

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***



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# Features of Human Anatomy: Marshall McLuhan on Technology in the Global Village

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**Abstract:** Technology is reshaping our individual human experience and wider society on a near daily basis. An interesting, and useful, source through which we can examine these changes is Marshall McLuhan. In particular, his famous phrases “The Medium is the Message” and “The Global Village” can illuminate both our inseparability from technology alongside the deep extent to which various technologies shape us and our world far more than we often realize. The gift of this point of view is a deeper awareness of pervasiveness and ongoing influence of technology, which raises many dangers, challenges, and opportunities for the Church.

In our current cultural climate, unanimity is perhaps more mythical than a unicorn, especially when it comes to political matters. So it was surprising that in 2013 the Supreme Court unanimously ruled to extend the protection from unreasonable search contained within the Fourth Amendment to cell phones and smartphones. The court’s opinion, written by Chief Justice Roberts, states that such devices “are now such a pervasive and insistent part of daily life that the proverbial visitor from Mars might conclude they were an important feature of human anatomy.”<sup>1</sup> As we shall seek to explore, Chief Justice Robert’s words about the mythical Martian’s observations are indeed not far from the mark.

(Herbert) Marshal McLuhan did not live to see the age of the cell phone.<sup>2</sup> Born in 1911, McLuhan studied at the University of Manitoba and received a PhD from Cambridge University. He converted to Catholicism as an adult, though he rarely made direct theological statements in his public works.<sup>3</sup> He held positions at several Catholic universities before settling at the St. Michael’s College, part of the University of Toronto. He died in 1980. He was deeply influenced by a fellow Canadian, Harold Innis,<sup>4</sup> the writings of James Joyce,<sup>5</sup> and taught Father Walter Ong, whose subsequent work explored many of McLuhan’s concerns and interests.<sup>6</sup> McLuhan’s technical area of study and teaching was literature, but his work defied such tight categorization; he explored widely and commented upon all manner of

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issues: history, economics, marketing, war, education, and above all else, technologies or, as he preferred to call them, “mediums.” In his prime, McLuhan was both praised as the “oracle of the electronic age” and derided by many of his scholarly peers as a charlatan.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, this was partly due to the fame he enjoyed during the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Also his style, which was aphoristic and generalized rather than systematic and detailed, annoyed many, as did his penchant for mercurial statements.<sup>9</sup> By the end of his life, the spotlight had moved on and it seemed that McLuhan’s fifteen minutes of fame had passed.<sup>10</sup>

Over the past two decades, though, McLuhan’s thoughts and musing upon technology (which he interchangeably called “medium” or “media,” a convention that will be observed throughout this paper) and its effects upon humanity have come to enjoy a renewed attention and appreciation.<sup>11</sup> He was anointed the “patron saint” of *Wired* magazine in the 1990s,<sup>12</sup> and many argue that McLuhan foresaw the coming of the Internet decades before its arrival.<sup>13</sup> He had a keen sense that Western society was undergoing a gigantic transition between two ages, moving from the “mechanic” age of the past into the “electric age” of the present and future. One of his books began with the following:

The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring pattern of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically everything we thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to “others.” And they’re changing dramatically.<sup>14</sup>

Many continue to feel the prescience of these words and are likewise drawn to McLuhan’s insights into the new world that seemingly continues to confront and confound us daily.

McLuhan’s influence lives on particularly through his famous maxims. One of the most well-known is the phrase “the global village” (to which we will later return).<sup>15</sup> But, by far, McLuhan’s most commonly known, and commonly misunderstood, insight is his famous quip “the medium is the message.”<sup>16</sup> This phrase first appeared in his book *Understanding Media* and, once coined, was often adapted in various forms and also applied in a variety of ways.<sup>17</sup> This multiplicity has not helped shake the perception that McLuhan seems to be saying, bluntly, that content is irrelevant. Yet this is not

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the case!<sup>18</sup> Rather, with this pithy phrase, McLuhan sought fundamentally to draw attention to what he felt was chronically and routinely ignored: the importance and effect of mediums (technologies) themselves, irrespective of the content they are conveying.<sup>19</sup> This is the simplest, and most often missed, meaning of the maxim: Look at the frame not just the picture, or, more precisely, look at the impact of the frame itself.<sup>20</sup> Paying close attention to the effect of technologies themselves led McLuhan to gain at least four insights into the effects of technology that we shall briefly examine before turning toward his explorations of the “electric age” in “the global village.”

