

Foreword

“IT IS THE BLACK HOLE OF THE DIGITAL AGE,” DECLARE MATT RICHTEL and Ashlee Vance.¹ This “black hole” is the three minutes it takes for a PC to boot up when it is turned on. “To an information-addicted society” that cannot tolerate “even a moment of downtime,” these three minutes have been the focus of intense frustration for millions of people.

What is the source of this frustration? It has been created by the technology industry with its constant drumbeat for ever-faster response. Each innovation raises our expectations, setting the stage for another round of innovation that will shave a few more seconds off the time it takes to do a task. “Our brains have become impatient with the boot-up process,” according to Dr. Gary Small at UCLA.² “We have been spoiled by the hand-held devices.” These technological changes have penetrated our culture deeply and pervasively.

The PC manufacturers have been hard at work to solve this problem, and in 2008 new technology was introduced that promised to reduce the boot up process to a matter of seconds. Millions of people are poised to purchase the new technology promising to get rid of this “black hole.”

This parable throws light on a defining dynamic of modern culture. Late modernity has become a culture obsessed with abolishing anything that stands in the way of instant gratification. It can be traced back to the emergence of modern technology. Initially, the focus was on tools that would help lighten the load of backbreaking work. Later, a new selling point was introduced. New products were touted as “labor-saving devices.” Now we praise those who are able to multi-task.

The irony is that we are so bedazzled by each new technology that we fail to reflect on what all these “labor-saving” devices have actually

1. “In a New Age of Impatience, Cutting Computer Start Time,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2008: A1. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/26/technology/26boot.html>.

2. Ibid.

done to the pace and quality of life. For several decades therapists have been noticing psychological disorders that stem from the stress people living in technological culture must cope with. One term for this syndrome is “hurry sickness.” Modern scientific culture continues to impress with its ability to produce a range of new technologies. While we struggle to cope with our “nano-second” lifestyle, we cannot face the prospect of technological obsolescence. We are reluctant to face up to this paradox.

For more than three decades Dr. Paul Jensen has been working with students, pastors, missionaries, and lay people to help them cultivate spiritual practices. He has observed that unless we pay attention to the cultural forces that shape and determine how we live, we will not understand which practices are appropriate and how or why they are effective. Traditional cultures had a strong sense of time and space. The one supported the other, thereby providing a structure for the way people lived.

Modernity has collapsed space and time. Each is nothing more than a factor of production—something to be exploited, consumed, and discarded. Our hurried lifestyle represents a heroic effort to get rid of both time and space, for these represent resistances to instant self-gratification.

In this book Dr. Jensen breaks new ground in three important ways. *First, he relates the theme of spirituality in a fundamental way to modernity/postmodernity. Second, he canvasses the history of culture and the spiritual practices of Jesus Christ, the early church, and contemporary Christians, to establish patterns and models from which we can learn.* Much can be gleaned from the spiritual practices developed in other ages and cultures. *Third, this book offers a challenging proposal to Christian disciples committed to living faithfully in contemporary culture.* If we are to think clearly and constructively about how we can avoid being co-opted by the powers that work against our total wellbeing—physical, psychological, social, and spiritual—we must understand the powerful dynamics of modernity. The goal of this subversive action is nothing less than to create time and space for the disciple to be in God’s presence in solitude and community, as modeled by Jesus Christ, and there be ministered to by God’s Spirit. This is urgently needed not only to sustain our personal discipleship but as the foundation for our engagement with the world.

Every generation needs to hear the ancient command, “Be still, and know that I am God!” (Ps 46:10a). This seems to be an especially desperate need in the over-stressed culture of late modernity. Paul Jensen invites—indeed urges—us to live against the grain of the world for the sake of the world.

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