

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY 199.3-9
ON HOLY CROSS SPIRITUALITY

by

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THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON HOLY CROSS SPIRITUALITY

One of the discoveries that surprised me in preparing this paper was the fact that our Founder, Father Moreau, was not only not opposed to technology, but was an active promoter of it. I thought that by going through the circular letters, I would find numerous references to technical innovation, and solemn warnings about the moral and spiritual dangers attached thereto. The absence of such caveats was curious and puzzling to me. I was almost ready to change the title around, and call it *THE IMPACT OF HOLY CROSS SPIRITUALITY ON TECHNOLOGY*. My surprise simply highlights my ignorance, after all these years, of the basic goals of Holy Cross.

Father Moreau was professor of dogmatic theology and then professor of Sacred Scripture at the major seminary of Saint Vincent in Le Mans until his departure from the seminary in 1836. In a short paper like this, there is no way to develop a record of the personal thought he put into his courses, and how concerned he was to be up to date on every publication of works of spirituality in terms of the teaching and formation that he gave. It would also be impossible to show how he tried to give a better general culture to the students of the major seminary. Catta judges this innovation thus: [A - 2]

Becoming aware of the demands that science would develop in the modern world and of the necessity of neglecting none of its conclusions even in the study of the sacred disciplines, Father Moreau had the truly new idea of opening the minds of his students to it. [A - 3]

After thinking about this paper over the past several months, it has occurred to me that technology has had a subtle impact on Holy Cross spirituality, and one that is not always easily discoverable. I conclude from a somewhat cursory reading of Father Moreau's letters, and others in positions of influence and authority, that, from the outset, Holy Cross embraced the technology of the place and time in which it found itself, and considered such to be evidence of God's gift to the world and was something to be used and developed with thanks and gratitude.

The definition of technology includes the following:

(Anthropology) Broadly, the body of knowledge available to a civilization that is of use in fashioning implements, practicing manual arts and skills, and extracting or collecting materials. [A - 1]

The little Holy Cross band that walked along the wharf at La Havre in August, 1841, was making use of technology in this anthropological sense. The missionaries, Father Sorin, Brother Vincent, Brother Joachim, Brother Lawrence and Brother Mary, and the novices, Brother Gatien and Brother Anselm were also employing technology in another sense:

The application of science, especially to industrial or commercial objectives...
the entire body of methods and materials used to achieve such objectives. [A - 1]

The sailing ship *IONIA*, on which they were to embark, was no doubt quite an improvement over the tiny caravels of Columbus, not only in size and comfort, but also in the techniques of navigation involving both instrumentation and knowledge of wind and ocean currents. The *IONIA* was a ocean-going packet ship, capable of carrying some 200 persons, in both cabin and steerage, plus a crew. The *IONIA* was a good sailor. Still it lingered for eight days in the English Channel, almost as if it were fearful of making the awesome decision to cross the formidable Atlantic.

I have often wondered what it must have been like to entrust one's life and fortune to the caprices of wind and sail. Once while wandering about the wharf in San Francisco, I observed a sailing ship tied up, which was advertised as the last of the sailing vessels designed to "round the Horn" in the pre-Panama Canal days. One could board the vessel and look around for a small fee, so I got aboard. . Eventually, I ended up the hold, the steerage, and began to wonder if the seven Holy Cross Missioners were confined to something like this for some thirty days, although they did have deck privileges aboard the *IONIA*. But thirty days on the surface of the heaving and tossing Atlantic! Thirty days!

In 1990 I attended the workshop given at the Solitude in Le Mans. A travel agent in Akron made the arrangements for the trip to Paris with almost effortless skill. He was, no doubt, well paid for his work, quite unlike Mr Dupont from Tours who prepared along with Father Moreau the first departure of Holy Cross missionaries for America. Mr Dupont, besides offering his experience of travel, dealt with the shipowners in Le Havre, negotiated conditions of the crossing, and made sure the Seven Missioners were properly installed in the steerage.

I paid for my passage using a bank credit card, a technological marvel from the financial industry bolstered by the omnipresent network of computers. There was no need to depend on the Associates of Saint Joseph, or that unknown, but wonderful lady, who put up a golden chair in a

lottery that raised fifteen hundred francs for the initial trip to America. And then came trouble for me from an unexpected source - modern high technology.