### **Mediums Matter: Media Affects Content**

The classic example of the first implications of “the medium is the message” is the debate between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy in 1960. The story goes that those listening to the radio thought that Nixon had won the day while those watching the debate on television perceived Kennedy to be the winner.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the medium through which the debate was observed had an effect on the content of the debate and its interpretation.

“Any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary” McLuhan warned.<sup>22</sup> People often use technologies obliviously or assume that different mediums are interchangeable in a one for one manner. Nothing could be further from reality.<sup>23</sup> TV is different from radio, the written manuscript is different from the printed book,<sup>24</sup> the airplane is different from the cruise ship.<sup>25</sup> Each medium has its own rules and “grammars” of form and interpretation that it imposes upon its content.

### **Opening Our Eyes: Any Content Is Itself a Medium**

McLuhan would push his fundamental insight further. It is not just that the medium affects content, but that, ultimately, “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium.”<sup>26</sup> As he put it, “the content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph.”<sup>27</sup> In this musing is a key lesson that McLuhan offers: technology is all around us, hiding in things that we have long ago ceased to think of as “technological.” As the initial novelty of any new technology wears off, it becomes “part of the furniture” as it were, just “the way things have always been.” In slipping from our attention, we fail to see how deeply technological our lives already are, even as we, perhaps, lament the latest “new” thing. For McLuhan, the idea of returning to a pre-technological world is beyond impossible—it is inconceivable. Even those who forsake the latest

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technologies (whatever they may be) still depend upon clothing, shelter, the wheel, and some form of language itself,<sup>28</sup> all of which are, in McLuhan's analysis, mediums in and of themselves.

### **Getting Personal: Technology Changes Humanity**

We are now in a position to take McLuhan's catchphrase a deeper still, as McLuhan the media critic becomes McLuhan the anthropologist. McLuhan argued that mediums not only shape content but also have deep impact upon their human users. This notion is most clearly seen in the subtitle of McLuhan's 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*.<sup>29</sup> For McLuhan, each new medium that human beings invent and utilize is nothing but an extension of humanity in a literal sense. In other words, for McLuhan all technology is a part that is added humanity to enlarge or prolong it.<sup>30</sup> He offered simple illustrations of this thesis: clothes are an extension of the human skin, the wheel is an extension of the human foot, weapons are the extension of the human fist.<sup>31</sup> As the human person is extended, his human experience changes: "Any technology tends to create a new human environment . . . technological environments are not merely passive containers of people but are active processes that reshape people and other technologies alike."<sup>32</sup>

With this in mind, we can see that Chief Justice Robert's observation of the cell phone's being "an important feature of human anatomy" is a deeply "McLuhanian" statement. The smartphone extends our voice through its microphone, our hearing through its speakers, our eyes through its camera, and our brains through its memory and circuitry. Leaving aside discussions of transhumanism, McLuhan challenges us to realize that technology is not simply something exterior to our humanity, but an interior, central, and inescapable part of it.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the most popular and less cryptic translation of "the medium is the message" is this: "We shape our tools, and our tools shape us."<sup>34</sup> This recognition, or at least the feeling of its effects, has led many to reject or revolt against different technologies throughout history. McLuhan was keenly aware of this and did warn against the mindless adoption of technology: "We are all robots when uncritically involved with our technologies."<sup>35</sup> Yet McLuhan was no Luddite.<sup>36</sup> His prescription was not retreat, but rather intentional understanding of technologies and their effects, which he thought could lead to more enlightened use of technology itself. His clearest statement of this prescription came in an interview in which he claimed that "the central purpose of all

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my work is to convey this message, that by understanding media as they extend man, we gain a measure of control over them.”<sup>37</sup> This “measure of control,” in McLuhan’s view, was not just personal, but also meant to be societal.

