods were proposed, including the use of nuclear explosive devices to dig the new canal. In this usage, a nuclear device of this type would a proper adaptation of the technology. (Note – the author recognizes the issue of nuclear fallout would be a concern in today's world; in the 1950's when this proposal was made, the use of this technology was proposed without any evil intent. This is unlike the nuclear warhead usage.)

Therefore, if technology is amoral, Anabaptists must focus their thinking to examining technology implementations, discern if there is good or evil intent, and respond appropriately.

Biblical responses to technology

So if technology is amoral, and there are dangers that Christians must be careful about, what is a proper and Biblical response to technology? The author believes there are a number of principles God has given in His scripture, and this section will discuss some of them.

First, as earlier discussed, the church has had clear difficulties with division in this area. It is clear from Scripture that love is to be heartbeat of relationships within the church. It is in love that believers are to work through difficult issues. If the world is to know about Christ through the love His people show one another, then this is the central characteristic believers must maintain. Therefore, the first response Christians in brotherhoods must have is to have a solid commitment to love one another.

Second, technology and all of its effects must be a servant and not a master. In I Corinthians 9, the apostle Paul describes the importance of keeping a goal in front and what it then takes to achieve a goal; in this case, he writes about spreading the gospel to as many as possible, and then states in verses 25-27:

> And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

When there is a main goal, everything else is to be subject to that goal. Furthermore, the goal itself is to be worthy of this attention. In the life of the Christian, all is to be subservient to following after Christ. If this is to be true, then all matters of technology must also be subject to a life of discipleship under the headship of Christ.

In this sense, how can technology serve Christians? There are some sound questions one should ask. For example, can the use of certain types of technology save time and labor? Here, one must calculate the savings in time and energy against the investment made in the technology. The business world actually measures this with a metric called *productivity*. It is an attempt to measure the amount of work one person can do with tools at his disposal against what one could do without them. Business has invested in technologies so that their labor force is smaller; typically in North America, the labor content is the highest cost in developing a product. Technologies that enhance what one can do can be a net cost savings. A Christian should be able to evaluate his use of technologies in the same manner – is there a profit in how one's time is spent by adopting this? If the answer is no, or it is easily a diversion that wastes time, one should avoid adopting that tool.

Christians must be careful to ensure technology is a servant and not a master in areas where diversion can occur. With many things in the world, there is a natural curiosity or draw that people have to something new or different. This is true for new technologies as well. A problem occurs for any interest when it becomes obsessive or compulsive, as it now, by one's allowance, becomes a controlling force. It is now apparent this is true for many modern technologies, along with some older obsessions modernized by it. One current example (as of early 2007) is the issue of video games on computers. Gaming has become increasingly sophisticated in complexity, graphics and violence. Today there are internet-based games where people pay a monthly fee to play online. The most popular worldwide online game is *World of Warcraft*, which in February 2007 had over 8 million worldwide subscribers (with 2 million in North America, and 3.5 million in China). As a result of this gaming environment, many people have become addicted. The problem is severe enough that in 2006 the first in-patient rehabilitation facility for people addicted to video games opened in The Netherlands (Amsterdam). In the United States, there are now twelve-step recovery programs available in this field. And in 2006 the first death of a person due to playing video games was reported in South Korea (the person deprived himself of rest/food/water over a 5-day period). Similar events have occurred in China, and this has resulted in the Chinese government proposing steps to penalize people when playing games for more than 12 consecutive hours.

There can be other obsessions with technology besides video games. These can be an unnecessary desire for the latest hardware (when not required for the tasks at hand), the latest software, or the like; or constant online chatting in forums, instant messaging, etc. All these areas need examination to determine the degree of one's involvement. The issue of technology as servant or master must be examined.

Regarding diversions and time wasting, it is wise to consider the example of one man who is deeply part of the technology age – Bill Gates, the head of Microsoft. In February 2007 he was interviewed about his children's use of computers, and specifically about his oldest daughter (age 10). Mr. Gates replied that his daughter was now in grade 4, and at her school they used Tablet PCs for their work. His daughter was allowed to use the computer at home as much as required for her school assignments. However, beyond that, she was limited to 45 minutes per day for computer recreational activity (e.g., games) during weekdays. On weekends, the time limit was raised to 1 hour per day. It is refreshing that the man who created and runs the largest software company in the USA is concerned about excessive use of the computer, and limited his children's time of access.