The plane which was to take me to New Jersey where I would board an over-seas flight to France sat on the tarmac in Cleveland for one, two hours with regular assurances from the Captain that we would be departing soon. Then three, four, five hours passed. No departure. Restless and angry passengers. Frustrated flight attendants. Finally, after six hours the Captain announced that the flight was canceled because the RADAR in New Jersey had been knocked out by an electrical storm. So we piled out of the plane into an airport terminal in chaos. How I wished then for some Mr. Dupont from Tours (or anywhere else) to set things straight. Eventually, about 24 hours later, the flight was rescheduled, the Radio Detecting And Ranging device was repaired, and we deplaned in Newark. Then, happily, we boarded a Boeing 747 for Europe. And then . . . we sat on the tarmac.

The Captain explained that we were just waiting our turn on the runway. I thought of Ogden Nash's comment about school graduation exercises, speakers, students, parents:

**The Month of June's upon us, and all throughout the land
The graduation speakers will tell us where we stand.
We stand at Armageddon in the vanguard of the press,
We're standing at the crossroads at the gateway to success,
In the midst of all this standing, we sit, and sit, and sit.**

I was angry, frustrated, but mostly I was tired, really tired after twenty four hours of waiting. And now this. I pulled a blanket over my head and fell asleep. I awoke to hear the Captain announcing that we were descending to Orley, and that we should fasten our seatbelts, make sure our papers were in order, etc, etc. Was it possible?! I had slept through the entire flight to Paris! It was, and I did. And it took my confreres on the first Holy Cross journey to America thirty days on a bouncing tub to make a trip of equal length?

My passage to France was a round trip ticket. I gave no thought whatever to the notion that I might not return within a few weeks. The Initial Seven had no hope of a possible return - if any. Of the seven, only two made a return journey. Brother Gatien left the Community in California, and, I think, returned to France where he died. The redoubtable Father Sorin made about fifty round trips. The modern jet airliner has been described as being to our age what the great cathedrals were to the

medieval ages of Europe. The Boeing 747 and other models of the jet passenger plane, came upon our times with such swiftness that it is difficult to imagine a time when such transportation was not available.

As I indicated above, Father Moreau and other major Superiors down to the present time had no objection to advancing technology. Tom Edison's electric light was no sooner invented than Father Sorin encircled Our Lady on the Golden Dome at Notre Dame du Lac with a string of incandescent lighting, just in time for an upcoming General Chapter. There were science museum exhibits on the Campus, and faculty members devoted to the study of science and its spinoffs in chemistry and aeronautics. In my day, the student Brothers were divided into "Science Students" and "Others". The science departments in our schools were prominent. However, something was happening in "my day" that indicates a characteristic of technology that leaves us confused when we realize what has taken place.

When the government (the Navy) took over Notre Dame in 1942 for the duration of WWII, the Campus was supplied with many foodstuffs from Saint Joseph's Farm. But the milk supply was almost immediately eliminated by the Navy because it did not meet their standards. And there were other changes. We Brothers no longer made regular trips to the Farm to help with crops, though we maintained our garden and tiny orchard at Dujarie Scholasticate. The day when our institutions were to have their economies partly embedded in a farm, large or small, was passing rapidly. What change did that make?

When I joined the Community in 1940, the qualifications for admission were the usual ones of Catholicity, fine character, piety, emotional stability, good memory, and, this one "*the candidate shall be able to do the work of the Community.*" This last requirement has undergone quite a change to "*the candidate shall be employable.*" The disappearance of the farm has signaled the elimination of many of the jobs that enabled Holy Cross to keep members engaged in doing the work of the Community, and forced Religious to seek employment. The difference is profound as I learned when, at age sixty, sixty five, or so, I faced a hostile search committee in West Virginia, seeking employment as a school principal.

Just a few years ago, a candidate for the Midwest Province, was refused admission to perpetual vows when he was unable to propose a plan for employment, although he was clearly able to do the work of the community if any such remained, which was questionable.

Another example. In our student days, we freely discussed Einstein's theory of relativity, the electron theory, atomic power, and, as is always the pompous notion of the young, thought that we really understood what the topics were all about. And Dr. Einstein was not regarded as anti-religious. For attributed to him were comments such as, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind", and "Subtle is the Lord, but malicious He is not". That only twelve people in the whole world were reputed to understand what Einstein was talking about, did not in the least deter us from earnest and serious discussions. Rather, I think we gloried in talking about what nobody understood. We twitted each other about our lack of understanding, and made jokes about it,

**There was a young lady from Wight
Who cried, as she studied her plight.
If I go shopping tonight, and move - as I might -
With the speed of light,
I shall meet myself coming back! Quite!**

Yet, when the Manhattan Project revealed the spinoff from atomic theory, that dreadful technology making possible the dropping of "the bomb", first on Hiroshima (542,000 pop, August 6, 1945), and then on Nagasaki (422,000 pop, August 9, 1945), that we began to catch a faint glimmering of the effects, political, moral, economic, and religious, on our age and time. Einstein had been excluded from the Manhattan Project, and he could plaintively ask, "Why didn't they tell me what they wanted to do"? And many other scientists discovered a sense of what we call "sin".