### Going Global: Mediums Change Societies

Ultimately, McLuhan used “the medium is the message” to become a cultural anthropologist. Just as each unique medium changes the individual human experience, so it also collectively alters the human culture that it inhabits. “When technology extends one of our senses, a new translation of culture occurs swiftly as the new technology” is adopted.<sup>38</sup> It was this thesis that allowed McLuhan the widest possible latitude in his explorations. He argued that the phonetic alphabet gave its users a vast advantage over cultures that employed pictorial or hieroglyphic writing systems.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, he argued that the printing press was the harbinger of the industrial revolution and led to the homogeneous and standardized cultures that had their zenith in the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> To put it simply, our technologies shape our sense of our world, our expectations, hopes, and fears, who we are as individuals and how we

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live together as a people. He states this most clearly, and most expansively, in his book *The Medium is the Massage* (which, teasingly, tells the point—the medium is the “mass age”): “All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered.”<sup>41</sup>

Now that we have seen the extent to which McLuhan promoted his most famous insight, as it relates to content all the way to societal structures, we are in a better position to explore the insights that he offered about the new human experience and cultural experience that our latest technologies are bringing forth.

### Toward the “Electric Age” in “The Global Village”

As noted above, McLuhan had a keen sense that humanity was undergoing a massive transition from mechanistic toward electronic technologies, or what he termed “the electric age.”<sup>42</sup> Fundamentally for McLuhan, electronic technology was an extension of nothing else than the human central nervous system, that is, of the human brain:

The Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we have extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric

technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time so far as our planet is concerned.<sup>43</sup>

For McLuhan, electric technologies have the ability of virtually transporting the brain to every corner of the globe or, we might even say today, the universe. Humanity now has the ability to become, in a sense, “disincarnated.” Once man is freed from the restrictions of the body, of time, and of space, McLuhan saw that everything in the electric age occurs at the speed of NOW. To use his exact words, there is an “all-at-onceness” in the electric age.<sup>44</sup> As a result, the electric age is one in which old barriers, such as time, space, borders, and long-established social divisions and norms, collapse with regularity and, for some, alarming speed.<sup>45</sup>

Here we can return to McLuhan’s notion of “the global village,” a catchphrase McLuhan used to expose and explore the shrinking of the world by electric technologies.<sup>46</sup> Whereas McLuhan thought that the mechanistic age was one of independence, the dawning electric age was the reverse, one of ever-increasing interconnectedness.<sup>47</sup> McLuhan put it this way: “[I]n the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to include us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action.”<sup>48</sup> We see this reality daily in our news cycles and in our globalized economy, but perhaps even more in the extent to which human politics, institutions, and thinking have turned, on the one hand, toward global problems with attendant quests for “global” solutions<sup>49</sup> and, on the other hand, to ever more specific attention upon marginal or esoteric groups and ideas.<sup>50</sup>

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An image that McLuhan used to describe the new situation of humanity was that of the nomad and the tribe. “Man the food-gatherer reappears incongruously as information-gatherer. In this role, electronic man is no less a nomad than his Paleolithic ancestor.”<sup>51</sup> Inherent in this description is McLuhan’s idea that all new technologies are essentially disruptive, breaking apart our previous ways of being. In McLuhan’s view, the mechanistic age and its mediums formed people who were individualistic, nationalistic, and isolated—people, in other words, who had broken away from the “tribal” groupings that characterize most oral societies.<sup>52</sup> Now, though, electric technology was disrupting the certainties of the mechanistic age, and humanity was undergoing a vast rebalancing. McLuhan argued that this process would be inherently violent, since people would have to redefine themselves in the midst of all-at-onceness change.<sup>53</sup> He noted that “discarnate man, deprived of his physical body, is also deprived of his relationship to natural law and physical law . . . [and] identity.”<sup>54</sup> In their quest for a new identity, McLuhan thought that information

nomads would variously band together, forming “a new state of multitudinous tribal existences.”<sup>55</sup>

Thus “the global village,” in McLuhan’s estimation at least, is not necessarily a peaceful place of tribal harmony. It is a rather place of “terror.”<sup>56</sup> First, this is because “terror is the normal state of any oral [tribal] society, for in it everything affects everything all the time.”<sup>57</sup> Everything, from an economic downturn in one country to a war in another, could unsettle or endanger everyone else. In the electric age, there seems to be no escape from this. Second, McLuhan simply observed that “when people get close together, they get more and more savage and impatient with each other.”<sup>58</sup> Proximity, in a broken world at least, is no guarantee of peace. The divisiveness and outright violence that fills much political and civil discourse these days, in McLuhan’s framework, is rooted in technologies that are inevitably shrinking the size of our world and increasingly granting us the opportunity of disagreement.

