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Sifting Through the Cultural Dust: A Pre-Transformational Activity

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Sifting Through the Cultural Dust: A Pre-Transformational Activity

Abstract

Technologically mediated communication which has flooded the worlds of North American people with information brings with it an increasing uncertainty about the reliability of this information. This flood of information delivers worldview and culture, completely unsorted, in very small increments to the hearts and minds of young people who are students in Christian schools. These small increments we call cultural dust. This study identifies technology, and specifically mass media and computer mediated communication, as a factor that has contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of students who attend Christian schools. Data collected through this action research project provides evidence that 16 media and technology enhanced "spirits of the age" identified by Hielema (2001) operate in the lives of middle school students at a Christian school in Alberta Canada. A unifying theme found in responses throughout the project is that of deficiency of a well-defined Christian identity in the lives of students. This dearth of Christian identity coincides with an accumulation of cultural dust in the Information Age.

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Sifting Through the Cultural Dust:
A Pre-Transformational Activity

by

Robert Duiker

BCS Redeemer College, 1987

Action Research Report
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Department of Education
Dordt College
Sioux Center, Iowa
July, 2010

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A Pre-Transformational Activity

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Abstract

Technologically mediated communication which has flooded the worlds of North American people with information brings with it an increasing uncertainty about the reliability of this information. This flood of information delivers worldview and culture, completely unsorted, in very small increments to the hearts and minds of young people who are students in Christian schools. These small increments we call cultural dust. This study identifies technology, and specifically mass media and computer mediated communication, as a factor that has contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of students who attend Christian schools. Data collected through this action research project provides evidence that 16 media and technology enhanced "spirits of the age" identified by Hielema (2001) operate in the lives of middle school students at a Christian school in Alberta Canada. A unifying theme found in responses throughout the project is that of deficiency of a well-defined Christian identity in the lives of students. This dearth of Christian identity coincides with an accumulation of cultural dust in the Information Age.

Introduction

Mass media and technologically mediated communication such as the Internet have flooded the worlds of North American people with information. With this proliferation of information comes an increasing uncertainty about the reliability and truthfulness of this information. Furthermore, people experience growing difficulty in ascertaining the perspective or worldview from which all that is seen, heard, and read is coming from. This flood of information is not only imposing itself on North American society, but it delivers worldview and culture, completely unsorted, to the hearts and minds of young people, in particular young people who are students in Christian schools.

Christian schools are committed to a goal of transforming culture for Christ. Since culture is now being transformed increasingly by technological means, Christian school teachers must revisit the ways and means that they work towards transforming culture for Christ in their classrooms. One of the prerequisites of this research is a working definition of what culture is and what the mechanisms are by which it works.

However, there is more that must be considered. Hielema (2001), a transformational Christian writer has said,

> A "Christ transforming culture community" which neglects its calling to be a "discerning the spirits of the age within us" community is somewhat like a hockey team playing without a goalkeeper. How can one seek to transform a culture in the name of Christ when that culture has already succeeded in enculturating that person's vision of Christ? (p. 8)

In other words, the teacher is not unscathed by the ravages of acculturation. A penetrating look into the mirror is required by all who would seek to help others in the battle against the spirits of the age.

Perhaps Christian schools have accidentally pulled their goalie. Many have spoken of Christian schools as schools for "Shalom" (Wolterstorff, 2002). Shalom can be defined as, "Making everything right in every way that it can be right." (S. Hielema, personal communication, July 2007). Christ transforming culture is a process of restoring things, as well as possible with God's help, to the way God intended them to be in the first place. To do this Christian school teachers must learn to recognize the spirits of the age. Shalom requires that Christian schools put their goaltender back in net. Christian school teachers are called to be goaltenders and goalie coaches as they learn to discern and then teach for discernment. In order to discern the spirits of this information age, teachers will need to be astute about the technological means which serve as conduits for this mass of information through which the spirits of the age are communicated.

There are many models of what culture is and how it works. It is not the objective of this study to compare all of the possible models of culture available and argue for one of them. The need is for a model that is simple enough to understand and explain to students so that the goals of cultural transformation are not so caught in a web of complication that they are abandoned. For the purpose of this model, culture will be considered to be the intersection of four elements: they are geography, language, religion, and history. When the first three of these exist together, people of common language and religion living in one shared geographic region, in time as they live together and share a common history, the four elements are integrated to develop into a

culture. That which is presented here is the simplest of explanations, but that is exactly what is needed in order give teachers a working definition that is useful in the classroom.

Over the course of history together, bound by common language and a common religion, people of one culture construct dwellings and other products from the materials prevalent in the geographical area they call home. A way of speaking develops that has a special sound that is called an accent. Their diet menu derives from the plants and animals indigenous to that part of the world. Their life together is a reflection of the jewels, rocks, and trees around them. They develop religious practices that are unique to them. Their feasts and celebrations become things that identify them as a people. The interaction of religion, language, geography, and history causes each of the four elements to change as it mixes with the others.

While this interaction is beautiful and it is a blessing from God, it presents a problem. For centuries people have had difficulty determining what is of culture and what is of religion. Traditional aspects of worship, such as musical styles, the posture and participation of the worshippers, or the clothing one wears in the place of worship, are manifestations of a culture. These are sometimes difficult to separate from the more fundamental body of religious doctrine which gave the tradition life originally. More simply put, the Bible is fundamental to Christian belief. A hymn book is a cultural product which is interchangeable with other sources of Christian music. A hymn book is a product of geography, history, language and religion interacting with one another.

Every person has a unique cultural makeup. Students arrive at schools with some predictable aspects to their respective cultural compositions. They are part of a family. For many that still means two loving parents and siblings. However, families are changing. Often there is only one parent. Many children are now being raised by grandparents. In some parts of

our society, same sex couples are raising children. Since marriage is part of God's plan, marriage is an aspect of religion and since it is religious, it is cultural according to the working definition previously set forth. These changes to families are therefore cultural changes. Those who work in Christian schools can usually predict that their students will belong to a church community. This, too, is more prone to change than ever before as people freely switch from one church to another. Teachers are typically familiar with the geographical parts of their students' culture. They know what town and province or state the students live in. They know of what countries the students are citizens. Even though families and religious communities are in a state of flux, still Christian school teachers will probably say that for the most part, they know their students well. Since teachers know students linguistically, geographically, religiously, and historically, they know their students culturally.

On the other hand, nuances of culture are much more common than is immediately evident. Those who have lived in more than one part of North America will know that there are subtle and not so subtle differences that identify people as being from one place or another. While many of these variations are geographical and linguistic in nature, some are also religious. A number of years ago my family and I moved to New Mexico to live among the Zuni people on the Zuni reservation. Before moving there I knew that I was in store for a cultural experience. While I was quite prepared for a life of interaction with the culturally distinct Zuni people, I had no idea what a complicated cultural situation I was entering. One of the teachers was from Kansas and another was from Alaska. The pastor and many of the other teachers were from Western Michigan. Each of these places is in some ways culturally unique.

Additionally, I discovered something that can be called a white missionary culture which characteristically was somewhat paternalistic towards our Native American friends. I unwittingly entered this cultural hodgepodge while bringing with me some culture of my own. I was raised in Ontario, Canada; my parents and three of my older siblings were immigrants from the Netherlands, and I was living in British Columbia before moving to New Mexico. With all of that, none of us seemed to have any idea why we didn't understand each other. After a number of years of reflecting on that experience, I came to view culture differently. The research speaks of acculturation as the transfer of cultural traits through prolonged contact (Sharma, 2004). Through my Zuni experiences, and many others that have been shared with me over the years, I have come to recognize that culture is transferred in very small units (Paul DiMaggio, 2001). With virtually every interaction that we have with any person, place, language, or tradition, a small amount of culture transfers to each person involved in the interaction. This small amount of culture I call cultural dust.

The notion of cultural dust helps explain the degree of change that can be seen in the world today.   If one considers the cultural changes that occurred in Europe as the world moved out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance and multiply it many times, that is the situation the world faces today. The intellectual, social, political, mathematical, and religious developments that characterized the Renaissance were preceded and precipitated by cultural interaction that was unheard of in the Middle Ages. World exploration, expansionism, and the trade of goods from the far east of Asia, through the Middle East, and to the far west of Europe brought people of a variety of cultures together in a way that enriched people's lives and changed them in unseen ways. Much of the cultural dust was still there, but it had been mixed with the dust of many interactions; with new friends and neighbors from many lands brushing against

each other. The interaction during that time of acculturation produced a great deal of creativity

and enterprise. The whole was apparently greater than the sum of its parts. It is interesting to

compare the cultural interaction of the Renaissance to that experienced by the students who sit in

the classrooms of North American schools in 2010. The proliferation of cultural dust, resultant

largely from mass media and computer mediated communication, which is experienced today is

many times greater than in the Renaissance or at any other time previously in world history. In

fact, the students that teachers think they know so well, they may not know very well at all in

terms of their complex and diverse cultural identity. (Prensky, 2001)

There are two easily recognized factors which account for our present difficulty in

recognizing the cultural makeup of our students. These factors are globalization and a

proliferation of technological media and communication devices (Nicholson, 2007). Cultural

dust is flying around like never before. Trade between countries and ready access to air travel

are just two factors of many which make the world a massive intersection of language,

geography and religion. With all of the traffic, none of the religions looks quite the same as

before. Of particular concern here is Christianity, and more specifically, reformed Christianity

with the network of schools which help it uphold a vision for transformation of culture. One

might doubt the ability of this group of academic institutions to participate in transforming

culture in the midst of this storm of cultural dust.

Technology has perhaps been the greatest culprit in this global loss of cultural identity.

In this research project an assessment will be made of the cultural "damage" done to our students

with an acknowledgment that the damage has been exacerbated by the forces of technology

alongside its friend and ally, globalization. Hielema (2001) asserts that, "We live in a thoroughly

electronic world, and its media have become the primary vehicles for the spread of the spirits of

our age" (p. 8). He goes on to describe 16 'media-enhanced' spirits of the age and suggests ways that they impacted the culture of the Christian community. Hielema (2001) calls on Christians to discern these spirits of the age while at the same time recognizing that, "the discerner himself is shaped by the spirits of the age that he seeks to discern and he has been, to some extent, blinded by them" (p. 9). Teachers require the tools which will, in the words of Hielema (2001), "throw off the electronic ennui and weariness that hinders, and to see Jesus more clearly through the cacophony and over-stimulation of our day" (p. 24), freeing us to run the race which has been set before us.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study has been to identify technology, and specifically mass media and computer mediated communication, as a factor that has contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of students who attend Christian schools. This was achieved by uncovering evidence that the 16 media enhanced "spirits of the age" identified by Hielema (2001) operate in the lives of middle school students at a Christian school in Alberta, Canada.

Terminology

A number of terms used in this study are taken directly from the sources relied upon. In particular this list explains a number of terms used by Hielema as he describes 16 media enhanced spirits of the age. Some of the terms may be unfamiliar to readers not versed in Reformed Christian scholarship. Additionally, a small number of terms coined by the author of this study are briefly explained here.

acculturation: A change in the cultural makeup of a person or group of people resulting from

    contact with people of another culture. Hielema (2001) uses the term 'enculturation' with

    the same implied meaning.

achievement compulsion: One of Hielema's '(2001) media-enhanced spirits' of the age

    which consists of the tendency to find one's identity in his or her accomplishments and

    possessions. (Hielema, 2001)

Christ transforming culture: H. Richard Niebuhr's preferred description (of five he puts

    forward) of the relationship between Christ and culture. Christians holding this view

    remain critical of culture yet participate in shaping culture as part of the task of

    developing the kingdom of God. (Carson, 2008)

commitment and choice: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which consists of the notion that

    choice is more than a fundamental human right; it is basic to the fabric of our being. This

    'spirit' includes the notion that a sense of commitment must be devalued reciprocally.

    (Hielema, 2001)

compartmentalized anthropology: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which consists of

    dividing persons into some combination of body, mind, soul, heart, intellect, emotion,

    will, spirit and so on. Electronic media have served to reduce the need and likelihood

    that a physical bodily presence is needed in matters of communication and relationship.

    (Hielema, 2001)

conduit of culture: Technology is a "pipeline" or conduit through which massive amounts of

    cultural information flows at high speed.

cultural dust: Small units of culture which pass from one person to the next through every

interaction. Each person becomes culturally unique because no two people accumulate

the identical collection of cultural dust over the course of a lifetime.

desire for convenience and the avoidance of pain: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which

consists of a prevailing desire to follow the path of least resistance and avoid all struggle,

sacrifice and discipline. (Hielema, 2001)

difficulty of discernment: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which consists of the

contention that the proliferation of media and technology-generated information makes it

difficult to engage in the reflection of subject matter and wrestling with challenging

concepts which discernment requires. (Hielema, 2001)

discerning the spirits of the age: Understanding what is of God and what is not of God given

the challenges to truth-finding presented by the present day and age.

electronic community: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which distorts and undermines the

communal nature of the body of Christ (the church). (Hielema, 2001)

elephant: A metaphor to describe the largeness of the impact of electronic media on the spirits

of the age. Since it is too large to see all at once, it must be described one part at a time.

