

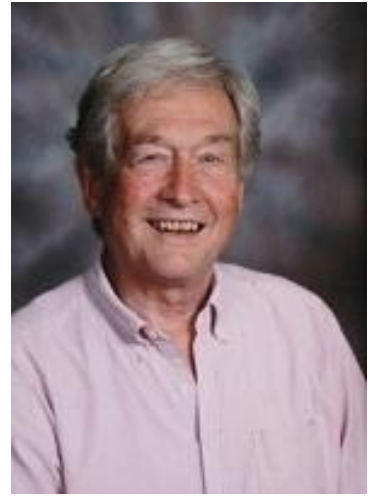
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HIGH TECH? or LOW TECH? The Case for Primary Experience

1 What's wrong with this picture?

2 You're attending a service of Christian worship, Holy Communion. Presiding Minister (PM) and Assisting Minister (AM) stand side by side at their seats during the Gathering Song. Then the PM, alone, steps forward to begin worship. She holds an electronic Tablet or i-Pad in her left hand, extends her right hand in Greeting. She reads the Apostolic Greeting from her Tablet, then reads the Prayer of the Day from her Tablet, her right hand attempting a kind of half-*orans*, then retreats to her seat.

3 What's wrong? Several things.

4 First: She should have long since memorized that Apostolic Greeting. Surely that brief exchange between pastor and people should not burden anyone's memory. In every parish, that Apostolic Greeting – a splendid recapitulation of the entire Gospel! – should not have to be read from a text. Same with the Blessing at the conclusion of worship. These moments in Christian worship should come across, to everyone present, as supremely personal and heart-felt. To have to read them from a text takes all the vibrant life out of these wonderful liturgical exchanges.

5 I've even attended a service of worship where the PM had committed to memory the words of the Prayer of the Day. I'm not suggesting that's an every-Sunday necessity, like the Greeting and the Blessing. But it was a deeply meaningful moment in corporate worship that registered significantly with every person present, you can be certain.

6 Second: She should use her AM to hold her text so she can manage a graceful *orans*. Pastors should never attempt a half-*orans*, holding a text in one hand and lifting the other in prayer. A graceful *orans* requires both hands. See Essay 197 above, paragraph 21. If you must read from a text, use both hands to hold it, and forget about attempting any *orans*. There's a persuasive, practical reason why that AM is necessary: He's standing at your side and holding your text, so you can use both hands to pray. Not one hand.

7 Third: The AM is there furthermore as a visual reminder to all present of the Priesthood of All Believers. The PM in catholic tradition is always a specially educated, called, and ordained person. The AM, on the other hand, is importantly not ordained, but lay. No service of Holy Communion is properly led without both: clergy and lay, in alternating roles of leadership as worship runs its course. Lay will wait upon clergy; clergy, in due course, will wait upon lay.

8 Fourth: That Tablet? That i-Pad? I'll argue there's no place for High Technology in Christian worship. See Essay 193 above. Christian worship demands Low Tech. Life-changing Christian worship calls forth Primary Experience. Thrives, prospers, only within the constraints of Primary Experience. Hear me out.

9 Yes, a bound book with paper pages is a technology. So is a candle. They're both Low Tech. So I hear you protesting: You're saying it's OK to use Low Tech but not High Tech in worship? In a word: Yes. That is correct. That's my argument.

10 Essay 193 above spells out some arguments against High Tech in worship, especially in the use of projectors, screens, and even Public Address systems – what might be called High Tech's corporate use. Let me extend the focus of that argument, in this posting, to include now also what might be called High Tech's personal use: Electronic Tablets and i-Pads owned – and used in worship – by worship leaders.

11 First: Low Tech feeds the human spirit. High Tech does not. I've spent a lifetime bemoaning the baleful influence of High Tech in human life, at least in the West. We are allowing ourselves to become slaves to our Technology. We are allowing High Tech to remove us farther and farther from what's authentic, what's human, what's real, what's true. High Tech does that, all the time. Low Tech does not. Low Tech – primary experience – nourishes our souls.

12 An example: Why do worshippers get all teary-eyed at a typical Christmas Eve Candle Light Service? It's because – for once in our High Tech saturated world – we're participating in a Low Tech event. We're caught up in Primary Experience.

13 I've spent a lifetime arguing this as well. Christian Worship is a post-literate, Low Tech, communal event. It thrives on Primary Experience. The best Christian worship will not even need books! Even the hymns will be call and response. Or lined out by a leader. Only worship leaders may be expected to be literate.

14 Second: An ethical argument, related to the first: High Tech is fraudulent: An electronic Tablet, an i-Pad, is a Virtual book. (A voice over a mic and speaker is a Virtual voice.) Sure, a Tablet or i-Pad is an incredible piece of machinery: It can include the entire contents of our hymnal, plus the entire contents of our Bible! But it's still fake. A phoney. It's Virtual, not Real. Could you tolerate fake candles on your altar Table? Fake flowers in the chancel?

15 I don't want anything Fake in my worship. I want only the Authentic. It's a moral issue. I don't want the Virtual. I want the Real.

16 Don't get me wrong. I admire High Tech. And I have to admit High Tech has made our lives – at least in the West – easier, more comfortable, more efficient, less labourious, even healthier. It can accomplish miracles, in almost every field of human endeavour, from manufacturing to medicine to moon shots.

17 No question: High Tech makes human life easier. But less real. Christians of all people should be aware that High Tech has serious limits and liabilities. We must not allow our own machines to enslave us.

18 Christians should always be aware of what our cult – our worship – is endorsing and sustaining and celebrating on a Sunday morning. Most often non-verbally. Is a life surrounded by High Tech, dependent on High Tech, enslaved by High Tech, really the signal we should be sending in our worship? In a word: "What are we cultivating in our cult?" Among the splendid values of Christian worship is its counter-cultural witness.

19 I'm arguing here that Christian worship should constitute an hour's refuge from the excesses of High Tech in human life.

20 Third: An electronic Tablet or i-Pad is an expensive piece of gadgetry. To buy one will set you back a bundle. So for a worship leader to use one in worship can become an offense to the poor. It's similar to a worship leader's sporting a high-end wrist watch, or wearing expensive jewellery. It's similar to the unseemly sight of a Christian pastor driving a *Lamborghini*.

21 Our assemblies should always include generous populations of the poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized: "the least, the lost and the last". If they don't – if the poor are not among us on Sunday morning – then we're simply not a catholic congregation. We're not gathering the people Jesus gathered. So both PM and AM should be aware of not deliberately offending these brothers and sisters in Christ.

22 All worship leaders, every Sunday, should be conscious of the signals they're sending – even non-verbally. By the very clothes they put on, the very adornments they wear. Or the cars they drive. Or the gadgets they carry.

23 I suppose, once again, I'm in the minority among contemporary Christians on this issue. You'll hear the argument "Using High Tech in worship is simply using our day's technology, the way other generations have used their technology. It's just a matter of Getting With the Program."

24 But I'll stay with my thesis: High Technology does not belong among us in worship. And other, smarter and more articulate culture critics than I will argue the same. It's likely you've just never run across them.

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