In education, we began to make decisions without giving the slightest thought to what the cost would be, especially in public schooling. The American love affair with the automobile has had profound effects and results far beyond anything even dreamed of. The auto would be limited impossibly without the addition of that essential prosthesis, the great American Roadway. And so, these concrete ribbons go crunching about our countryside, eating up farmland, creating suburbs, destroying the inner cities, creating monumental social problems. It was possible, years ago, to travel on the railroad for a quarter of a cent per mile; now one must travel by auto for not less than thirty cents per mile. The break-through effects of technology are specific and unavoidable, unexpected and harsh though they may be.

In this breathtaking and blessed land, the United States of America, we have been set free from that ancient scourge - the famine. Agricultural technology has mastered the art of harvesting and storing the bumper crop and tiding us over the lean years. And lean years are not wholly out of our memory. The Lenten fast originated and takes place in the Spring when, in past years, food supplies were running low and would not be replenished until another crop was harvested.

So we might as well fast and make a virtue of it. And yes, the memory is still there, but the need has long since disappeared. Famine in some other countries and regions of the world has not disappeared, as we know by the tragic events of recent months and years.

We see, then, that technology promises and provides riches. We who live in this present time and age, enjoy a life of luxury and security unknown to the kings and queens of old. And thus we fall under the caveats of scripture. The psalmist warns us that

**In his riches, man lacks wisdom
he is like the beasts that are destroyed**

Psalm 49, Emptiness of Riches

And in Matthew 19; 23, 24 we read,

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you solemnly, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.'

And therefore, our Superiors were rightly concerned for our spiritual welfare as we came abreast of the riches of technology. In earlier planning stages for this presentation, I had a whole list of hilarious tales about radios, TVs, autos and other technological marvels and how they made their way into our houses over the protests of Superiors. But the conflict was never about technology as such, but only about the danger to our spiritual welfare.

Technology also provides the insidious temptation to think of ourselves as no longer needing the protection of Providence, as if we had

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somehow become independent of God and His merciful care. However, the experiences of our own lives ought to highlight the nature of the temptation. The dramatic story of the Unsinkable Titanic is a frightening reminder of how man, in his pride and arrogance, can go astray. Thus it is clear that technology, along with other elements of our lives, must be controlled and directed according to the norms of religious truths.

When I lived at the Solitude in Le Mans during the Workshop, we had a free afternoon one day, and Brother Edward Hagus (SW) and I decided to walk to downtown Le Mans and see the sights. Sister Genevieve, MSC, suggested that we look for the monument to the Wright Brothers. On the way down, I wondered what connection there was between the Wright Brothers and Le Mans. A monument in Dayton, Ohio, I could understand, but Le Mans? We found the monument on the edge of the flea market square, at the end of Wilbur Wright Boulevard.

It seems that, about 1906-08, the Wright Brothers had a fully operational "flying machine", but the US Army was less than interested, and it seemed to be "ho hum" day in America. So the Brothers decided to split up. Orville would stay in America to continue trying to interest the US Army, and Wilbur would go to France to see if he could interest the French authorities.

Mr Lèon Bollée offered Wilbur space in his automobile factory and suggested a "flying field" at the racetrack at Le Mans. Wilbur found them suitable and started to work. The airplane had been damaged in shipment, and Wilbur had to make extensive repairs to the plane and the motor. Wilbur Wright was a gentleman of the old school, went to work wearing a jacket and cravat, which were not removed unless the day got a bit warmish. The French workingmen found Wilbur a fascinating character. As an American, he was reputed to be rich and have powerful political connections. However, he went to work everyday with a lunch bucket, and worked with his hands. And the Frenchmen at the Bollée factory could not pronounce his name. They called him "Veelbure Reet" which was very close to the French words "vielle burette" - old oilcan. He was considered a great man by the French working men, and was popular with them.

The day came, August 8, 1908, Saturday, when Old Oilcan was prepared to demonstrate his "flying machine". About 26 people were at the Hunaudieres racetrack at Le Mans. On that early plane there were no

wheels, just skids and a rail to guide them, along with a catapult to give the plane a shove on take off, for the motor was not very powerful. To the amazement of the observers the plane took off smoothly, rose into the air, circled, and neatly returned to its starting point.