(Hielema, 2001)

 history is bunk: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which maintains that historical context is

irrelevant and unimportant. (Hielema, 2001)

home away from home: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which erodes the notion of home

as a geographical location. Home in the virtual reality of cyberspace diminishes who we

are as cultural beings. (Hielema, 2001)

individualism: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which convinces a person of the notion

that a successful individual will be independent and self-reliant. (Hielema, 2001)

instant gratification of fabricated desires: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which

consists of the quick satisfaction of a proliferation of fleeting desires and the impatient

waiting and praying for solutions to a multitude of (invented) problems.   (Hielema,

2001)

LIAR syndrome: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which implies that as information

overload increases, the tendency to act on that information decreases. LIAR is an

acronym for 'low information-action ratio' which is a term which was coined by Neil

Postman. (Hielema, 2001)

Metacognition: awareness and understanding one's thinking and cognitive processes; thinking

about thinking

postmodern shrug: relativism: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which popularizes the

idea that all truths are equal and that the only standard is tolerance. (Hielema, 2001)

privatization of faith and its reduction to morality: A media-enhanced spirit of the age

which relegates the Christian faith to a role of encouraging moral values which in turn

have become matters of personal choice. (Hielema, 2001)

relationship between noise and silence: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which contends

that the world has become so noisy that silence has become uncomfortable. (Hielema,

2001)

religion: A common set of beliefs about the nature, purpose, and causality of reality and

humanity which is shared by a group of people and result in a set of common practices.

shape of discourse: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which consists of a tendency to engage

in discourse which is characterized by either extremes of politeness or rudeness.

(Hielema, 2001)

special events: A media-enhanced spirit of the age which consists of living for the next

exciting adventure and demonstrating an aversion for everyday activities such as work.

(Hielema, 2001)

Literature Review

Suspicion about technology is not a new thing. In 1964 Ellul published his

groundbreaking work, *The Technological Society*. in which an entire history of developing

'technique' was exposed, one technology at a time, as having diminished human life in some

important way   In the 1970s and the 80s and 90s, Schuurman lamented that those involved in

technology spent little time reflecting on the impact technology has on culture. (Schuurman,

1977; Schuurman, 1995) A group of scholars from the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship

in 1986 published *Responsible Technology*, (Monsma) a comprehensive treatment of how

technology ought to be done in a way in keeping with our calling to "Be fruitful and increase in

number," and to, "fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1:28 NIV) In 1993, Postman warned us

all that technology has a life of its own and is not to be trusted in his provocative work,

Technopoly. (Postman)

The context for the present discussion regarding the cultural impact of modern electronic

media and communication technologies is further presented by Gergen, who in his editorial

commentary on contemporary life, *The Saturated Self*, identified seven technologies of social

saturation including railways, the post office, the automobile, the telephone, the radio, motion

pictures, and commercial publishing (mass printing of paperback books). Each of these brought people into close proximity and fostered a range of relationships that could never have taken place before. Air transportation, television, and electronic communication followed in a decidedly more high tech wave of development. (Gergen, 1991)

A statistical picture of the high speed, wired and wireless world is valuable for understanding the present state of personal technologies. The numbers paint a picture of the rapid expansion of personal usage of three related technologies. These are the Internet, broadband connectivity, and mobile telephones. From 1995 to 2006, households online increased from about 15% to about 75%. (Madden, 2006) About 75% of American households have Internet access with 55% of the total population reporting that they have high speed access. Almost 80% of the population has cellular phones. (PEW, 2008) The totality of the picture includes a quickly growing trend which includes some challenges of inequality, danger, and individualism.

The usage trends for Internet use and cell phone usage are very similar. People with high incomes and education are more likely to have Internet connections and cell phones. The elderly are less likely than younger people to have Internet connections and mobile phones. Whites are more likely than blacks and city dwellers are more likely that rural people to have Internet connections and cellular phones. The difference between Internet usage and cell phone usage is in the degree of disparity between rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural, young and old, and educated and uneducated. While wealthy, educated, white, young, and urban people are statistically similarly likely to use a cell phone as they are to have Internet access; poor, uneducated, elderly, black, and rural people are all more likely to own a cell phone than they are to use the Internet. (PEW, 2008)

One factor that appears to curtail the acceptance and growth of Internet usage, particularly in rural areas is the availability of broadband or high speed connections. (Horrigan, 2008) People with broadband use the Internet more often. Describing the plight of Internet users with a dial-up connection Horrigan (2007) said, "They don't understand the benefits of the Internet because they have slow connection speeds, but the slow connection speeds inhibit their ability to learn about the benefits of the Internet." While 63% of rural American households have Internet access, only 38% have broadband. (PEW, 2008)

Rainie & Keeter (2006) have described the cellular phone as, "The communication's Swiss Army knife." They measured the usage of and desire for 11 cell phone features from sending text messages to watching video. The most desired cell phone feature is mobile maps. 4% already used this feature in 2006; another 47% wished they had it. 35% of Americans used text messaging while additional 13% desired that feature in 2006. 63% of all teens have a cell phone (Lenhart, August 2007) Young people are more likely to change their wallpaper and ring tones on their cell phones. They are more likely to make a spontaneous call when they have free time and they are more likely to experience shock when the monthly bill arrives. "32% of the youngest cell phone users say they couldn't live without their cell, compared with 18% of cell owners ages 30 and older who say that. Fully 2/3 of younger cell owners (67%) say they always have their cell phone on." (Rainie & Keeter, 2006)

The statistical evidence paints a picture of a changing world. Sharma (2004) lends support to the idea of technology as a means of transferring cultural images and messages. In *Cultural Pathways Through the Information Age* he sounds warning bells when he says, "All of the cultural evidence points to the sobering realization that the pristine and idealistic view of childhood is increasingly at risk in the information age" (p. 12). This is clearly a message that all

parents, educators, and government officials need to be paying attention to. Sharma, a senior methodologist/scientist at the market research firm based in Princeton New Jersey, TNS-Global, makes a comprehensive argument about the cultural transmitting power of electronic media, and specifically computer technology. His concluding remarks draw attention to recent discussions among child psychologists who, "Reach the profound conclusion that the new technologies infuse children and childhood with emotional capital of the new information economy, while simultaneously blurring the distinction between biology and technology" (p.20). He concludes that, "We must be attuned to this new subtler layer of discourse about childhood if we are to participate fully in the everyday lives of the next generation of children and young adults." (Sharma, 2004, p. 20)

In the language of a methodologist, Sharma has described the electronically enhanced transfer of the spirits of the age and alerted parents and teachers to be aware of this subtle level of discourse. This is no less true for Christian school teachers than teachers in government run schools. Christian schools exist, at least in part, to pass on a story of faith to a new generation of participants in that story. It is the mission of the Christian school teacher to participate in the lives of these children and as such they have no choice but to tune in to the subtle messages transmitted through a variety of electronic means easily assessed by their students.

Sharma (2004) begins his article with a survey of the history of the Internet, chronicling its ascent from a fledgling technology in the sixties to what it was in 2004 when his essay was published. He projected that the Internet would follow the pattern of television as it waits for a succession of technological innovations to push it into every single household. He spoke of increasing convergence between computers, cell phones, television, and other media. Now, only four years later, Facebook, iPods, iPhones, and YouTube are all evidence of his predictions

coming true. One of the questions which this present research seeks to address is, "How has technology, and specifically mass media and computer mediated communication, contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of students?" At the heart of his message Sharma asks the same question.

> The computer mediated interactive culture has an impact on cultural transmission
> particularly among children and adults who are early adaptors of such technologies. This
> has significant implications for debates within the cultural psychology. How do children
> acquire culture? While it is common knowledge that the level of technological
> development has an impact on the socio-emotional and cognitive development of
> children, the role of the Internet on children's acquisition of culture is relatively
> unexplored.   (Sharma, 2004, p. 10)

When Sharma says that, "Every behavior has a cultural context and no behavior is culture free" (p. 11), it has a very familiar ring to it for many supporters of Christian education.

In *Describing the Elephant: Christianity in a Media-Driven Culture*, Hielema draws attention to 16 "sightings" of dangerous and often imperceptible acculturation of people within the Christian community aided by various forms of electronic media. These, "Electronic media," says Hielema, "have become the primary vehicles for the spread of spirits of our age." (Hielema, 2001, p.8) The spirits of the age call people to be friends of the world; of the here and now. However, the Bible calls people to not to be a friend of the world lest they become enemies of God (James 4:4). Hielema's sixteen topics include discussions on postmodernism, the privatization of faith, individualism, instant gratification, an image based culture, commitment and choice, the relationship between information and action, convenience, special events, noise,

a revocation of history, the compulsion to achieve, the ways we talk, the difficulty of discernment, electronic community, and the need for a home.

The 16 spirits of the age to be examined in this study are summarized as follows:

1. **The Postmodern Shrug: Relativism:** The vastness of the Internet makes it impossible to monitor well. It is difficult to distinguish reliable information from unreliable. With so much information from so many different perspectives, norms for right and wrong become passé. Tolerance becomes the only standard which can be imposed in the Internet age. Boundaries between the truth and the lie are obliterated in virtual reality. It is more important that news be intriguing than that it be truthful in this information age. Each Christian in this age can have a personal theology, which is neither right nor wrong; just a different selection from among a smorgasbord of choices.

2. **The Privatization of Faith and its Reduction to Morality:** Our technological age reinforces a firm boundary between public and private life and assists in relegating faith to the private part of life. This distinction is not new as it lies at the heart of a notion of separation of church and state. While science presides over public discourse regarding "what is," religion is reduced to discussions of "what ought" or issues of morality. Mass media has exacerbated a trend towards immorality in our culture. If faith is personal and private, the church is limited in its ability to address this immorality. Morality is a personal choice. The Internet is the mega-supermarket where those choices are made. At its center the church is not to be primarily concerned with morality, but rather is to be engaged in a bigger project of participating in God's plans to make all things new. The success of this mission requires an understanding of faith as a public reality where public issues such as norms for marriage, family, and sexuality are the church's business.

3. **Individualism:** There is a misguided notion in North American society that in order to be fully mature you must be independent and self-sufficient. This is exacerbated by technology. Technology contributes to the mobility of people which in turn leaves them less rooted in a community and more self-sufficient. The need to buy technological gadgets leads to the need to work more and harder, leaving less time for relationships. Furthermore, devices such as television and computers often take us away from other people and, therefore, contribute to individualism. Technology has made the home a hotel for separate individuals. This individualism feeds a notion that a personal relationship with Jesus is sufficient for living a Christian life. The Scriptures clearly call for believers to meaningfully commune with each other and with God. Technology has contributed to the breakdown or diminishment of Christian community.

4. **Instant Gratification of Fabricated Desires:** Technology has promoted the consumerism that characterizes our age and it has advanced our need for entertainment made available through mass media. Christianity, as well, has been packaged as a set of neat little solutions to all of our problems and entertaining homilies to make our lives happier. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is often replaced by something more shallow and selfish. Technology leaves us hungering for better sound and a bigger and brighter screen often at the expense of a message which convicts us of our sin and directs us to a path of loving God and neighbor.

5. **Compartmentalized Anthropology:** For over two thousand years of human history people have thought of themselves as compartmentalized in some combination of body, soul, mind, heart, spirit, intellect, emotion, will, etc. Media and technology have exacerbated this denial of our oneness or wholeness partly by removing physical presence

from human interaction and relationships. Media messages promote the cheapening of intimate physical relationships. Fashion which includes tattoos and piercings can be thought of as disregard for the human body or, on the contrary, claiming it back as an essential, yet still separate part of a well-rounded life. Within this trend, worship is considered a matter of the mind, soul, or spirit. To worship God with all your heart is to worship Him with your entire un-compartmentalized being.

6. **Commitment and Choice:** The expansion of technologically accessible information and the shrinking of the global village have increased the number of choices we have. Choice has become more than a right; it is now a fundamental part of our being. It is basic value in a consumer-driven society. Choice is prevalent in almost every area of our lives. Choice gives everyone the right to change one's mind. Loyalty is devalued. Commitment is diminished when choice is the preeminent right. Virtual reality is a constantly changing place where loyalty and commitment do not fit well. Even commitment to one's self is eroded in cyberspace where a person can choose his or her own identity. Commitment to doctrine, commitment to a church, and commitment to a spouse, are all degraded in a technology-dominated culture of choice.

7. **Low Information-Action Ratio (passive receptivity):** Information overload has made people less responsive to information. The proliferation of information that floods our lives was multiplied in the media age and multiplied many times more in the Internet age. People have been desensitized and are not easily prodded into action. While people may respond heartily to global disasters, the help is short-lived due to compassion fatigue. Truth becomes something that does not require an active response but rather a mental

one. The information explosion moves us farther from the kind of truth Jesus embodied; the kind that moves you to come to the Father. (1 John 3:18f)

8. **The Desire for Convenience and the Avoidance of Pain:** Our culture demands technological gadgetry to make our lives more pleasant and enjoyable. Technology makes our work easier. The media contributes to a culture of convenience by making us aware of all of these modern conveniences and creating a sense of need for these things. It is often difficult to make a distinction between technological tools that aid us in our work and a desire to always seek the path of least resistance or laziness. The central love command of Scripture requires sacrificial living. The desire for comfort can undermine our diligence in pursuing the spiritual disciplines. Prayer has often become a tool of convenience. As modern conveniences make our lives more pleasant, we may become complacent about our expectation for our place in eternity. Technology is a tool to lull us to sleep and gradually erode our vigilance as we wait for Jesus' return.