Finally, McLuhan was also quick to foresee one of the chief concerns of the electric age that is being realized in our time: continuous surveillance.<sup>59</sup> In one of his writings, he even went so far as to frame this problem in theological language:

Electrical information devices for universal, tyrannical womb-to-tomb surveillance are causing a very serious dilemma between our claim to privacy and the community’s need to know. The older, traditional ideas of private, isolated thoughts and actions—the patterns of mechanistic technologies—are very seriously threatened by new methods of instantaneous electric information retrieval, by the electrically computerized dossier bank—that one big gossip column that is unforgiving, unforgetful and from which there is no redemption, no erasure of early “mistakes.”<sup>60</sup>

Whether by government or private firms seeking economic gain, electronic technology gives outside powers direct access precisely to what is most interior to us—our central nervous systems, and by extension, our inmost thoughts.<sup>61</sup> This affects not only privacy, as McLuhan notes, but also how we now socially express our moral judgments as a society. To put it bluntly: The public stockade is back; only this time, when you do wrong (which we will all do, at some point) you are on display in front of the whole global village.<sup>62</sup>

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## Reflections

McLuhan’s insights offer a way of seeing technology that, though contestable in its broad generalizations and lack of detail, is

inherently useful.<sup>63</sup> The gift of his point of view is a deeper awareness of pervasiveness and ongoing influence of technology upon the human person and society. It is precisely in the mundaneness, or returning to Chief Justice Robert's words, in the "pervasive and insistent part" that technology plays in all our lives that blinds us to the deeper ways in which it shapes our human experience. McLuhan seeks to open our eyes toward this because he believes ignorance of this reality is ultimately destructive.<sup>64</sup> Yet he does not counsel retreat in the face of technology, but rather intentional awareness leading to a deeper understanding that in turn results in more thoughtful engagement with technology.

Surprisingly, given the many concerns he had about "the global village," McLuhan could in turn be hopeful about the "electric age."<sup>65</sup> At the same time, he warns us toward a deep sense of humility in the extent of our understanding. He was fond of saying "we see through the rear view mirror. We walk backward into the future."<sup>66</sup> This humility was tied into McLuhan's evaluation of how far along we truly are into the "electric age." In the 1960s, he stated that, "We are today as far into the electric age as the Elizabethans had advanced into the typographical and mechanical age."<sup>67</sup> Certainly we may be further down the road, but I think McLuhan would say these are still early days. Far more is ahead of us. The time to think about it all is, of course, NOW.

How does reconciliation work in a world where our technologies make it ever harder to forgive or forget? What does forgiveness look like within a "global village," where our actions and therefore, inevitably, our sins impact not only those near to us but also our neighbors who just happen to live across the globe? How can the Christian community resist the violence that technological disruption tends people towards? How does the Church serve, teach, and gather the new "tribes" of our times around Christ? How does the Gospel speak into a world of "terror" and surveillance, where most people are consumed with worry, fear, and suspicion? Are Christians themselves too oblivious to the technologies that fill and shape their lives? What should the Church make of the "disincarnate man"?<sup>68</sup> These are some of the questions that McLuhan's work presents to the Church in this "electric age."

How can the Christian community resist the violence that technological disruption tends people towards?

These questions should perhaps spur Christians toward a deeper evaluation of what their own tradition has thought and said about technology, particularly within the Scriptures. McLuhan himself mentioned Psalm 115 in his public works and noted with eagerness that "the psalmist insists that the beholding of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them."<sup>69</sup> Like the people of the Old Testament, we, too, are prone to look towards technology as the source of our identity, security, and

meaning.<sup>70</sup> When we do so, our tools end up shaping and controlling us far more than we care to admit or are often even able to realize. There is truly nothing new under the sun. And yet, in McLuhan's estimation, clothes are a medium, and it was clothes that God provided to Adam and Eve in their broken state.<sup>71</sup> There is, it seems, a tension that must be held: when it comes to technology neither total (ignorant) embrace nor total (impossible) rejection can be embraced.

