

From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology

By John Dyer

Kregel, 2011. 192 pp.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

www.davidwgill.org

John Dyer is director of web development at Dallas Theological Seminary and also a student at DTS. He earned his undergrad degree at Texas A&M, served in youth ministry at a couple churches, and worked as a technology consultant and web developer for several companies, large and small, out in the general marketplace. While this is a fine background, it hardly would predict that this brother would have written what is probably the best little introduction to a careful biblical Christian view of technology, the dominating force in contemporary life. But that's what it is.

Dyer has a very readable, gentle, inviting way of expressing himself. The basic outline of the book is shaped by the "metanarrative" (the Big Story) of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. Technology is seen as part of Creation --- it is the kind of design and making that God does, and those made in his image and likeness do. Dyer shows how Adam and Eve were to cultivate and guard the Garden and develop language to name the animals. But of course technology is affected by the Fall into selfishness, sin, and rebellion against God. And technology is part of redemption: Adam and Eve make clothing to cover their nakedness; God provides a "technology upgrade" in the form of animal skin clothing. Noah's ark will be a technology of redemption while Babel's Tower reflects the fall. Our Lord grew up as a carpenter's son--- *tekton* is the Greek word -- and was crucified on a carpenter/technology product, the cross. And what began in the Garden ends in the City, the New Jerusalem, in which a redeemed and purified technology is brought to full restoration and consummation.

The preceding paragraph hardly does justice to Dyer's unfolding of the biblical story and his great eye for technological implications and lessons and guidelines in the text. Dyer also is a reliable first guide to the field of technology history, sociology, and critique, led by such thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Ellul, Neil Postman, and Albert Borgmann. This can be complicated stuff and Dyer's explanations and critiques are helpful. Dyer's definition and understanding of technology is also solid, Technology, he says, is "the human activity of using tools to transform God's creation for practical purposes" (p. 65). Technology has several aspects, e.g., tools, methods, and systems. Technology is embedded with values (quantification, replicability, artificiality, standardization, etc.). Technology is shaped by humans but it also shape those human users.

Dyer has page after page of personal, family, church, and business examples to illustrate his points. He is utterly fair to the perspectives of both technology lovers and technology resisters. I have read dozens and dozens of books on technology over the years; this is the one to begin with for all thoughtful Christians from high school up. It is a great read on your own but would be the basis for a wonderful eleven week study group. The book gets an "A."