9. **Special Events:** Media and technology have made super-events such as the Super Bowl possible. The electronic world thrives on special events. People have come to dread the work week and live for the weekend with its multitude of special events. Ordinary life is meaningless, but special events give one a reason to live. This has also become true in the Christian community. Church has become an event. We might travel hundreds of miles for a special, large production service with inspirational speakers and a polished production. The result is a short-term energy burst followed by more dissatisfaction with our little congregation back home. The real problem may be found not so much in the event itself but in the reason for attending the event. Our technological age promotes self-gratification. Christian worship demands God glorification.

10. **The Relationship Between Noise and Silence:** Technology and media have contributed to a noisy culture. Radios, televisions, MP3 players, cell phones, pagers, car stereos, DVD players, satellite radio, electronic games, arcades, etcetera are seemingly always on. We live in an over-stimulating environment where we can no longer hear what comes from within or the still small voice of God. Christian busyness is enhanced at the expense of reflection and prayer. Technology tries to rob us of the Spirit-filled silence in which we can, "Be still and know that (He is) God."

11. **History is Bunk:** The infamous statement of Henry Ford asserting that, "history is bunk," has become increasingly true as technology makes possible a proliferation of information that buries all facts, important and unimportant, in one indecipherable heap. Today, information which is five years old seems irrelevant. In fact, anything that is five years old is too old and in need of replacement. If history is bunk, then much of the Bible is bunk. History is a gift from God. Stories are a form that we, by our design, understand. To understand ourselves, and creation, and each other, and to understand God, we need stories to be told; we need history. Technology devalues history and therefore our ability to make sense of our existence.

12. **The Achievement Compulsion:** Rugged individualism has generally been considered a positive character trait by Americans and Canadians alike. Many accept the notion that our lives are the results of our efforts and that each person is responsible to make something of his or her life. Technology allows us to make more of our lives, due to increased speed and efficiency. It is a short and natural path from esteem derived from accomplishments to value of the person based on possessions. This is no less true in our churches and among Christians than in other parts of our society.

13. **The Shape of Discourse:** Conversation in a technology-dominated world is characterized by extremes of politeness and rudeness. Speaking the truth in love requires truth, frankness, courage, and politeness. Discourse on the Internet tends to lack the essentials of Biblical truth-telling. Polite tolerance of those different from ourselves is easily discarded with the distance and anonymity that Internet based conversations provide. Avoidance is also made easy when one can simply change his or her status to "away" or "busy." People who learn to converse in a technological age may never gain the essential attitudes and abilities required for the type of 'Iron Sharpening Iron' conversation which true Christian friendship demands.

14. **The Difficulty of Discernment:** The domination of technology and media over culture creates a situation where it is difficult to identify what is of God and what is not. Information overload and information presented as entertainment make the task of discerning good and evil very complicated. The prevalence of opinion polling suggests that evil and good can be identified and sorted democratically. The acceptance of democracy as "God's way" as subtly paved the way for passive acceptance of a proliferation of world views broadcast via various technological means.

15. **Electronic "Community":** Virtual reality threatens the existence of the sort of community that God intends for his people to live in. The notion that the Holy Spirit dwells in individuals but is not in communities is exacerbated by the various electronic conduits of culture that impose themselves on our collective lives. The combination of individualism, fatigue, consumerism, a truth-deficit, and passivity, discourage us from wasting time together as Christians, bound together and working together in love as Christ intended. The media and the World Wide Web form our new imagined and virtual

communities. TV characters who do not know us are our friends. We see and are seen as Facebook profiles instead of living, breathing, caring, loving, hurting, thinking, worshipping beings.

16. **Home Away From Home:** A culture dominated by technology erodes a notion of home which is central to our identity as humans. We are programmed to have a sense of belonging to a location and a group of people that we call home, and to yearn for this home when it is absent. Furthermore, we long deep within our being for an eternal home in our Father's house. In the meantime, we have a home here where God is with us. Home is a place where we tend a variety of gardens. We care for the place and the people in our home. Virtual homes come with no such requirement. Prolonged exposure to electronic homes will erode our ability to live meaningfully in a real one.

There is a great deal of overlap between these spirits of the age. While Hielema takes a close look at parts of the "elephant," this research project will also try to obtain a more distant and, therefore, holistic perspective by assembling a large mass of evidence about technology and its impact on culture as a conduit for cultural information. The work of Putnam (2001) will be examined, who in *Bowling Alone*, speaks of poor self-image and even depression which seem to result from extensive Internet usage. Gergen's (1991, p. 49) notion of populating the self will be discussed. The impact of information technology will be illumined by an understanding of Neil Postman's concept of low information-action ratio as described in Dawn's, *Is It a Lost Cause?* (Dawn, 1997, p. 182) Pipher's *The Shelter of Each Other* provides this research with a comparison of the electronic world to one big town as she laments how lonely young people have one-way relationships with famous people; with personae instead of persons. (Pipher, 1997, p. 13)

Methods

This study was an example of ethnographic research inasmuch as it is a description of a defined cultural situation. It took place in a global but very real setting and focused on how culture works in an attempt to gain understanding of it (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). This research project was a mixed methods study because it incorporated a literature review, aspects of a qualitative study, and made use of statistics which have been cited to make the point that technology is not only imposing itself on North American society, but it delivers culture, (spirits of the age) completely unsorted, to the hearts and minds of young people, in particular young people who are students in Christian schools.

This action research project has included a compilation of reflections of grade seven, eight, and nine Christian school students as they discussed the role(s) that technology plays in their lives and answered questions which gave evidence of media-enhanced spirits of the age working in their lives. Included in the assessment of technological cultural influences was a focus on the phenomenal rise in interest in the web-based social network Facebook, which began in 2004 (Brewis, 2008), to look at its role in the acquisition of culture of students at Rocky Christian School, in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. The central question pondered was, "What evidence do we see of the spirits of the age?" or as Hielema (2001) expresses in other words, "How do we become, a deceit-discerning community?" (Hielema, 2007) Students engaged in 16 sessions of answering questions (see Appendix A) during the third and final term of the 2008-2009 school year, where the teacher took three to five minutes at the beginning of each session to informally answer students questions to ensure that students had clarity about the technological and Biblical background of each question. Students had up to 15 minutes during

each session to write answers in spaces provided on forms which were collected after each

session and stored in a secure location.

A version of this method was put through a trial-run in September and October of 2007.

In the trial run, students entered initial responses directly to the blog site. The actual research

instead made use of the handwritten responses in order to solicit answers in the most untainted

form possible. After the trial-run many questions were changed and added to better gain

feedback on each of the 16 spirits of the age identified in Hielema. The questions asked of the

7th, 8th, and 9th grade students (see Appendix A) were intended to gauge the impact that each of

these 16 spirits of the age have had on each of their respective worldviews. These specific

questions are closely related to themes which come from Hielema's understanding of the media-

driven culture. Hielema submitted personal input into the questions posed. After students

answered the questions posed, they were introduced to the 16 spirits of the age and a brief

introduction to the problems using Hielema's discussion as a framework. Afterwards, students

were given a chance to add to their thoughts on the matters discussed. The answers have been

scrutinized for signs of the 16 spirits of the age. The results section of this document contains a

detailed discussion of the evidence of each of the 16 spirits gleaned from the students' responses.

The collection and sorting of data began with the list of 16 spirits of the age which have

been identified as categories that are important. Sections, paragraphs, words, and phrases of

student work that related to or illustrated the operation of a media-enhanced spirit of the age have

been highlighted. Descriptions of illustrative data sought were adjusted as we proceeded. Key

words and phrases were identified and counted as they recurred. Data was copied and pasted

into the 16 categories plus other categories as they emerged. Categories that swelled with an

abundance of data were treated as core categories. As data was read and coding began using the

16 initial categories, obvious themes will likely began to emerge. Themes are larger groupings of categories or spirits of the age. (Visible Knowledge Project, 2009)

Results

In order to uncover evidence that the 16 media enhanced "spirits of the age" identified by Hielema (2001) operate in the lives of middle school students at Rocky Christian School, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students were asked a total of 62 questions relating to these 16 spirits of the age. The spirits of the age are identified as headings in bold and underlined. The results for each question are represented in one or more tables. The table numbers correspond to the question numbers. Where more than one table is used to represent the data of a single question, table numbers with decimals have been used. Since key words and phrases were identified and counted as they recurred, in many cases a single student would use more than one key phrase or word and as such the total number of responses does not equal the total number of students and the number of responses is not consistent from question to question.

The Postmodern Shrug: Relativism

Table 1

Student Responses to the Question, "In What Situations is it OK to Say, 'Well, That's Right and

True for You, But It's Not Right and True for Me? When is it Not OK?'"

Student Responses	# Students
Christianity is right for everyone (Bible is absolute)	6
Religion is separate from other aspects of life	6
Hold Christians to a different standard than others	6
Parents determine personal (family) law	3
Laws of the land apply to all	3
Bad habits/activities wrong for all	2
Issues (abortion, euthanasia, etc.) wrong for all	1
Christianity will (should) differ from person to person	1
Many actions are neither right or wrong	1

There is no clear consensus in Table 1 regarding the absolute authority of Biblical truth

over all people.

Table 2

Student Responses to the Question, "What Do You Think is God's Purpose for Human Life?"

Student Responses	# Students
evangelize/teach/preach	11
to care for the earth/creation	11
to love/honor/serve God	10
to glorify/worship God	5
to be His image bearers	5
to commune/have relationship with God	4
to love our neighbors, live in harmony	4
to grow/learn/obey God's ways/laws	3
to build His kingdom	1
to be God's 'entertainment'/pleasure	1
no purpose	1
to have company in heaven	1
go to college, get a job, get married	1
to care for ourselves	1
to believe in God	1

There is a fairly even split represented in Table 2 between the salvation focus of

evangelical Christians and the creation/fall/redemption/restoration focus of reformed Christians.

Table 3

Student Responses to the Question, "How Do You React to Media Words, Images, and Themes

That You Believe to be Wrong?"

Student Responses	# Students
Turn away/change channel/fast-forward	9
Ignore it	6
Anger, sadness, must calm down	4
Nothing is wrong/no problem	4
Discuss with fellow viewers	4
Think about it	3
Awkward feeling	2
Regret non-action	1
Nothing can be done	1
Holy reaction, "God will win"	1
Justified non-action	1
Cool reaction "Wow! That's so stupid!"	1
Talk to parents	1
Sick-feeling	1

Responses represented in Table 3 appear passive and personal. No students admitted to

watching with great(er) interest and none suggested engaging in protest or boycott beyond

switching channels or fast-forwarding.

The Privatization of Faith and its Reduction to Morality

Table 4.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Imagine a Movie in Which There is a Romantic Scene, and

After Watching It, One of Your Parents Says to You, 'I Hope You Were Watching Carefully,

Because That was a God-Glorifying Romance Scene.' Could That Ever Happen?"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes it can happen	16
That could never happen	3
maybe or I doubt it	1
My parents would be joking	1

In Table 4.1 a large majority of students agree that it could happen.

Table 4.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Imagine a Movie in Which There is a Romantic Scene, and

After Watching it, One of Your Parents Says to You, 'I Hope You Were Watching Carefully,

Because That was a God-Glorifying Romance Scene.' What Would That Scene be Like?"

Student Responses	# Students
couple must be married	5
Scene was not sexually explicit	4
must be Christian couple	1
romance is from God	1
Christian romance is selfless	1
Romance for "good reasons"	1
no 'wrong' ideas presented	1
must be true love	1
recitation of poetry	1
all romance is God glorifying except rape	1
appropriately and with respect	1
less crude but not God-glorifying	1
Romance scenes typically dirty	1

In responses recorded in Table 4.2 only one respondent mentioned that the couple should

be Christian and that the love is qualitatively distinct (selfless).

Table 5.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Is Your Religion Anyone Else's Business?": Degree of

Affirmation

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	13
No	8
Sometimes	5
Indecisive	2

A majority of responses affirm that their religion is someone else's business and therefore

is not entirely private.

Table 5.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Is Your Religion Anyone Else's Business?": Comments

Student Responses	# Students
important to share/evangelize	10
you decide whose business it is	2
no secrets/shame about what I believe	2
model what you believe	1
need to make faith information available	1
need to be held to account	1
church is public	1
parents' and pastors' business	1
private process	1
should not be open to criticism	1
no answer	1

In Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 students indicate that it is OK to make other people's faith

their business (evangelism, modeling), but students do not express a willingness to make their

faith someone else's business.