On Monday, August 10, Wilbur was ready to try again. On this day, there were 4,000 crowding the racetrack. They had come from Le Mans, and from the environs, by foot, horseback, carriage, bicycle. France went wild with excitement. Remember, this was the first time man had flown in controlled fashion, rising, circling, returning to the starting point. At Hunaudieres racetrack Wilbur made a total of nine flights, and then because of the crowds and increased length of the flights, moved to Camp d'Auvours, a military parade ground, a few miles east of Le Mans. A total of some one hundred flights were made, and on about sixty of them, Wilbur carried a passenger.

One day a woman presented herself to Wilbur and asked to be taken aloft. Wilbur, always the gentleman, agreed. You must remember that one did not get "into" the Wright flying machine; one clambered onto the lower wing and sat there. Incredibly, there were no seat belts. The passenger sat in the full blast of the propeller. So here was a lady wrapped in yards of yard goods, and voluminous skirts, waiting to fly. Wilbur was fearful of two things: the flying skirts would get caught in the machinery, and there was a question of modesty. Ever the creative person, Wilbur took a piece of rope to the lady's husband and suggested that he tie his wife's skirts about her ankles. He obliged, and the catapult sent the plane down the skid rails, motor roaring. The plane rose, circled the field and the crowd, and the lady could wave to her friends one hundred and fifty awesome feet below.

The flight went perfectly. The trouble started when the plane returned to the starting point. The lady got off the plane, but refused to let anyone remove her hobble. The hobble was her claim to fame, and so she kept it on, hop, hop, hop. Paris took up the cue, and the hobble skirt became the latest fashion rage. The hobble skirt spread to America, and the slide I am showing is authentic. The Fashion Museum at Kent State University provided me with this picture, circa 1911-14. And to think, that for years I thought that the only permanent thing to emerge from Le Mans was the spiritual legacy of Father Moreau.

There are two reasons why I thought it useful to mention the Wright Brothers in connection with Le Mans. First, it demonstrates that Le Mans was not some remote backwater crossroads. On the contrary, Le Mans was an ancient town in which important human affairs had been conducted for decades, and from the time of Father Moreau to the day when Léon Bollée established his automobile factory there. I think there are some reasons to think of Le Mans as the birthplace of American Aviation. And Father Moreau recognized and reacted to the La Sarthe region and the times in which he lived. The striking thing about Father Moreau was that he seemed to rise above circumstances. Moreau used all the things of this world in the same way - for the advancement of the Kingdom. Second, the experience of the Wright Brothers in discovering the secret of controlled flight illustrates another facet of technology, namely; that it often requires a complete change of attitude and an about face in dealing with the breakthrough.

The Wright Brothers were bicycle mechanics. A bicycle is a machine which is inherently stable. One who has learned how to ride a bike, soon learns that, aside from steering, the machine is quite stable, and will not fall over. The early investigators all concluded that a flying machine was to be a stable device. And all designs were based on that conviction. The great German flight pioneer, Otto Lilienthal, was killed in a glider that he thought was stable.

Orville Wright was thinking about this and thought that "we have been trying to learn to fly by watching the birds. Perhaps this is like trying to learn magic by watching a magician". So they concluded that the airplane was to be nothing like a bicycle, but was to be inherently unstable. Stability would be achieved only through a system of controls. So they had to abandon their experience and preconceived notions, and approach the matter from a totally new point of view.

What does our commitment to God through Holy Cross require of us? There would seem to be three requirements, although you may conclude there are more or perhaps less than three depending on how you wish to express your personal analysis. However, this is one that I like:

(1) The Holy Cross Religious is to become a good person, a saint. The grace of Jesus Christ is his or hers for the asking, and personal sanctity is an essential condition for Holy Cross membership.

(2) The Holy Cross Religious is to preach the Gospel. Some with a gift of eloquence and a mind for scholarship, may do so from a pulpit but all Holy Cross Religious must gain a clear knowledge of the Scripture and

convey their adherence to the Word by the example of their lives.

(3) The Holy Cross Religious must be a loyal son or daughter of the Church. This is not an easy requirement, because in the Church we become conscious of the clay feet, the human bumbling and down right failures. However, it is the Institution established by Jesus to carry on the His Mission on earth. Its work is for the most part solid, significant and trustworthy.