Finally, McLuhan's insights offer us a surprising, and hopeful, vantage point for deeper insight into the interaction of the Christian community as a whole with technology. Specifically, Lamin Sanneh's landmark work, *Translating the Message*, has drawn critical attention to the centrality of translation in the spreading of the Gospel.<sup>72</sup> With Marshall McLuhan's insights in view, we are in a position to expand upon this point. The Christian Church has and continues to demonstrate an extreme trust that the message of the Word can be translated not only into different languages but also into different mediums. From manuscript to print, from stained glass to spoken word, from Instagram to Internet, from radio to the big screen, the Word of the Lord continues to go forth. In so doing, Christians also demonstrate a tacit conviction that, as Robert Kolb has put it, "This medium, Jesus of Nazareth, is also the message itself."<sup>73</sup> What Kolb's brief insight ultimately offers the Church is a crucial beginning point for all reflections from a Christian perspective—namely that it is ultimately in Christ that all things hold together. While the change and disruption of new mediums naturally create fear, dread, and worry within people, Christians can forsake such reactions in the confidence that Christ has given through His promise that "and surely, I am with you always." Indeed, it is exactly this promise that has likely enabled the Church to continuously adopt and adapt technologies of all sorts in service of the unending message of Christ. Thus, rather than with apprehension and dread, Christians can engage the technological change confronting us today from a position of hope, excitement, and discovery.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Riley v California*. 573 U. S. 9 (2013).

<sup>2</sup> For a brief contemporary biographical sketch, see the introduction in Raymond Rosenthal ed., *McLuhan: Pro and Con* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 15–22. For full biographies, turn to Philip Manchard, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998) or W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). For a more recent treatment, see Douglas Coupland, *Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work* (New York: Atlas & Co. Publishers, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> After his death, McLuhan's son Eric published a series of letters, conversations, and private musings about faith and Christianity. See Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek eds., *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion by Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999). See also Gordon, 219–225.

<sup>4</sup> McLuhan called his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* nothing more than “a footnote of explanation” upon Innis's *Empire and Communication*. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (New York: New American Library, 1969 c. 1962), 65. [Hereafter *GG*].

<sup>5</sup> McLuhan declared that “*Finnegans Wake* is the greatest guidebook to media study ever fashioned by man.” See R. Pollack, “Understanding McLuhan,” *Newsweek*, February 28, 1966, 56.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> For a brief view of the varied reaction he received, see Richard Kostelantz, “Understanding McLuhan (In Part)” *New York Times Review of Books* (Jan. 29, 1967). Online archived version available: <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/mcluhan-magazine.html>. For an admittedly “hostile” critique, see Johnathan Miller, *Modern Masters: Marshall McLuhan*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: The Viking Press, 1971). See also the varied reaction in Rosenthal, *McLuhan: Pro and Con*.

<sup>8</sup> He had a cameo in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, a feat few academics have matched.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, in a collection of essays for and against his views, he began by stating: “I am an investigator. I make probes. I have no point of view. I do not stay in one position. . . . I DON'T EXPLAIN—I EXPLORE” [emphasis original]. See Gerald E. Stearn gen. ed., *McLuhan: Hot & Cold* (New York: New American Library, 1967), xii. It is also said that when one critic rejected his ideas he replied: “You don't like those ideas? I got others.”

<sup>10</sup> “The September 26, 1970 issue of *The New Yorker* ran a cartoon of a young woman saying to a man as they left a cocktail party, ‘Ashley, are you sure it's not too soon to go around parties saying, ‘Whatever happened to Marshall McLuhan?’” Manchard, 232.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Paul Levinson, *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Robert K. Logan, *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan* (New York: Peter Lange, 2010); and Adrian Athique, *Digital Media and Society: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013), Ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup> They wrote of him, “In the tumult of the digital revolution, McLuhan is relevant anew.” See Gary Wolf, “The Wisdom of Saint Marshall, the Holy Fool,” *Wired*, Jan. 1, 1996. Online archived version available: [http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.01/saint\\_marshall\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.01/saint_marshall_pr.html).

<sup>13</sup> “It is no extravagation to say that McLuhan also predicted the internet.” William F. Baker, “Fifty years in the Global Village”: Remembering Marshall McLuhan on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” *The Nation*, August 4, 2011: <https://www.thenation.com/article/fifty-years-global-village-remembering-marshall-mcluhan-his-100th-birthday/>.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967). This book is composed in a non-traditional format and has no assigned page numbers. As a result, all further quotations from it will hereafter be *MM*.

<sup>15</sup> A hint of the ideal first appears in *GG*, where McLuhan mused “the globe has contracted spatially, into a single large village” (262). The two-word phrase appears in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Cambridge, MA: 1994 c. 1964), “Our specialist and fragmented civilization of center-margin structure is suddenly experiencing an instantons reassembling of all its mechanized bits into an organic whole. This is the new world of the global village” (93). [Hereafter *UM*]. After this, McLuhan utilized the phrase liberally, both in book titles and his prose. See, for example, Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968). [Hereafter *WP*]. This phrase is certainly among the most fitting three-word summaries of our globalized age.