Table 6.1

Student Responses to the Question, "What Does it Mean to be Masculine or Feminine?"

Comparisons with Male-Female Distinction

Student Responses	# Students
distinct from male/female	9
like a man / like a woman	6
synonymous with male/female	4
unclear	1

Many students report that everyone has both masculine and feminine traits and that being male is not synonymous with having masculine traits nor is femininity exclusively female.

Table 6.2

Student Responses to the Question, "What Does it Mean to be Masculine or Feminine?"

Descriptions

Student Responses	# Students
courage or toughness/caring or gentle	5
different hobbies/interests	4
strong/pretty	2
emotional differences	2
personality	2
grooming differences	2
physical difference	2
leadership-masculine	1
no distinction between male & female	1
no answer	4

A relatively small number of responses in Table 6.2 associated character traits to masculinity and femininity.

Individualism

Table 7.1

Student Responses to the Question, "What is Church for?" Individual Benefits

Student Responses	# Students
Learn about God	13
Faith nurturing	6
Experience Jesus' Love – God's presence	6
Understanding of Bible and Creation	5
Hear preaching	2
Teaching for new/non-Christians	2
Preparation for service	2
Build Self-esteem	1
Sabbath Rest	1
Discussion/sharing	1
total	39

Table 7.2

Student Responses to the Question, "What is Church for?" Interactions with God and Each

Other

Student Responses	# Students
Communion of the Saints	11
Prayer	1
Encourage each other	1
total	13

Table 7.3

Student Responses to the Question, "What is Church for?" Focus on God

Student Responses	# Students
Praise to God, worship	14
Give Thanks to God – remember what God has done	3
Singing	1
total	18

References to individual benefits clearly outnumber other purposes for church.

Table 8

Student Responses to the Question, "How Do You React to Your Friends When They Say or Do

Something That You Believe to be Wrong?"

Student Responses	# Students
Give direction	8
Say it is wrong	5
No reaction	4
Refuse to participate	3
Express personal view (I think it's wrong)	3
Warn of consequences	2
Response varies with severity	2
I have not discovered wrongdoing among my friends	2
Guilty silence	1
Uncomfortable/meek reaction against	1
Gentle rebuke	1
Go along with it	1
Justified inaction	1
Indifference	1
Seek respect for personal view	1
Suggest Alternative	1
Indignation	1

Many students do offer some corrective reaction on the basis of personal belief. None

indicated any notion of holding friends to account for their beliefs.

Table 9

Student Responses to the Question, "Is Christianity More Like a Team Sport or a Solo Sport?"

Student Responses	# Students
Team (with fellow players rather than coaches)	11
Both	8
Solo with coach(es)	8
Related to church attendance (rather than all of life)	4
Solo, individual, personal	3

Quite a lot of data interpretation was needed on Table 9 to discern if by 'team' the student meant helped by a coach as opposed to peers supporting each other mutually. If students wrote of being helped but not of playing a position relating to other players, the 'solo with coach' notion is presumed. There is some reluctance here on the part of participants to choose either team or solo when directed to do so. 'Both' was not an option sanctioned by the question.

Instant Gratification of Fabricated Desires

Table 10.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Describe Some Differences Between What You 'Want' and What You 'Need.'": Description of Needs

Student Responses	# Students
general	21
food/water	11
clothes	9
shelter	9
education	1
God	1

Table 10.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Describe Some Differences Between What You 'Want' and What You 'Need.'": Description of Wants

Student Responses	# Students
general	6
games/fun things	4
ease/conveniences	3
entertainment	2
television	1
candy	1
pets	1
telephones	1
iPods	1
cell phones	1

There is a strong consensus in Tables 10.1 and 10.2 that needs are things essential for existence and everything else falls into the "wants" category.

Table 10.3

Student Responses to the Question, "Describe Some Differences Between What You 'Want' and What You 'Need.'": Other Assertions

Student Responses	# Students
wants are things you don't need	15
wants are not bad	1
want is desire	1
needs are increasing	1

Only one person mentioned God and no one mentioned other people or air as needs.

Table 11

Student Responses to the Question, "What Makes You Want Things?"

Student Responses	# Students
jealousy	10
imagination/image	6
advertising/marketing	6
peer pressure	6
The media	5
I/people want things I/they like	4
way to fill time/void	3
human (sinful) nature	2
make others jealous	1
lack of gratitude for what we have	1
Satan	1
feels like a need (craving)	1
novelty	1

Many answers in Table 11 are similar to one another in meaning. There are subtle differences between jealousy and peer pressure which are difficult to discern from the data. It is also difficult to discern if jealousy and want are seen by students as vices or simple facts of life.

Table 12.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Is Entertainment Important?": Negative Responses

Student Responses	# Students
Not a necessity	4
No, detracts from better or healthier activity	3
Simple No	1
No, previous generations could manage without	1

Table 12.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Is Entertainment Important?": Affirmative Responses

Student Responses	# Students
Yes, Antidote for boredom/kills time	10
Simple Yes	7
Somewhat/sort of important/in moderation	5
Yes, contributes to happiness	3
Yes, cultural reasons	1
Yes, alternative to work	1
Yes, for young people	1
Yes, keeps you out of trouble	1
Yes, relieves stress	1
Yes, provides means to interact with others	1

Tables 12.1 and 12.2 indicate that entertainment is important to most students. The most common reason is entertainment's capacity to counteract boredom.

Table 13

Student Responses to the Question, "How Does Waiting Make You Feel?"

Student Responses	# Students
annoyed, angry, disgusted	10
impatient	8
bored	4
fearful, anxious, stressed, nervous	4
Varies, depends on situation	4
OK, fine, no big deal, everyday thing	4
happy	2
teaches patience	2
excited	1
opportunity to meet people (line-up)	1
sad	1
hungry	1
uncomfortable	1

The responses in Table 13 indicate that a majority of students experience negative feelings about waiting.

Table 14

Student Responses to the Question, "Do People Make Judgments About You on the Basis of Your Possessions?"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	15
Partial yes (Some people, Most people, Sometimes, Probably, Maybe)	6
No, I don't think so	5
Almost no, qualified no	1

21 yeses and partial yeses were recorded. A substantial majority believe they are judged on the basis of their possessions.

Compartmentalized Anthropology

Table 15

Student Responses to the Question, "We are Called to Love God with Our Emotions, Our

Desires, Our Minds, Our Actions, Everything! Is it Easier to Love Him with Some "Parts" of

Ourselves Than Others?"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	9
No	4
Circular answers, make no sense	2
I think so	1
I don't think so	1
Actions, then minds, then desires	1
I don't know	1
Parts cannot be separated	1
Easier to love with actions (words)	1
Minds and desires easy, actions and emotions hard	1
Minds and actions hard	1
Emotions easier than actions	1
Minds hard	1
Minds easier than desires and actions	1
Heart easier than mind	1

There are many brief and non-answers represented in Table 15.

Table 16

Student Responses to the Question, "If Yes, Why Are Some "Parts" Easier Than Others?"

Student Responses	# Students
No answer / no to question 'a' / I don't know	7
Requires discipline / self-control	7
Peer pressure	3
Lack of conviction / personal responsibility	2
Parts disagree with each other	2
Varied emotional states and situations	2
Sin	2
Parts vary in experience or opportunity to love	2
God's impact varies from area to area	1
Some parts art more visible	1
Parts vary in importance	1

There are a large number of non-answers reflected in Table 16. Many referred to

discipline and self-control as requirements for loving God with all of our parts in unity.

Table 17

Student Responses to the Question, "Is Love Something You Do or Something You Feel?

Explain."

Student Responses	# Students
Both/either	18
No answer, non-answer	5
Feel	4
Do	2

A large majority define love as both emotion and action.

Table 18.1

Student Responses to the Question, "What Do You Mean by the Word 'Heart' When You Love

God with All Your Heart?": Totality Responses

Student Responses	# Students
heart is all I am	8
heart is entirety of life	1
heart is totality of effort	1
heart is totality of relationship	1
heart is all of my being and potential	1
heart is all I am and have	1
Total of above 'totality' section	13

The majority of answers included some notion of the heart of the totality of ones being.

These answers are clustered together but do contain subtle differences from one another.

Table 18.2

Student Responses to the Question, "What Do You Mean by the Word 'Heart' When You Love

God with All Your Heart?":Descriptors

Student Responses	# Students
heart is mind	3
heart is soul	2
heart is desire	2
heart is physical	1
heart is body, soul, and mind	1
heart is life-source	1
heart is highest priority	1
heart is commitment (locus of commitment)	1

Ideas about the heart as cognitive, emotive, spiritual, or bodily are all represented in the

data, but none is prevalent.

Commitment and Choice

Table 19

Student Responses to the Question, "What Role Does Your Faith in Christ Play in Making

Decisions?"

Student Responses	# Students
Jesus helps make good decisions (discern)	8
What would Jesus/God have me do?	4
What would Jesus do? Jesus is the model	3
Avoid bad decisions	3
Faith in Christ does not help in decision making	2
Faith helps a little, or sometimes	2
Feeling or thoughts about right and wrong	2
God is always watching/present	2
Helps with tough or big decisions	1
The Bible gives me direction	1
Godly respect for parents	1
Natural consequences	1

Many responses affirm that, "Jesus" helps, as compared to the language of the question

that, "Faith in Christ" helps.

Table 20

Student Responses to the Question, "Describe the Relationship Between Choices that You Make

and Choices that God Makes with Regards to You (Your Life)."

Student Responses	# Students
God guides our decisions	7
No Answer	5
Our choices burdened with sin, God's are not	4
God has the big picture (omniscient and good)	3
I don't know	3
God governs over all choices	2
We make small decisions, God makes big ones	2
God decides consequences of our choices	1
Our choices are similar to God's	1
God does not make choices	1
God makes all choices	1

Students were more likely to answer the question represented in Table 20 in terms of God's role in personal human decisions than in terms of decisions that God makes or has made independently.

Table 21

Student Responses to the Question, "How Do You Decide What to Believe?"

Student Responses	# Students
Parents, Family	8
Feels Right, rings true	7
Bible	4
I decide	4
Prayer	4
Reasoning	4
Other Christians, spiritual leader, pastor	2
Maturation, transition from parents to me	2
Guidance of the Holy Spirit, God in my heart	2
Environment	1
Love (experience)	1
Conscience	1
Popular Opinion	1
Anti-Religious	1

Table 21 shows that families and feelings are on the forefront of decision making with regards to personal beliefs.

Low Information-Action Ratio (passive receptivity)

Table 22.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Have You Ever Learned About a Serious Problem on TV (Hunger, AIDS in Africa, etc.) and Wanted to Do Something About it?" Agreement

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	21
No	6
no desire to act on problem(s)	2

Table 22.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Have You Ever Learned About a Serious Problem on TV

(Hunger, AIDS in Africa, etc.) and Wanted to Do Something About it?" Specific Problem

Student Responses	# Students
hunger, poverty, Africa, AIDS	13
disaster	2
animal abuse	1

Poverty, hunger, and disease are the most prevalent specific problems students expressed

a desire to respond to.

Table 23.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Did You Do Something?" Yes or No

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	20
No	8

Table 23.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Did You Do Something?" Specific Action

Student Responses	# Students
30 hour famine	12
tithe, donation	3
Sponsor a child	2
through school or church	1
shoe boxes / Christmas child	1
prayer	1
no but my family does	1
regret	1

Most of the actions listed involve the student participating in a planned event or program.

Table 24.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Did You Wish an Adult had Shown You How to Do

Something?" Yes or No

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	10
No	11
maybe/sometimes	4
I did get adult help	3

Table 24.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Did You Wish an Adult had Shown You How to Do

Something?" Specific

Student Responses	# Students
fundraising	1
how to make a donation	1
I want to be independent	1
I know what to do	1

Only a small number of students made reference to a specific task they wished an adult

had instructed them about.

Table 25

Student Responses to the Question, "How Do You Respond Inside When You Witness Horrible

Human Tragedies on TV?"

Student Responses	# Students
feel sad/sorry	8
motivated to help	6
sympathetic	4
indifferent/callous	3
angry/disgusted/sick	2
feel selfish/shame	2
surprised/shocked	2
scared/fear	1
prayer	1
shudder	1
no answer	2

Table 26

Student Responses to the Question, "What Media Messages Do You <u>Not</u> Take Seriously?"

Student Responses	# Students
ads which appear to stretch truth and ads for alcohol, energy drinks etc.	8
ads about 'pointless' things	2
reports on the lives of stars	2
misrepresentation of Biblical Truth	2
I do not take any media messages seriously	2
messages about how to be cool	2
'bad' media messages	1
billboards	1
computer pop-ups	1
The weather	1
violence	1
profanity	1

For many students "media" means TV and "messages" are ads. The distinctions between

advertising for 'bad stuff' and ads which stretch the truth were so unclear that the results were

merged.

Table 27

Student Responses to the Question, "When 1 John 3:18 says, 'Dear Children, Let Us not Love with Words or Tongue but with Actions and in Truth,' What Actions Are Required?"