Another question to ask is, can the use of this technology bless one's spiritual life? Perhaps it may seem odd to the reader to think in this manner. Yet, the reader has most likely been blessed by the presence of the printed Scriptures in his home. Some five hundred years ago, the printing press was invented, and soon printed materials became readily available to people. Today most North American homes have not one but several printed copies of the Bible. Have not these Bibles, so readily available, been a source of great blessings to God's people? So yes, technology can be a blessing to one's spiritual life.

Recently the author acquired a small electronic player called an iPod (made by Apple Inc.) – this device can store and play various audio files. Most people in North America use them to play music and songs. In the author's case, most of the device's memory stores portions of the Scripture read by a person. The same material, stored on cassettes or audio CDs, would require either some 60 cassette tapes, or some 60 audio CDs, to store the Old and New Testaments. The iPod can hold the same material in a small electronic device smaller than a credit card (though thicker). This now allows the author to listen to Scripture at opportune times, since it is readily available, than might otherwise happen. Recently, using such a device during a morning walk in the countryside was a great blessing to the author. Again, the key point is to use the device in a way that will enhance and bless one's walk with the Lord. Many people have reported blessings from using some advanced Bible software and tools available for computers today.

Another possibility is technology can be used to enhance the witness of the church. When radio became popular in the twentieth century, many people were enamored with the technology and listened to many programs. Christians (though not Anabaptists) used this interest to begin broadcasting Christian material, especially sermons and Bible teachings. A great number of unchurched and unconverted people listened to these programs, and the witness of the church grew to include many people who otherwise might not have entered the door of a church.

Today, this method does not reach many unchurched people. It was recently estimated that fewer than 10% of the people who listen to Christian radio stations are people in need of evangelism, at least in North America. Radio programs are more concerned with internal issues of the church and far less reaching into the lives of people without Christ.

Where would be the comparable field today for unchurched people? If one looks around, one sees today's youth listening through headphones and ear buds to iPods and other MP3 players. For the most part, they are listening to music; but many are listening to *podcasts*, which are the equivalent of yesterday's radio programs. These are programs put onto the internet and available for downloading to an iPod, where they can be listened to at any time. When the author purchased an iPod in 2006, one item of research he did was to survey the internet and determine what type of Christian content was available in podcast form. There were many churches and other groups who had podcasts available. Sadly, out of nearly six thousand podcasts listed under the "Religious and Spiritual" category, not a single one was Anabaptist. In the one area of the world where youth are reaching and finding their content, there is no Anabaptist voice. This finding should create heavy hearts in Anabaptists.

Another insightful use of technology is found within an organization helping women who are with child, and considering the option of abortion. The organization www.OptionLine.org developed an instant messaging (IM) program for its website so young women could text message with counselors. If the reader is not aware, text or instant messaging is a method of using a keyboard to type and send a message instantly to another person's screen. That person may then reply back, and a conversation by typing occurs. Two key points about IM is that one, it is used extensively by youth in today's culture, and two, it can be done in an anonymous manner. Both of these points were keys to OptionLine deciding to try an IM counseling option. Youth routinely use IM in their daily lives, and this feature is a normal extension of how they communicate in life with other people. The anonymous nature makes it easier for young girls to contact them for help. Often the IM conversations are short and take less time than it might for the young girl to look up the phone number. The following responses (quoted in a WorldNetDaily webpage article of Jan 27 2007) by a young woman express how strongly this new method works for her generation:

"I think this is so awesome we can IM someone about this thanks!"
"You Rock!"
"thanks so much this has been so convenient for me and you have answered all my Q's!!! who ever came up w/this idea is brilliant!!!"
"ur a blessing!"

(The reader should note that IM often uses a spelling method to reduce keystrokes, and is more phonetic in nature, to save time)

These are examples of how Christians may use different types of technology to serve the kingdom. There are limitations and there are dangers; however, one should not ignore the advantages and the opportunities that are available to the church. When technology is a servant, it is a powerful tool.