<sup>16</sup> *UM*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> “The medium is the message,” “the medium is the mass age,” and “the medium is the message” were all alternative ways that McLuhan expressed and explored the maxim.

<sup>18</sup> This idea was put to McLuhan most pointedly when an interviewer asked him if the content of Hitler’s speeches had meant nothing. McLuhan unequivocally stated that “By stressing that the medium is the message rather than the content, I’m not suggesting that content plays no role—merely that it plays a distinctly subordinate role.” See Eric Norden, “The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan,” *Playboy*, March 1969. Online archived version available: <http://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/spring07/mcluhan.pdf> [Hereafter *PI*].

<sup>19</sup> “Those who are concerned with the program ‘content’ of media and not with the medium proper, appear to be in the position of physicians who ignore the ‘syndrome of just being sick.’” *UM*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> This expression is adapted from John M. Culkin, SJ, “A Schoolman’s Guide to Marshall McLuhan,” Raymond Rosenthal ed., *McLuhan: Pro and Con* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 247.

<sup>21</sup> Kayla Webley, “How the Nixon-Kennedy Debate Changed the World,” *Time*, Sept. 23, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2021078,00.html>.

<sup>22</sup> *UM*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Many technology companies experienced this reality very recently, as they had to transition the websites they built for personal computers towards the technology of smartphones that many now use to access the Internet.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Eisenstein has demonstrated how print technology differs drastically from that of the manuscript. See, for example, Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> “The traveler now turns to the airways, and thereby ceases to experience the act of traveling.” *UM*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> *UM*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> “Each mother tongue teaches its users a way of seeing and feeling the world, and of acting in the world, that is quite unique.” *UM*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> “The personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.” *UM*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> “All human tools and technologies, whether house or wrench or clothing, alphabet or wheel, are direct extensions, either of the human body or our senses. Computers are extensions of our brains. As extensions of our bodies, tools and technologies give us new leverage and new intensity of perception and action.” Marshall McLuhan, Harley Parker, *Counterblast* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1969), 38. [Hereafter *CB*]

<sup>31</sup> *MM*.

<sup>32</sup> *GG*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> In McLuhan's thought, the means by which technology (extensions of humanity) reshape the human experience is through changing the balance of the human sensorium (taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight). Any technology tends to extend (that is, increase) some senses while suppressing or "numbing" others. For a simple example, consider that you went down the same road twice, but the first time you drove a car and the second time you rode a bike. In the car, you would depend heavily upon your visual sense to detect signs (speed limits, stops signs, yield signs), pedestrians, and above all else, other cars. On the bicycle, however, you would hear the pedestrians, feel the wind slowing your progress, and perhaps even smell nearby factories or restaurants. These two technologies would yield extremely different human experiences of the same piece of road.

<sup>34</sup> Contrary to many citations attributing these words to McLuhan himself, this phrase actually emerged from John Culkin's summary of McLuhan. He originally stated it as "We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us." Culkin, 248.

<sup>35</sup> *CB*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> "I see no possibility of a worldwide Luddite rebellion that will smash all machinery to bits, so we might as well sit back and see what is happening and what will happen to us in a cybernetic world. Resenting a new technology will not halt its progress." *PI*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> *GG*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> "No pictographic or ideograms or hieroglyphic mode of writing has the detribalizing power of the phonetic alphabet." *GG*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> "Printing was the first mechanization of an ancient handicraft and led easily to the further mechanization of all handicrafts." *GG*, 58.

<sup>41</sup> *MM*.

<sup>42</sup> "Today we live on the frontier between five centuries of mechanism and the new electronics, between the homogeneous and the simultaneous. It is painful but fruitful." *GG*, 172.

<sup>43</sup> *UM*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *GG*, 81. Cf. "Ours is a brand-new world of allatonce. 'Time' has ceased, 'space' has vanished. We now live in a global village . . . a simultaneous happening." *MM*.

<sup>45</sup> "Our electric extensions of ourselves simply by-pass space and time, and create problems of human involvement and organization for which there is no precedent." *UM*, 105. Cf. "With the extension of the nervous system itself as a new environment of electronic information, a new degree of critical awareness had become possible." *WP*, 20.