Student Responses	# Students
help people	11
loving actions	4
give, charity	3
telling people about the Word	3
be like Jesus	3
good actions, do something	2
show you care	2
show kindness	2
pray	1
show mercy	1
golden rule	1
good example	1
walk the walk	1
free labor	1
hardworking	1
demonstrate fruits of the spirit	1
follow ten commandments	1

The students' most commonly mentioned way to love with actions and in truth was to help people.

The Desire for Convenience and the Avoidance of Pain

Table 28

Student Responses to the Question, "Remember a Time in Your Life that You did Something that was Very Difficult, Very Inconvenient, and Afterwards You were Glad that You did it. What was it?"

Student Responses	# Students
organized event	11
helped someone/work/sacrifice	4
learned/practice/discipline	3
interpersonal encounter	2
spiritual encounter	1
Undescribed episode	1

Very few students report an event where something difficult is done which was not organized by adults.

Table 29

Student Responses to the Question, "Why were You Glad Afterwards?"

Student Responses	# Students
Unclear, don't remember	10
someone benefitted	6
personal joy/benefit/education	4
motivated or influenced others	2
obedient to God	2
personal improvement/ learned empathy	2
met the challenge	2
gratitude	1

A number of students were glad they did something difficult but were unable to recount the reasons why. While we see in Table 28 that most of the difficult activity was for an unselfish cause, we see in Table 29 that much of the gladness afterwards was attributable to personal benefit.

Table 30

Student Responses to the Question, "What Sorts of Life Activities Fit this Category?"

Student Responses	# Students
Sacrifice/mission	12
non-answer	11
Physical Work	3
loving enemies	2
Overcome fear/difficulty	2
Confession	1
Honing skills	1

Many students did not answer the question.

Table 31

Student Responses to the Question, "Is it Important to Regularly Have Such Activities in Our Lives? Why or Why Not?"

Student Responses	# Students
life lesson	15
personal satisfaction/benefit/joy	8
no answer	3
good work accomplished	2
Simple Yes	1
Probably not	1
Sometimes	1

Table 32

Student Responses to the Question, "What is the Role of Prayer in Your Life?"

Student Responses	# Students
relationship/conversation with God	9
psychological benefit / help in hard times	8
daily routine	6
thanksgiving	6
supplication	3
miracles/help others	3
I don't pray (much)/prayer unimportant	3
no answer/I don't know	3
personal benefit	2
confession	2

The most common roles of prayer in students' lives, reflected in Table 32, are

conversations with God and help in hard times.

Table 33

Student Responses to the Question, "Is it Hard to be a Christian? Explain"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes – persecution	10
Sometimes, situational	6
Yes – lifestyle/life	4
Yes – faith defense	2
Yes – expectations	1
Yes – don't want to be one	1
Yes – judged/example	1
Yes – spiritual warfare	1
No – going to heaven	1
No – no discrimination	1
No – sheltered	1
Yes – evangelism	1

The difficulty of living a Christian life is primarily a result of persecution and defending

the faith according to the data.

Special Events

Table 34

Student Responses to the Question, "Why Do You Attend Events Such as YC Alberta (Major

Christian Concert/Youth Conference)?"

Student Responses	# Students
fun/enjoyment	7
learn about God	7
socialize/new friends	5
(awesome) experience	4
Excellent speakers	4
fellowship (Christian)	3
Excellent musicians	3
experience God's love/closeness	3
I don't attend	3
build faith	2
Worship	2
relationship with God	2
do Christian stuff	1
listen to God	1
salvation advise	1
loud music	1

Fun and socializing are among the most mentioned reasons for attending.

Table 35

Student Responses to the Question, "What Effects Do Such Special Events Have on You a Month

After They Are Over?"

Student Responses	# Students
I remember/know what I learned	5
memory fades (some buzz left)	4
they help me	2
I think about them	2
varies	2
No change	2
I forget about them	1
Faith strengthened	1
closer to God	1
fire reignited	1
I remember the fun	1

The enduring effects are more often about the experience and lessons learned than about

amusement and socializing.

Table 36.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Do You Enjoy Work? Explain." Degree of Affirmation

Student Responses	# Students
I like work sometimes (conditional)	18
I like having completed work	4
I enjoy work	3
I know it is good for me	2
I dislike work	2
I usually dislike work	2
I love work	1
I detest work	1

The majority express some condition for enjoying work. Only a small minority indicated

that they enjoy work unconditionally.

Table 36.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Do You Enjoy Work? Explain". Conditions

Student Responses	# Students
if I get paid	3
if I'm in a good mood	2
if it's easy	2
if it interests me	1
if it's good for me	1
if God gives me a servant's heart	1
when it is a good thing to do	1
if it is outside	1
if I feel like I'm accomplishing something	1
if it is not physical	1
if it is not school work	1
if it's not dirty	1

Few referred to the value or accomplishment of the work, in their responses, as the reason

for enjoying work.

The Relationship Between Noise and Silence

Table 37.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Do You Enjoy Silence? Explain" Affirmation

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	12
Sometimes/somewhat	11
Mostly not	3
No	2

A large majority of students indicated that they enjoy silence.

Table 37.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Do You Enjoy Silence? Explain." Comments

Student Responses	# Students
silence facilitates thinking	7
there's too much noise in my life	3
when with annoying people	2
silence facilitates resting	2
silence facilitates relaxation and comfort	2
depends on my mood	2
silence can be frightening	1
silence facilitates praying	1
sometimes I need noise	1
Not sure	1

The most common response suggests that noise interferes with thinking.

Table 38

Student Responses to the Question, "When Do You Experience Silence?"

Student Responses	# Students
In my room (at home)(in bed)	13
When alone	12
At night or early morning	10
When outdoors (hunting or fishing)	5
when siblings are absent	3
when reading	3
Random times/lots of times	2
In awkward moments	2
When I want it	1
When I'm given the silent treatment	1
After reprimand from teacher	1
When everyone stops talking	1
When there is nothing to say	1
When doing nothing	1
In the library	1
when taking a test	1
On road trips	1
Bath time	1
never	1

Quiet time is most prevalent in students' bedrooms in the early and late hours of the day. There are no signs in Table 38 of silence which endures longer than 10 or 12 hours.

Table 39

Student Responses to the Question, "What Do You do When it is Quiet?"

Student Responses	# Students
think	10
read	9
take a nap/sleep	7
listen to music	5
pray	3
relax, get comfortable	3
use computer or watch TV	3
make noise	3
do homework	3
sit and look around (at Creation)	2
walk around	1
pet my cat	1
find something to do	1
do something fun	1
work	1
get restless	1
talk	1
watch a movie	1

Many of the quiet activities produce noise and involve some degree of commotion including electronic commotion.

History is Bunk

Table 40

Student Responses to the Question, "In What Ways Do Stories That Your Grandparents (or

Older Relatives) Have Told You About Their Lives Affect You?"

Student Responses	# Students
they teach lessons	7
make hardship (war) more real	7
no stories	4
learn how the world has changed	3
history is bunk	2
alter my ambitions	1
make me want to do the same	1
shape views about justice	1
learn to value a simpler life	1
make me think	1
increases respect	1
learn about heritage	1
learn to be thankful	1
"positively"	1

Only a very small minority declared that history is of no importance.

Table 41

Student Responses to the Question, "Do You Feel at All That What They Experienced in Their

Lives Helps You Understand Your Own Life as Their Grandchild?   Why or Why Not?"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	12
No	10
their lives were too different	6
family pride suggested	5
common experiences	3
Maybe/somewhat	2
family history is entrusted to me	1
family shame suggested	1

Students were divided between those who gained understanding from their grandparents'

stories and those who found little value in stories of the past.

Table 42.1

Student Responses to the Question, "How Important is Knowledge of the Past?" Degree of

Affirmation

Student Responses	# Students
Important	11
very important	9
not important	3
quite important	3
somewhat (not too) important	1

A large majority see knowledge of the past as important.

Table 42.2

Student Responses to the Question, "How Important is Knowledge of the Past?" Comments

Student Responses	# Students
don't make the same mistakes	10
know (for) the future	5
know what happened	4
remember and be grateful	3
know how things were	1

Table 43

Student Responses to the Question, "How Do You Know if or when God is Talking to You?"

Student Responses	# Students
feeling/urge	9
(agrees with) scripture	4
conscience	2
prayer/conversation with Him	2
dreams	2
God's voice	1
speaks to your heart	1
repetition / coincidence	1
logic (good-God/bad-Satan)	1
visions	1
nature	1
people	1
you can tell it's from Him	1
signs	1
God doesn't talk to me	1

The most common answer affirms that knowledge that God is talking to students is

confirmed by feelings.

Table 44

Student Responses to the Question, "What Do You Think is Wrong with the World?"

Student Responses	# Students
sin (the Fall)	12
crime (murder, stealing)	6
war	5
'lots'	3
poor care for the earth	3
drugs	2
crazy religions – battle of religions	2
hate	1
us	1
materialism	1
selfishness	1
care for each other	1
poverty	1
hypocritical "Christians"	1
broken fellowship	1
not enough evangelism	1
normal to do wrong	1
teaching 'extra-Biblical' history	1
ignorance	1
ingratitude	1
nothing	1

The "sins" mentioned most frequently are criminal activities.

The Achievement Compulsion

Table 45

Student Responses to the Question, "Do Your Parents and Friends Relate to You Based on What

You Do or Based on Who You Are?"

Student Responses	# Students
Who I am	8
Both	7
What I do	4
I don't know	1
either way they love me	1

Table 46

Student Responses to the Question, "What's the Difference?"

Student Responses	# Students
I don't know/unclear	9
real friends like you for who you are; God's creature	3
(my) thinking versus acting	2
parents stick with you when friends don't	2
most people only see what you do, not who you are	2
personality versus achievement	2
(parent and friend) reaction	1
who I am is just a name, I am known by what I do	1
better to relate to what you are	1
actions can change, identity cannot	1
identity is a feeling	1
what you do is subject to peer influence … not who you are	1
identity is internal, actions are external	1
relating to people who are the same vs. do the same	1
actions are misunderstood because identity is misunderstood	1

Many students refrained from responding to this question. Many students understand

'relating' to mean liking or loving.

Table 47

Student Responses to the Question, "How Can You Tell?"

Selected Student Responses
1. You can tell just on how much they told you what they would have done.
2. One student expressed the idea that people must be authentic if they are to be related to for who they are.
3. I know because even when I do wrong, they still love me the same amount and if not the same, more.
4. It's challenging, but when people are themselves you can just tell. When they're acting "weird" their eyes show a hint of it.

The responses to this question do not appear to indicate a pattern. For this reason instead

of coding the data, selected responses were quoted verbatim.

Table 48

Student Responses to the Question, "Is it True that God Helps Those Who Help Themselves?"

Student Responses	# Students
No	10
I don't know/no answer	8
Yes	5
sometimes	4
God helps everyone	2

Students answering "no" outnumbered those responding with a "yes" by a two to one margin. A significant number gave no response.

Table 49.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Do Christians Achieve More Than Non-Christians?

Explain." Affirmation

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	16
No	10

Table 49.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Do Christians Achieve More Than Non-Christians?

Explain." Explanation

Student Responses	# Students
Yes, in heaven	9
Yes, spiritually	6
Yes, on earth	1
unclear/unsure	2
no answer	1

Since the question was meant to imply earthly achievements like productivity and earning an income, "Yes, in heaven," and, "Yes, spiritually," are understood to mean, "No," in Table 49.1. Table 49.2 gives clarity to the intended meaning of affirmative responses. The word "Heaven" was used frequently in student responses.

The Shape of Discourse

Table 50

Student Responses to the Question, "How Important is Politeness when on MSN or Text Messaging?"

Student Responses	# Students
Very important, WWJD, rudeness is wrong, etc.	13
Somewhat important, depends on ..., less than ...	5
don't have/know/use MSN etc.	4
Not important	2
Important	2
confusing answer	2

Only two students indicated that politeness in unimportant on MSN or when using text messaging.

Table 51

Student Responses to the Question, "What Does it Mean to Speak the Truth in Love?"

Student Responses	# Students
how the truth is spoken, nicely/politely	9
non-answer	6
why the truth is spoken	5
both how and that	4
about truth telling	3
when the truth is spoken	1
that the truth is spoken	1

Most students focused responses on clarified the meaning of "speaking in love" as opposed to "speaking the truth."

The Difficulty of Discernment

Table 52

Student Responses to the Question, "Have You Ever Thought After Hearing a Sermon, 'I Don't Think I Agree; I Think the Preacher Distorted Something in the Bible?'"

Student Responses	# Students
No	18
Yes	7
I don't listen to sermons/I don't go to church	3
Answer demonstrates discernment	2
Answer demonstrated discernment of a homily from a teacher	1

Most students have never questioned the Biblicalness of a sermon heard in church according to the responses.

Table 53

Student Responses to the Question, "Is There a Voice Inside You That is Continually Examining How True and Right Things Are?"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	22
Reference to personal actions rather than discernment of truth...conscience	9
Sometimes	3
No	2

Most students indicate they are continually examining the truth of messages they are confronted with.