The heart of the matter – the most important response

If there is one most important response Anabaptists (and Christians in general) need, it is to consider the heart of the matter. The author believes one principle from Proverbs is the key in relating to technology:

> Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. (Prov 4:23)

This is really the crux of the issue. If one's heart is not kept safe from evil and harm, it will lead to enormous problems in life. Nearly all the disadvantages, the dangers and the problems associated with misuse of technology are caused by not being diligent to keep one's heart safe. It is for this reason one must apply appropriate safeguards and restrictions, given the weakness in the human heart. With one's very spiritual life at stake, there is little room for error. Misuses of technology have led many brethren down paths of pornography, gambling, time-wasting (this seems like a small item, but since time and life are gifts of God, does one dare misuse large quantities of it?), endless internet debates and discussions (when not moderated for appropriate time use), and other ends of either no eternal value or much harm.

And so it is that one can see the problematic quandary Anabaptists are faced with today. Anabaptists have controlled the world's influence by controlling the *amount* and *types* of technology available to members. This method has rapidly become outdated as technologies merge and they deliver content via almost every device within one's grasp. Technology is desirable to use if it meets the servant criteria in one's life; it is also dangerous if not regulated properly because disastrous results come from uncontrolled use. Furthermore, it fractures and divides brethren who see different sides of the issue and often do not understand the fears and concerns of those who think differently.

The future of Anabaptists and technology – what should be pursued?

To understand what path Anabaptists should consider pursuing, one needs to review the plan God made for His church and see what goals He has established for us. Only then can we evaluate the technology itself, and proper responses to it.

The author did not grow up in a Mennonite background or home. In his early 40's, he and his family moved over to the Anabaptist life after many years in fundamental and conservative Baptist circles. In the course of reading Anabaptist history, the author found this insightful view from John C. Wenger:

> In the chapter, "Recapturing the Anabaptist Vision," it was pointed out that the Mennonite Church has never entirely recovered the original evangelistic zeal of Anabaptism. *There has been a tendency to substitute a quiet inner piety for an aggressive spirit which personally assumes the obligations of Christian discipleship in the face of a hostile world.* This has been the most serious liability of modern Mennonitism and it is still not entirely overcome. It manifests itself in an unwillingness to pay the price of following resolutely the New Testament ethic … as well as in catering to modern movements which are entirely foreign to the genius of Anabaptism. …. If the Mennonite Church wishes to regain its power it must recapture the Anabaptist vision of the cross of the Christian and of making disciples of all the nations. (Wenger, John C., Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine, p 196, Herald Press, copyright 1947 & 1959; emphasis original)

Though the quiet inner piety has much to speak in its favor, the loss of engaging the world has been a great loss for Anabaptism. It is clear from history the early Anabaptists were committed to spreading the gospel

and engaging the world in a discourse about real Christianity. In doing so, they lived non-conforming lives and set aside everything for the cause of the gospel. The founders of Anabaptism understood the Great Commission and seriously undertook steps to fulfill it in the 1500's.

The author asks this question of the readers: is the current Anabaptist church committed to pursuing the same goals as the early pioneers? And is the current Anabaptist church willing to use, where appropriate, current and modern technology where it aids in reaching the world for the Lord? Is the church willing to be aggressive in spirit, as J.C. Wenger describes, to preach repentance and discipleship to the world, and using tools the world is receptive to using (i.e., technology)?

That aggressive spirit mentioned by Wenger in confronting the world in its sin and rebellion against God seems to part of the character the church is to display as seen in the New Testament: "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18); "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). There is a sense in verses such as these that the church is not to be in retreat but in a forward moving direction to challenge the world and to maintain what was delivered to us by Jesus Christ and the apostles. As such, modern technology is and can be properly subject to the church for the advancement of the gospel.

But since technology has some dangers it can bring, how should churches respond to it? How should it be used? What should church leaders be doing in this difficult area?

Some suggestions have already been made in this paper: keeping technology as a servant; avoiding active (inappropriate content) and passive (time diversion) concerns and issues; finding methods to use technology to bless one's spiritual life, and to spread the gospel to this world; and above all keeping our heart with diligence.