<sup>46</sup> "The effect of extending the central nervous system is not to create a world-wide city of every-expanding dimensions but rather a global village of ever-contracting size." *CB*, 40.

<sup>47</sup> "Our extended faculties and senses now constitute a single field of experience which demands that they become collectively conscious. Our technologies, like our private senses, now demand an interplay and ratio that makes rational co-existence possible. As long as our technologies were as slow as the wheel or the alphabet or money, the fact that they were separate, closed systems was socially and psychically supportable. This is not true now when sight and sound and movement are simultaneous and global in extent." *GG*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> *UM*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Consider McLuhan's description of the "TV child," whose horizons mirror that of the generation that is now called "digital natives": "You must remember that the TV child has been relentlessly exposed to all the 'adult' news of the modern world—war, racial discrimination, rioting, crime, inflation, sexual revolution. . . . He's been orbited through the TV screen into the astronaut's dance in space, been inundated by information transmitted via radio, telephone, films, recordings and other people." *PI*.

<sup>50</sup> “The shock of recognition! In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained—ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.” *MM*.

<sup>51</sup> *UM*, 283. Later on, he elaborates more: “Men are suddenly nomadic gatherers of knowledge, nomadic as ever before, informed as never before, free from fragmentary specialism as never before—but also involved in the total social process as never before; since with electricity we extend our central nervous systems globally, instantly interrelating every human experience.” *Ibid*, 358.

<sup>52</sup> “Printing the Bible in the 15th century meant religion without walls. But unexpectedly it raised the towering walls of vernacular nationalism and individualism, for print upset corporate and liturgical worship. Although printing was the first mass media, it isolated the reader and the student as ever before.” *CB*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> “The fantasy violence on TV is a reminder that the violence of the real world is much motivated by people questing for lost identity. . . . On the frontier everybody is a nobody, and therefore the frontier manifests the patterns of toughness and vigorous action on the part of those trying to find out who they are.” Marshal McLuhan, “A Last Look at the Tube” *New York Magazine*, March 17, 1978.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> *PI*. To see the foresight of this insight, consider a recent article from *The Economist* that explores the complexity of the “Melungeons,” a small ethnic group from Appalachia. The author notes that “Whereas formerly ‘Melungeon’ was a slur to be renounced, it has become an allegiance to be embraced. . . they are emblematic of a 21st-century urge to belong.” “Down in the Valley, Up on the Ridge: An American Mystery,” *The Economist*, August 27, 2016. This is but one of a thousand examples of (re)tribalization.

<sup>56</sup> “Uniformity and tranquility are not hallmarks of the global village; far more likely are conflict and discord as well as love and harmony—the customary life mode of any tribal people.” *PI*.

<sup>57</sup> *GG*, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Marshall McLuhan in an interview with Mike McManus, *The Mike McManus Show*, Television, TV Ontario, 1977.

<sup>59</sup> “As our senses have gone outside us, Big Brother goes inside.” *GG*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> *MM*.

<sup>61</sup> “Once we have surrendered our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don’t really have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common speech to a private corporation, or like giving the earth’s atmosphere to a company as a monopoly.” *UM*, 68.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Jon Ronson, *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> Considered Elizabeth Eisenstein’s nuanced treatment of McLuhan: “By making us more aware that both mind and society were affected by printing, McLuhan has performed, in my view at least, a most valuable service. But he has also glossed over multiple interactions that occurred under widely varying circumstances.” (Eisenstein, 129).

<sup>64</sup> This was McLuhan’s pinnacle concern. He warned: “there can only be disaster arising from unawareness of the causalities and effects inherent in our own technologies.” *GG*, 302.

<sup>65</sup> “Personally, I have a great faith in the resiliency and adaptability of man, and I tend to look to our tomorrows with a surge of excitement and hope. . . . We live in a transitional era of profound pain and tragic identity quest, but the agony of our age is the labor pain of rebirth.”

*PI*.

<sup>66</sup> *MM*.

<sup>67</sup> *GG*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> McLuhan expressed deep concern on this point toward the end of his life in a letter to Clare Boothe Luce. He stated, “Discarnate man is not compatible with an incarnate Church” (Gordon, 219).

<sup>69</sup> *UM*, 45. For a deeper explication of this theme and its centrality to the Old Testament in particular, see G. K. Beale, *We Become Like What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Just try taking a person’s cell phone away, even for a short time.

<sup>71</sup> Gn 3:21.

<sup>72</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 139.