Table 54

Student Responses to the Question, "Do You Pay Attention for Matters of Right and Wrong?"

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	22
Sometimes/somewhat/mostly	4
No	1

Students believe they are alert to matters of righteousness and truth.

Table 55

Student Responses to the Question, "Who in Your World is Watching to See What is True (on TV,

the Internet, Etc.)? How?"

Student Responses	# Students
parents	15
God, Holy Spirit	8
self	4
nobody or almost nobody	3
teachers	1
people who care	1
Internet authorities / watchdogs	1

While most students indicate that their parents are watching out for truth and deceit, only

a small number of students claimed that they were themselves watching for such things.

Table 56

Student Responses to the Question, "What Does the Term, 'Spirits of the Age' Mean to You?

How Do These Spirits Travel/Spread/Behave?"

Selected Student Responses
1. They spread maybe through your conscience, and they behave well, you probably wouldn't even know they were there. But they can be bad.
2. Spirits are things that are all around us.
3. Technology and other bad things.
4. They can travel through TV, computers and cell phones. They can spread through people. There are good and bad things in this world that are going around. I think that certain things can change us.
5. I don't totally understand the concept of "spirits of the age" but I do know that there is a spiritual battle going on around us and Satan works in as many ways as he can.
6. I think they're bad spirits who get you with drugs and self destruction. And good ones have come in good forms.
7. Spirits of the age mean the behaviors, attitudes and beliefs of the current time.
8. What spirits of god are alive in all of us today in the 21st century.
9. I guess it means the beliefs of people right now. They spread by actions, words and media. TV shows and music tell a lot about what we "believe".
10. It means individualism, rights to choice.

The responses to this question do not appear to indicate a pattern. For this reason instead

of coding the data, selected responses were quoted verbatim.

Electronic "Community"

Table 57

Student Responses to the Question, "Think of a Time When a Difficult Situation Arose in Your Family or Community and Someone Whom You Did Not Know Very Well Emerged as a Loving, Comforting Hero. What's the Difference Between That Kind of a "Hero" and the Heroes of the Music and Entertainment Industry?"

Student Responses	# Students
Real heroes help (those in need) save	9
Real heroes care	5
Entertainers don't really care about fans/others	3
Real heroes do good things (sheep from Matthew 25)	2
Entertainers are fake or non-heroes (just entertainment)	3
Entertainers look good/beautiful/glamorous	2
Entertainers care about money	2
A real hero has a personal relationship with beneficiary	2
Entertainers think highly of themselves	2
Real heroes love what they do	1
Both kinds of heroes help people	1
Entertainer heroes don't help	1
Entertainment from heroes is usually bad	1

Answers here indicate that students understand a real hero to be virtuous and do not indicate a high regard for entertainers.

Table 58.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Should the Parents of Rocky Christian School Students Get Together to Decide on Guidelines for TV, Movie, Music, and Internet Usage? Why or Why Not?"Affirmative Responses

Student Responses	# Students
Yes – easier for teachers to show movies	2
Yes – so parents know what children are watching	2
Yes – no discriminating / equality	1

Table 58.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Should the Parents of Rocky Christian School Students Get

Together to Decide on Guidelines for TV, Movie, Music, and Internet Usage? Why or Why

Not?" Negative Responses

Student Responses	# Students
No – parents each set own rules / own business	13
No – no detail	3
No – kids won't listen cooperate	2
No – not lenient enough rules would result	2
No – kids should choose what to watch	1
No – too much sheltering of kids	1
No – we should trust each other	1
No – It would mess everything up	1
non-answer / I don't know / semi-answer	2

Negative responses clearly outnumber affirmative ones. A number of "no" responses

invoke the rights to parents to make individual choices for their own family.

Table 59

Student Responses to the Question, "Describe What Our Reaction Should Be When There is a

Disaster on the Other Side of the World?"

Student Responses	# Students
Emotional or verbal response	14
Active response - general	7
Spiritual response (pray)	4
attempt (try) to help	3
Financial response	1
Active response - specific	1
distant (remote) response	1
raise awareness	1
direct help (in the afflicted area)	1
evangelize	1
conditional response	1

More indicated that there should be an emotional or verbal response than that there should be an active, helpful response.

Home Away From Home

Table 60

Student Responses to the Question, "How Important is Home?"

Student Responses	# Students
place of eating, sleeping, and shelter	5
place of comfort / peace	4
place to belong / always welcome	4
place of safety	4
place of love	3
place of quiet / solitude	2
place of family	2
place of Christian living	2
place of bonding	1
place of sharing	1
place of character formation	1
place of entertainment	1
place to get away from	1
Home is not important	1

The role of home appears in many cased to be a refuge from a noisy world.

Table 61.1

Student Responses to the Question, "Read Matthew 25:31-46 (The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats). Is it Possible to Be a Sheep on the Internet?" Affirmation

Student Responses	# Students
Yes	7
maybe, possibly, sometimes, depends, etc	6
No	1

Table 61.2

Student Responses to the Question, "Read Matthew 25:31-46 (The Parable of the Sheep and the

Goats). Is it Possible to be a Sheep on the Internet?" Comments

Student Responses	# Students
The Internet is not (all) bad	3
Filter out bad	2
If you are careful	2
Post kind and appropriate things	1
By showing respect	1
Use appropriate language	1

Few students added comments to responses to this question.

Table 62

Student Responses to the Question, "What are the Characteristics of a Family that is Close?"

Student Responses	# Students
love	11
comforting / caring	11
talk / share / discuss each other's lives	9
share prayer time	6
joyful / play / fun / content / happy	6
share meals	4
spend time together	3
don't fight, gets along	3
protect each other	2
there if you need them / supportive	2
close to God, Christian	2
discipline (spanking)	2
share embarrassing stories	1
share feelings	1
share rooms	1
not embarrassed by parents & siblings	1
make up quickly / forgive	1
do fight	1
works together	1

The theme of sharing in various ways emerges from this table. The word "together" is

repeated many times in student responses.

Discussion

The Postmodern Shrug: Relativism

While reviewing the answers to the questions relating to relativism, this study sought after signs of tolerance, obliteration of boundaries between the truth and the lie, the importance of intrigue as opposed to truthfulness, personal theologies which are neither right nor wrong.

Signs of tolerance and obliteration of any line between truth and untruth can be found in a significant number of answers that indicate a differing set of standards for Christians than non-Christians. Non-Christians are outside of the Christian's sphere of influence and therefore their different truth is tolerated. It must be noted that a similar number of responses contended that Christianity is for everyone. Additionally, there appears to be a level of discomfort with ascribing to Christianity observance a level of absoluteness that equals legal statute observance. Tolerance is most clearly seen in the answers to the question represented in Table 3, "How do you react to media words, images, and themes that you believe to be wrong?" Popular responses included turning away, ignoring them, and having no objection at all. No students admitted to watching with great(er) interest and nobody was indignant enough to engage in protest or boycott. While some felt sick and awkward, there were few signs of anyone sticking their neck out or taking a stand.

The lack of any evidence with regards to the preeminence of entertainment value over integrity may be the result of questions which did not adequately address the matter. While some of the responses suggest a theological perspective, there is little evidence here of personal theologies. There is however some evidence of family theologies inasmuch as some mentioned parents as a determiner of right and wrong, but no one mentioned a faith community. The

foundation for personal theologies appears to be in place when faith communities and practices are not mentioned. At set of mores may be replaced by the variable practices of the home.

There is an incongruity among the responses when one considers that spreading the Gospel and stewardship top the list of purposes for humanity while at the same time responses the question represented in Table 3, "How do you react to media words, images, and themes that you believe to be wrong?" are considerably more passive than active. The responses to the question represented in Table 1, "In what situations is it OK to say, 'Well, that's right and true for you, but it's not right and true for me? When is it not OK?'" indicate that the notion that all of life is religion is not prevalent. The separation of the life of faith from other parts of our lives is evidence of relativism in the lives of students.

The Privatization of Faith and its Reduction to Morality

We can see signs of the reduction of faith to morality when students are asked to describe a God-glorifying romance scene as represented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. Student answers did not focus on what would make the scene pleasing in God's sight. Rather they focused on the morality of the situation in at least two ways. First, they were concerned about the morality of the relationship when they communicated that the couple must be married. Second, they were expressing apprehension about the morality of the film production when voicing alarm about sexually explicit content. Only one respondent mentioned that the couple should be Christian and that their love must be qualitatively distinct. A romantic scene involving a Christian couple should demonstrate the kind of selfless love that Christ has for His bride; the church. The students showed concern about the scene being moral rather than virtuous.

The problem of privatization of faith is more extensive than simply withholding Jesus' name from public expression. We contribute to the problem when we do not invite public input into discussions of God's plans to make all things new. The privatization of faith is evidenced in student answers to the question represented in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, "Is your religion anyone else's business?" Christianity is something of a one-way street for students who on one hand generally agree that their religion is the business of others but on the other hand overwhelmingly understand that making their religion someone else's business implies evangelism or spreading the gospel. They did not extend the invitation for others to enlighten them with religious wisdom. They make their faith private by exercising control over the door to the heart. For faith to be truly public, my faith must have a public agenda which is open to public examination.

While it may be true the privatization of faith and its reduction to morality manifests itself in the lives of students, the extent to which it has impacted the way they view masculinity and femininity is unclear. The example of a movie scene was chosen in this study because Christians might look for the sexual explicitness of a film and disregard the ways that the wonder of being made in God's image is distorted in society's understanding of maleness and femaleness. However, when asked about masculinity and femininity, as represented in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, very few students spoke of appearance, grooming or ways of meeting the standards that society sets for gender identity. Instead student responses focused on character traits and interests.

Individualism

It may be the case that individualism is so deeply rooted in the culture in which we and our children live that the notion of team is no longer clearly understood. Student responses, represented in Table 9, demonstrate that any time one receives help he or she is part of a team. Only a small number spoke of helping each other or being stronger together. No one noted the differing roles that team members play to complement one another. Although most students held that Christianity is more like a team sport than a solo sport, the details of the responses indicate that Christianity is fundamentally a personal matter for which help is available from parents, teachers, pastors and friends. Biblical notions of being an inseparable and unique part of a body which, in its entirety is the bride of Christ are secondary to the notion of a one-on-one relationship with Jesus.

When the question represented in Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3, "What is church for?" is posed, references that students make to individual benefits clearly outnumber other purposes for church. One articulate student said,

> "God wants us to have fellowship with one another and He's given us pastors and others to help us, but there's a time when it's just between you and God. The struggle of your personal relationship with God is exactly that – personal. It's nice to have a person to talk with and to help you, but making decisions about your life and future (I think) is between you and God."

Is it not the case that team athletes struggle with their personal contribution to the team effort and that teams struggle together to accomplish their collective goals? The scriptures clearly call for believers to meaningfully commune with each other and with God. The articulate student appears to be missing out on the richness of interpersonal relationships that God intends for His people.

Further evidence of individualism in the lives of our students can be found in responses to the question represented in Table 8, "How do you react to your friends when they say or do something that you believe to be wrong?" We see that in each case action (or inaction) is based on personal belief of the student observing the wrong behavior. No one indicated an inclination or responsibility to hold someone to account for their commitments or expressions of belief. No student shared responsibility for the wrong activity. In the same way that Christianity is seen as a solo activity, sin is seen as something which is the responsibility of the individual sinner.

Instant Gratification of Fabricated Desires

As we seek to identify technology, specifically mass media and computer mediated communication, as a factor that has contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of students who attend Christian schools; we asked questions to help us understand the degree to which they seek instant gratification of fabricated desires. Regardless of how technical gadgets and entertainment are treated in the lives of the students, no student contended that they were needs, as seen in Tables 10.1, 10.2, and 10.3. A strong majority held essential things like food, shelter and water to be needs and entertainment related items were wants. Education was identified as a need by one person. One person affirmed that God is a need. No one mentioned other people or air as a need. When students were asked what it is that makes them want things, we see in Table 11 answers like jealousy, peer pressure, human nature and Satan, which all suggest that students acknowledge that wanting something has negative connotations. One person spoke of a want feeling like a need. One would suspect that these same students would find consumerism to be problematic. Our study suggests that fabricated desires are not overtly prevalent in the lives of this group of students. It is difficult to ascertain if jealousy and want are

seen as vices or simple facts of life. Perhaps more helpful feedback would have been collected

had we asked, "What would be required to make you NOT want desirable things?"

Although students give little evidence that they themselves are damaged by consumerism,

a clear majority of them confirm, as shown in Table 14, that people make judgments about them

on the basis of their possessions. A good follow-up question would be, "Do you judge others on

the basis of their possessions?"

Even though no student expressed that entertainment was a need, almost all students

considered entertainment to be important. Whereas considering entertainment to be important is

not a cause for concern, the fact, as represented in Table 12.2, that many cited boredom as the

reason for its importance is troubling. The cry, "I am bored!" is closely related to the plea, "Will

somebody please entertain me?" The passivity that boredom requires can be seen in many of the

responses. Entertainment is something done by entertainers. While student responses suggest

concerns with regards to boredom and passivity, they give us very little evidence to suggest a

need for instant gratification or the fabrication of desire.