We might smile at the "young lady from Wight" fearing the effects of accidentally traveling at the speed of light. Yet there is nothing funny about the global financial transactions which travel from one world capitol to another *at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second)* over wire and satellite, and linking those capitols now united by common interests, not by geography. And in similar fashion, other groups of people - scholars, scientists, engineers, educators, and others - will be united on a world-wide basis. Thus, is rapidly passing the age of remoteness, driven out by computer technology.

About 150 years ago, Charles Babbage, conceived of the computer before there was a technology capable of building one. There was a need to construct navigational tables to aid the seafarer. The *10th* Captain possibly employed such charts on the voyage to America in 1841. The calculations based on the charts were of life-saving importance; if there were mistakes, a ship and its human cargo could be lost. And there were mistakes. Babbage thought his machine would help to eliminate human errors. However, the Babbage machine was not brought to reality in his lifetime. The computer of today realized Babbage's dream in a way he could never have imagined.

The computer programmers of our age are like the medieval builders of cathedrals. The edifice of medieval times was stable and durable. But not always; some cathedrals collapsed. Our modern programmers build substantial and sturdy programs. But always the robust is placed in juxtaposition to the fragile. The awesome AT&T communication network "crashed" sometime this past year. I wasn't aware of it until I read the papers, since I don't use the phone that much. The commercial enterprises which make 24-hour, 7-days-per-week use of a phone system were aware. It was a scary experience. It was traceable to a "bug" in the program of instructions to the computers of the system, just one line in hundreds of thousands of such. The "crash" was speedily repaired.

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I am currently involved in the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) at an Akron parish. It is here that I have my opportunity to "preach the Gospel". Each year, in each group, there are couples hopelessly enmeshed in marital problems, that is, problems as generated and defined by the rules of one hundred and fifty years ago. No one is given a cruel rejection such as, "You got yourself into this mess, so live with it". Rather the couple is warmly received, and we say, "Let's work with this problem and pray over it, and see what we can do". Our present day Tribunals have produced some marvelous solutions.

We have always lived in the midst of an advancing technology. The first person to create a technological impact on Holy Cross Spirituality was Father Moreau himself. The impact of a dynamic technology on our Spirituality is observable mostly in the disruption it produces in our life style:

We can, as individuals or as a group, fall prey to the lure of riches, because a dynamic technology enriches us.

We can be tempted to imagine ourselves as independent of God's Providence. "We can take care of ourselves!"

The technology requires us to evaluate ourselves because of our need for vocations, and to make changes we think will help us, as a group, to be more attractive.

Technology forces us to change our life style and to cut loose from the power of culture to guide us.

Technology forces us to look at ourselves, the Church, and Society vis-à-vis new approaches and movements such as racism, psychology, scripture studies, the woman's movement.

READINGS

Below are a few of the readings I found useful in preparing this presentation:

THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (A - 1)

LIKE A MIGHTY TREE by Graziella Lalande. English translation. FIDES
ISBN 2 - 7621 - 1451 - 9. (A - 2)

BASIL ANTHONY MARY MOREAU By Canon Etienne Catta and Tony Catta
Volume I and Volume II BRUCE LCCC Number 55-11616 (A - 3)

CHRONICLES OF NOTRE DAME DU LAC by Edward Sorin, CSC. Trans by Toohey
Edited by James T. Connelly, CSC University of Notre Dame Press (A - 4)

'Subtle is the Lord ...' THE SCIENCE AND THE LIFE OF ALBERT EINSTEIN
by Abraham Pais Oxford University Press ISBN 0 - 19 - 520438 - 7 (US pbk)

CIRCULAR LETTERS OF FATHER MOREAU Volume I and Volume II English
Translation by Edward L. Heston, CSC The Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana

KILL DEVIL HILL, Discovering the Secret of the Wright Brothers by Harry Combs
Houghton Mifflin Company, ISBN 0 - 395 - 28216 - 0

ROCKDALE The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution
by Anthony F. C. Wallace W.W. Norton & Company ISBN 0 - 393 - 00991 - 2

THOMAS AND BEULAH Poems by Rita Dove Carnegie-Mellon University Press
ISBN 0 - 88748 - 021 - 7 pbk

SPRINGS OF WATER IN A DRY LAND Spiritual Survival for Catholic Women
Today by Mary Jo Weaver Beacon Press ISBN 0 - 8070 - 1218 - 1

Also, I found the Lectures of John Bradshaw on Marriage via Telecast on Public Channel of enormous help. I found it useful to read the weekly news magazines in reference to the topic and also some of our fine Catholic publications.