At this point, it is also wise to reiterate and consider the issue of brotherhood divisiveness. There is an extreme need for brotherhoods to be in true fellowship and love when difficult issues such as this one arise. Any existing weaknesses are likely to surface due to this issue. To pursue a course of discussion, and thought, and planning in this subject will require the utmost care, respect and love accorded to all the brethren. Above all, the goal of the church – making disciples of all nations – must be kept in perspective during these conversations. How will a particular decision affect all the brethren? How will it affect the witness to the lost? Will some grave danger enter the church? Or will the world increasingly see the Anabaptist church as a quaint, interesting group but irrelevant to the issues of the modern world? The author does not believe that there is a single answer or course that every church should adopt; most churches will be somewhat unique in their approaches to these questions. Some churches will be comfortable with technology and adapt to it with appropriate safeguards; others may need to remain farther away from it for the sake of the brethren. However, the fears and concerns of all the brethren must be carefully addressed and understood. And there must be room for everyone to grow in this area as dialogue is held.

The issue of church leaders and technology is one other weakness the Anabaptist church has not fully addressed. In the book A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 by Phillip Keller, Keller describes the process a shepherd uses to prepare the feeding area for his sheep. Prior to sending sheep out to graze, a shepherd must make survey trips over the intended grazing areas to determine the amount of grazing to be done, to find resting areas that are suited for the sheep, to lay out mineral and salt supplies, and to search and remove any poisonous weeds which can kill the sheep. In short, the shepherd must first survey and prepare the area for his sheep.

How many church leaders in Anabaptism today have actually performed this role of a detailed search and survey of the land? If the area of technology is not only full of potential, but also danger, have the leaders been sufficiently responsible to make the land usable for the flock? The simplest way people approach issues such as this is to avoid them, because it is hard work to perform the due diligence called for by the task. Yet do leaders fulfill the will of the Lord, the Head of the Church, in setting a tone of the aggressive spirit to challenge the world with the gospel of the King, in the way the world will be most apt to hear?

These words and challenges are not meant to be another word of criticism and burden to leaders, but an honest challenge and a call for an assessment of leading the flock in this age.

Further, parents have a responsibility in this area similar to church leaders. It is a common theme to humor ourselves in America with stories of children being far more proficient in technology than parents and grandparents. How will parents and grandparents lead children by example and wisdom if they choose to ignore the technology their children will be forced to use when they mature? Have parents been truly responsible in teaching children if the children have not been taught proper usage and that by a right example? Children are by nature curious; if we simply use the method "don't touch; avoid this" when their contemporaries are fluent in such tools, how prepared will they be upon adulthood to interact with the world and have appropriate discipline?

To this end, the author decided his children needed to understand the technology of iPods and MP3 players, and to be able to use them in an appropriate manner. Therefore the author purchased an iPod and first learned how to use it, and then how to find what content was available for it, and how that content can be accessed. With this information, the author then led his children into the prepared tableland of this technology world, and they are blessed with the benefits of the technology while the dangerous areas are controlled and regulated. This has removed much of the curious desires, and they are no longer as enamored with the new technology.

In a brotherhood, perhaps not all members are capable of performing this level of investigation. However, there should be members who are, and a sharing of knowledge and wisdom is certainly appropriate. With the basic principle of preparing a safe tableland for children to learn and feed upon, this should be a priority for leaders and parents in any church – at whatever level of technology usage the church decides to pursue.

Concluding thoughts

This paper has not been written to cause dissension and division within the churches. Rather, it is meant to serve as a call to examine within, to carefully enquire of the Lord for His plan and purpose in each local assembly and in love to come together and discuss how each body is to carry out the Great Commission in this age. The churches must examine these issues and make a **conscious** decision of what to do. The churches must be careful not to become irrelevant to the modern world for reasons of tradition. Any decision to remove technology must and should be a carefully considered decision. And churches must also be careful not to introduce worldliness and materialism through technology, and subvert pure hearts devoted to serving Christ, through either outright evil or passive distractions.

Churches must also be sensitive that such discussions are very likely going to reveal weaknesses in the brotherhoods. These should not be shied away from, but rather approached carefully and lovingly. Long held fears and concerns are likely to surface. If these are appropriately dealt with, a far stronger brotherhood can result. Prayer and brokenness as a group will be the keys to moving forward together.

May God be glorified in His church, and may we be careful to walk circumspectly in this world, while yet attacking the strongholds of Satan with the glorious gospel of God. To Him alone be the glory, now and forever!