Compartmentalized Anthropology

Students were clearly challenged by the complexity of issues pertaining to various

notions of compartmentalized anthropology. On one hand it is encouraging to note that

responses to the question represented in Tables 18.1 and 18.2, "What do you mean by the word

'heart' when you love God with all your heart?" a majority of students acknowledged some way

in which the word heart implied a totality as opposed to a compartment. On the other hand,

when asked if it easier to love God with some "parts" of ourselves than others, as represented in

Table 15 and 16, only one respondent asserted that parts cannot be separated.

The question represented in Table 17, "Is love something you do or something you feel?" is also a complex one. Overwhelmingly students said it is both. It is complex because feeling and doing might suggest emotion and body compartments but it is also possible to feel or do with your whole un-compartmentalized being. The intent of the question was to consider emotion a compartment which produces a variety of feelings which are fleeting, but steadfast love (1 Corinthians 13) is the action (doing) of an un-compartmentalized heart. The extent to which compartmentalized anthropology is a spirit of the age which infects these students remains unclear.

Commitment and Choice

Perhaps this section should have been called commitment versus choice as they are mutually exclusive values which tend to displace each other. If there was a continuum between commitments and choices, every decision could be placed on that line depending on the degree of conviction in that decision. Commitments endure. The notion of choice implies a right to change one's mind. When the question represented in Table 19 was asked, "What role does your faith in Christ play in making decisions?" students reinterpreted the question to be one that is less about faith and more about an ongoing series of decision-making conversations with Jesus. The language of faith which is imbued with a notion of commitment is being displaced with a language of consecutive conversations with Jesus which might or might not be connected to one another. God appears to be more of a coach than a reason to live or a being who makes enduring decisions with regards to our lives. It is noteworthy that no one gave a response containing the notion that I live to honor God's preeminent decisions.

Table 20 shows the results when students were asked to describe the relationship between choices that they make and choices that God makes with regard to their lives. Their responses demonstrate a greater level of comfort when dealing with the notion of personal decisions as opposed to divine decision making. The concept of God choosing a people to live for and with Him was not mentioned nor were there remarks about God's wondrous decision to offer salvation to His people. No student made reference to the steadfastness of God's choices versus ours.

When faced with the question represented in Table 21, "How do you decide what to believe?" for many students the question became, "Who decides," or, "what is a trusted source of truth?" A few students wrote something like, "I believe that which fits with what I know from the Bible." Others spoke of being aided in decision making through the teaching of Christians their lives. One spoke of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many spoke of help from family members. Creation and diligent study were not mentioned which suggests something about the ease of decision making. Numerous responses made reference to decisions feeling right or ringing true. The impression left is that the very notion of commitment and the necessary struggle that precedes commitment making has been substantially eroded. Having said that, it is important to add that there is no evidence of students declaring a right to choose. Indications that commitment is a diminishing reality in the lives of students are subtle.

Low Information-Action Ratio (Passive Receptivity)

News of war, famine, earthquakes, poverty, disease, and severe weather in all corners of the world enters our homes through TV and computer screens on a regular basis. When the spirit of passive receptivity enters our lives, we are desensitized to this sort of news in a way that

causes our response to be short-lived or mental rather than active. To measure the impact of a

low information-action ratio in the lives of the students, they were asked, "Have you ever learned

about a serious problem on TV (hunger, AIDS in Africa, etc.) and wanted to do something about

it?" as represented in Tables 22.1 and 22.2, and then, "Did you do something?" as represented in

Tables 23.1 and 23.2. A very large percentage of students answered "yes" to both questions.

Many references were made to hunger, poverty, and disease. The help offered by the students

generally consisted of participation in school-led programs like the World Vision 30 Hour

Famine and Operation Christmas Child. Clearly, within this group of students there is an active

interest in helping people who face grave misfortune in other parts of the world. Although not

mentioned in the surveys, many of these students regularly raise funds for World Wide Christian

Schools and recently for a Christian school destroyed in an earthquake in Haiti. Additional

evidence of compassion for those less fortunate is found in responses to the question represented

in Table 25, "How do you respond inside when you witness horrible human tragedies on TV?"

Other than two students who expressed indifference, the overwhelming majority expressed

sadness, sympathy, shame, shock, anger, or motivation to help.

One might argue that even if one person admits to not wishing to help victims of

catastrophe in distant lands, a passive receptivity problem exists. Furthermore, with regards to

the plight in Haiti, compassion fatigue may yet set in. The real test will come a year later. Will

students still be motivated to help? On the other hand, it may be the case that students who

express indifference may be presenting signs of active un-receptivity as opposed to passive

receptivity. Perhaps some students are deliberately unreceptive to media messages about

horrible human tragedies.

In order to gain an understanding of how active students are in the process of filtering

media messages they were asked, as shown in Table 26, to indicate which media messages they

do <u>not</u> take seriously. A large number focused on advertising. Mention was made of

misrepresentations of the Bible and lives of the stars. While we might like to that students are

alert to the more subtle media messages in movies or on television which depict lives that look

wholesome, happy and good, we see little evidence that overwhelming amounts of bad news is

causing them to be unresponsive to disasters and extreme misfortune as they present themselves.

The Desire for Convenience and the Avoidance of Pain

As we seek to identify technology, specifically mass media and computer-mediated

communication, as a factor that has contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of

students who attend Christian schools; we asked questions to help us understand the degree to

which the students desire convenience and seek to avoid pain. When asked to recount things

they did that were very difficult or very inconvenient, we see in Table 28 that a relatively small

number reported an event where something difficult is done at their own initiative. Most were

fundraisers planned by adults. There were a number of students who were glad they did

something difficult but were unable to recount the reasons why. Most of the difficult activity

was for an unselfish cause yet much of the gladness afterwards was attributable to personal

benefits. Very little of the student's focus was on the good work accomplished or the benefit

received by the ones ministered to. When asked if it is hard to be a Christian, students expressed

that the difficulty of living a Christian life had less to do with the challenges of righteousness,

forgiveness, justice, and selflessness than they did with persecution and defending the faith. It is

probably safe to observe that the answers bear witness to a lack of experience of struggling with

sin and enduring those dimensions of Christianity that are in fact inconvenient and painful. It

appears that convenience is so normative that students perceive that Christianity is supposed to

be easy until that terrible day when persecution knocks at our door.

Understanding that the central love command of scripture requires sacrificial living, we

looked for signs of a desire for comfort which can undermine diligence in pursuit of the spiritual

disciplines. Indeed, we found no sign that the Christian life is a rigorous one. Prayer has often

become a tool of convenience. No one suggested seeking God's will or expressing adoration to

God as roles for prayer. Evidence of desiring convenience and avoiding pain can be seen in

student comments which assert that the purpose of prayer is for many the psychological benefit

and help in hard times answers. We see in student responses to this set of questions, reflected in

Tables 29 – 33, more evidence for a personal relationship with God as compared to a corporate

one. Much of the inconvenience of Christianity is living in loving relationship with other people.

Simply carrying on a relationship with Jesus, without the messiness of a church community is

easy, especially if Jesus is doing all the forgiving.

Special Events

The electronic world thrives on special events such as the Super Bowl. This has also

become true in the Christian community. Believers might travel hundreds of miles for a special,

large production service with inspirational speakers and a polished presentation. In this section

the researcher attempted to measure the degree to which ordinary life and work is meaningless,

and special events give students a reason to live. When students were asked if they enjoyed

work, as represented in Tables 36.1 and 36.1, the most common answer was a conditional yes.

For very few students was the condition that the work itself had some intrinsic value and that

they sensed some sort of obedience to what God was calling them to do. More often the condition had to do with the (absence of) difficulty of the work, the cleanliness of the work, or the financial compensation for the work. The notion that work is good and that it brings joy was not in evidence. On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence that big events are well attended by students who value the experience, the speakers, the fun and the friends.

We also looked for clues that attending a big Christian event promotes self-gratification as opposed to true Christian worship which demands God-glorification. The evidence for this is less clear. The fact of the popularity of these events suggests that they deliver something that the local church congregation does not. Perhaps it is obvious that a conference cannot be a community like a congregation. What is less obvious is the degree to which church can or should emulate the convention experience. If students had been asked to compare the purposes of Christian special events to those of church, we may have received some valuable feedback to help answer the question. What we can say is that according to student responses, the enduring effects, as reported in Table 35, are more about the experience and lessons learned than about fun and socializing. We do not clearly know whether or not those lessons were God-glorifying.

The Relationship Between Noise and Silence

Technology and media have contributed to a noisy culture. Can our students hear the still small voice of God in an over-stimulating environment? Noise is so prevalent in today's world that silence will sound odd or cause you to feel uncomfortable. As we see in Table 37.1 and 37.2, when asked, most of students claimed to enjoy silence or somewhat enjoy it. The most common explanation is that it enabled thinking. If thinking time and prayer time have similar

requirements then it may be true that technology robs us of the Spirit-filled silence in which we can, "Be still and know that (He is) God."

We suspect that rural students are more likely to experience quiet time particularly related to outdoor time. Hunters and fishers in particular value silence. Rural families are more likely to be offline. Many reported that their rooms are quiet places, which implies either that they have very little electronic equipment in their rooms or that they define quiet in ways that tolerate a level of electronic noise. The latter is suggested by a number of responses to the question represented in Table 39, "What do you do when it's quiet?" Listen to music, watch TV, play computer, and watch a movie. Other answers involved making non-electronic noise such as talking. All of these suggest that silence isn't very well liked at all. There are no signs in the responses of silence which endured for longer than 10 or 12 hours.

Other than three mentions of prayer and two mentions of looking around at creation, no reference is made to silent time as God-time. In other sections we have seen references of a personal relationship with Jesus or Christianity as a solo activity. However, close scrutiny of the answers represented in Table 38 reveal that when the opportunity presents itself to have quiet one-on-one time with God, many students look to break the silence. Others search for other voices to listen to. Radios, televisions, MP3 players, cell phones, pagers, car stereos, DVD players, satellite radio, and electronic games certainly give us many choices with which to break the silence when we get close to an opportunity to be still and know.

History is Bunk

Technology makes possible a proliferation of information that buries all facts, important and unimportant, in one indecipherable heap. If history is bunk, then much of the Bible is bunk. Do students see history as a gift from God? Some make a distinction between Biblical history which is important, and the rest which is unimportant. Students fail to recognize the importance of stories and how we, by our design, understand the form. Some maintain that history is bunk yet value their heritage. They fail to see the contradiction. Students are better at recounting stories than assessing their impact. Answers to the questions represented in Table 40, "In what ways do stories that your grandparents (or older relatives) have told you about their lives affect you?" and, "How important is knowledge of the past?" suggest students are recipients of stories rather than a participant in a multigenerational story. However, when asked how these stories help them understand their own lives as grandchildren, a few answers suggested family pride and one even suggested family shame. Only a very small minority declared that history is of no importance. In general, history is seen as important primarily for the purpose of learning lessons.

The depth of the problem is unearthed a little further with responses to the question represented in Table 43, "How do you know if or when God is talking to you?" While some answers spoke of agreement with the Bible, none implied that God speaks in a narrative. We are all players in an epic which includes Creation, the fall into sin, redemption Jesus, and restoration where God uses us to rebuild His kingdom. The students see the good news as little bits of information communicated by conscience and feelings and dreams and visions and signs and God speaking to our hearts. They all miss the point that God tells a story. We cannot begin to understand the good news until we understand the story. We cannot begin to fully grasp our own

identity as God's people until we understand that the stories of our lives and families and communities are chapters in His story.

The Achievement Compulsion

In order assess the degree that the compulsion to achieve is a spirit of the age which impacts the lives of our students we looked for responses that gave indications that our lives are the results of our efforts, that esteem is derived from accomplishments, and that the value of the person is based on possessions. The notion of identity and what it consists of does not appear to be something students have give a lot of thought to. As such, this set of queries, represented in Tables 45 – 49.2, received more unanswered questions than any other segment of the study. No one mentioned the notion that what you do flows out of who you are. Various notions of identity mentioned included the idea that you are what you think, an identity is a name, identity is unchanging, it is a gift from God or what God made you to be, your identity is your personality, and your identity is a feeling inside. It is less complex to have clarity with regard to what you do than it is to be clear about who you are.

Students were asked, "Do your parents and friends relate to you based on what you do or based on who you are?" as represented in Table 45. The word love does not appear in the question, yet students in many cases freely substituted the word 'love' for 'relate.' Many responses suggested that it is wrong to value or love a person based on what they do. Who you are, therefore, is separate from your actions. There is little evidence of compulsion to achieve in the answers except possibly in athletics. This may be a reflection of the rural adolescent demographics of the group.

The thing that is alarming in this set of responses is not a compulsion to achieve, but rather something quite opposite of that. Rugged individualism and the achievement compulsion may be a prevalent spirit of the age among Christian adults, but the evidence here among Christian adolescents in rural Alberta is very different. Perhaps the spirit here should be renamed, 'The divorce of identity and achievement' or 'lazy reliance on God.' The parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30) and the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25: 31-46) both make the point that kingdom building achievement is important and that you will be judged on the basis of what you do. Rather than achieve for the glory of self, the responses here suggest achievement is irrelevant to self.

More evidence of confusion of the relationship between identity and achievement is found in responses to the question, "Do Christians achieve more than non-Christians?" as represented in Table 49.1 and 49.2. While most answered yes, in the explanations of the responses we find that these accomplishments are spiritual or eternal in nature. Earthly achievement, whether for God or self, is downgraded in favor of heavenly futures. The common ground between the achievement compulsion and achievement irrelevance is the claim of God's achievements as our own. In the one case God is the giver of gifts and talents, and in the other it is God who grants salvation. In both cases humans are undeserving.

The Shape of Discourse

Do the grade 7, 8, and 9 students at this rural Alberta Christian School possess the essential attitudes and abilities required for the type of 'Iron Sharpening Iron' conversation which true Christian friendship demands? To find out we searched student responses for positive standards for truth, frankness, courage, and politeness. We also looked for justification and

endorsement of rudeness, anonymity, and avoidance which are normative in computer-based communication and social networking. While students voiced support for politeness as seen in Table 50, the more advanced truth-telling skills of frankness and courage were absent from the discussion. More questions should have been asked about maintaining anonymity for the purpose of being frank without any requirement of courage. The data we do have suggests that our students fall short of possessing the requisite skills and attitudes for 'iron sharpening iron' relationships.

The Difficulty of Discernment

Information overload and information presented as entertainment make the task of discerning good and evil very complicated. It is difficult for students to identify what is of God and what is not. Students believe they are discerning of right and wrong but the evidence suggests a degree of naiveté. Table 52 shows that most students have never questioned the Biblicalness of a sermon heard in church. While that may sound respectful of clergy members, the reality is that pastors need people in the pew with a keen understanding of the scriptures to hold them to account. It may be the case that sermons do not get discussed in the car on the way home from church as much as they used to. The students do not appear to be listening for Biblical correctness. They notice very little that is wrong. Students seem to see themselves as participants in the world without being critical observers of the world.

Students overwhelmingly concur, as demonstrated in Table 53, that there is there a voice inside of them that is continually examining how true and right things are and that they do pay attention for matters of right and wrong. At the same time they say that it is their parents and God who are watching to see what is true (on TV, the Internet, etc.). The notion that we should all maintain a degree of surveillance over media and Internet messages is not understood. The

job of protecting our hearts and minds falls to parents and to God even though it is becoming increasingly impossible for parents to effectively monitor all of the inputs in our children's lives. We will need to be very deliberate in the coming years and generations to teach our children to discern messages which are at odds with those in God's word.

Electronic "Community"

The media and the World Wide Web form our new imagined and virtual communities. We see and are seen as Facebook profiles instead of living, breathing, caring, loving, hurting, thinking, worshipping beings. This study has sought to gauge the degree to which the combination of individualism, fatigue, consumerism, a truth-deficit, and passivity, discourage us from "wasting" time together as Christians. The notion that characters on TV shows and movies become friends who we care for, but who do not care for us in return, is dispelled by these results. The answers described in Table 59 indicate that students understand what a real hero is, however their inclination while writing responses to these questions is likely to be considerably more objective than their predispositions while watching favorite movies. We know that tickets, CDs, and DVDs continue to sell.

Students became quite protective of their media-related freedoms when asked, "Should the parents of Rocky Christian School students get together to decide on guidelines for TV, movie, music, and Internet usage?" as represented in Tables 58.1 and 58.2. Negative responses clearly outnumbered affirmative ones. Many 'no' responses invoked the rights of parents to make individual choices for their own families. This might be interpreted as, "I don't want any other parents influencing my parents into becoming more strict." Apparently, most students are happy with current levels of media-engaging-freedom. Data with regards to actual movie

watching behaviors and Internet usage would improve our ability to make sound observations with regard to the degree to which participation in an electronic community impacts the hearts and minds of our students.

Home Away From Home

When students were asked, "What are the characteristics of a family that is close?" as represented in Table 62, the responses taken together presented a rich picture of a family that works together, is not embarrassed by parents and siblings, shares rooms, shares feelings, shares embarrassing stories, receives discipline (spanking), is close to God, is a Christian family, is there if you need them, is supportive, protects each member, don't fight, gets along, fights, makes up quickly, forgives, spends time together, shares meals, is joyful, plays, has fun, is content and happy, shares prayer time, talks, discusses each other's lives, is comforting, is caring, and loves. A notion of home is central to our identity as humans. We are programmed to have a sense of belonging to a location and a group of people that we call home, and to yearn for this home when it is absent.

Furthermore we long deep within our being for an eternal home in our Father's house. Can this notion of home be satisfied by a virtual home? Students almost unanimously agreed about the importance of home. When students were asked the question represented in Table 61.1 and 61.2, "Read Matthew 25:31-46 (the parable of the sheep and the goats). Is it possible to be a sheep on the Internet?" only one person gave a flat 'no.' The rest were split between 'yes' and some form of partial yes. Students answered as if the question was, "Is it OK for Christians to be on the Internet?" The real question is can you live out the hallmarks of a Christian life on the Internet? Can you feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, give clothes to the needy, visit the sick and imprisoned, befriend the stranger on the Internet? The sheep treat others, regardless of their

station in life, like they would treat Jesus Himself. The qualities of a sheep are much like the

qualities of a member in a family that is close. The question, 'Can you be a sheep on the

Internet?' is not so different from the question, 'Can the notion of a home that is close be

satisfied by a virtual on-line home?' The affirmative answers from the students are not

satisfying.

Limitations

While this research is intended to be helpful to middle school grade teachers in Christian

schools, limitations exist with regards to its general relevance and precision. Many limitations

result from the open ended nature of the questions posed to students during the data collection

process. The limiting factors include the ability of student to answer, student maturity, and

objectivity of the student. Interpretation of the data due to unclear language usage by the student

resulted in potential misunderstanding of the students' intended meanings. Some questions

could have been posed with phraseology which would have produced clearer responses. For

example, instead of asking, "What makes you want things?" as represented in Table 11, a better

question here might have been, "What could make you NOT want desirable things?" Similarly,

the question, "Did you wish an adult had shown you how to do something?" represented in

Tables 24.1 and 24.2, was posed. This question seems to presuppose that no adult helped. That

was not the intent.

The results were not tabulated democratically but rather by the frequency of words,

phrases, and ideas which increases the representation of the ideas of students who generate more

ideas in their written responses. Anecdotal responses, in general, limited the ability of the

researcher to quantify results.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to uncover evidence that the 16 media enhanced "spirits of the age" identified by Hielema (2001) operate in the lives of middle school students at a Christian school in Alberta Canada. To accomplish this, evidence was uncovered that the 16 media enhanced "spirits of the age" identified by Hielema (2001) operate in the lives of the students. In doing so, this study has identified obstacles to effectively teach in a culture-transforming way in the Christian school classroom.

Part of the stated purpose of this study has been to identify technology and specifically mass media and computer mediated communication, as a factor that has contributed to accelerated cultural change in the lives of students who attend Christian schools. This was accomplished through a substantial and thorough review of literature which deals with the relationships that exist between technology and culture.

Another component of the stated purpose is to be better able to assist teachers by suggesting ways that they can teach for shalom in a world of incomprehensible cultural influence, where technology is a conduit for small units of culture, here described as cultural dust. The data shows that the methodology of the project itself can be used as an element of sound teaching practice for promoting student metacognition with regards to the influences of technology-enhanced spirits of the age, such that the spirits of the age are recognized and critiqued by the student against the biblically normative standards of the Christian community.

The central theme that emerged from the data is the notion of human identity. After conducting the study we find that students in a general way answer, "I don't know," to the question, "Who are you?" Passive, indecisive, uncritical, undiscerning, moralistic, easily bored,

and followers, are descriptions used to describe the many of respondents in this study based on the responses. None of these descriptors is among those we desire for our students.

Identity is found in belonging to a home, belonging to a family story, belonging to a community, belonging to a set of unshakeable core beliefs which we know and can recognize departures from, belonging to a group with whom we share a common faith and a common purpose, belonging to a culture of geography, food, home, celebrations, material things, and language which satisfies us and gives us comfort, and belonging to special tasks for which we are uniquely gifted, in which we make the world better, and through which we experience shalom with our God.

To formalize this finding and to provide a valuable tool for use in the classrooms we propose the following set of statements with regard to identity flowing from the 16 spirits of the age and identified in this study as areas of concern.

1. The Postmodern Shrug: Relativism: We share a common belief and a common identity with the people who call themselves Christian.

2. The Privatization of Faith and its Reduction to Morality: Our identities include public participation in God's plans to make all things new.

3. Individualism: Our interdependence with other Christians is a crucial part of our identity through which we meaningfully commune with each other and with God.

4. Instant Gratification of Fabricated Desires: We are identified by our desire for righteousness over all earthly consumer desires.

5. Compartmentalized Anthropology: We are identified as people who love God and neighbor with body, soul, mind, heart, spirit, intellect, emotion, will, etc. functioning inseparably as whole and complete human beings.

6. Commitment and Choice: We do not choose our identities; we nurture the ones we are given.

7. Low Information-Action Ratio (passive receptivity): We are known by our compassion and action in times of need.

8. The Desire for Convenience and the Avoidance of Pain: We are identified by our labors, our giftedness and the contributions we make to craft the world what God intended it to be.

9. Special Events: Our identities are found in our everyday lives.

10. The Relationship Between Noise and Silence: We are identified as people who value the still small voice of God over all and any noises which impose themselves on our lives.

11. History is Bunk: Our identities are found in the unique places we occupy in the stories of our past and in God's ultimate big story.

12. The Achievement Compulsion: Our identity is forged, not so much by our accomplishments, but by the purposes for our achievements

13. The Shape of Discourse: We sharpen each other's identities with words which come from the abundance of our hearts.

14. The Difficulty of Discernment: We work hard to gain full command of the beliefs by which we are identified so that we can routinely test every overt and subtle message for truth.

15. Electronic "Community": Our identity is forged by the time we spend together as believers, side by side, working together in love as Christ intended.

16. Home Away From Home: Home is the interactive strong foundation for our interdependent identities.

While it may be overtly simple to reduce all of the 16 media enhanced spirits of the age to the single notion of spirits of the age which compromise Christian identity, such a simplification is also useful for translating them into classroom friendly language. As we have

seen, the proliferation of electronic media and devices in the lives of our students makes it essential that teachers understand their impacts and lead students to comprehend their potential to impact human identity. Based on this study we are able to propose a framework for a strategy to better manage the cultural change that results from the flood of cultural dust through electronic conduits.

The changes that schools need to make are not primarily technological changes comprised of filters and blockers and parental controls. The gifted teacher is one who is best qualified to work with people. While we have identified how the identity of Christian young people might be adversely impacted in rural Alberta, it is reasonable to think that the manifestations of this erosion of Christian identity will vary from school to school. We need a model which takes in to account a diversity of students and respects the students as decision-making agents in their own lives.

Many teachers in intermediate grades have taught units in family history. We recommend something similar for middle grades students entitled "The Identity Unit." The central question is, "Who are you?" The unit will feature discussions of home, family and family history, belonging to a community and church, commitment to and devoutness about core beliefs, belonging to a culture group, using our gifts in work which makes the world better, and gives us shalom with our God. Each student will create a project in which they grapple with who they are and who they intend to be, and then propose strategies for becoming and continuing to be that person.

The project sets the stage for looking at obstacles to forging the identity they desire using the 16 spirits of the age with accompanying questions. After answers are compiled and names removed students should be presented with the results together while the teacher leads a

discussion. The one paragraph description of each spirit of the age and the one sentence

summary ought to be part of what students see. Students ought to journal notes to themselves as

they are encouraged to take seriously the project of nurturing a personal identity.

Over time students ought to consider together how their faith communities are being

impacted by these same spirits. They should revisit the unit regularly over the middle years.

This unit may have to become a Bible program in order to make it fit into a crowded curriculum

or it could take place during the first five or 10 minutes of every social studies period.

Technology and its impacts will continue to proliferate in our lives. Our goal as teachers in

Christian schools will be to enable and encourage students to be more metacognitive and

proactive with regards to their own Christian identities.

The challenge is a big one. The abundance of cultural dust which accumulates in the

lives of Christian young people will continue to grow, and it promises to become increasingly

difficult to sort through. The task of Christian educators everywhere is to aid young people to

hone a Christian identity so that they might be enabled to discern which cultural dust should

become part of them and which dust to shake off.

Appendix "A"

Spirit of the Age (Hielema, 2001)	**Questions**
The Postmodern Shrug: Relativism	• In what situations is it OK to say, "Well, that's right and true for you, but it's not right and true for me."? When is it not OK? • What do you think is God's purpose for human life? • How do you react to media words, images, and themes that you believe to be wrong?
The Privatization of Faith and its Reduction to Morality	• Imagine a movie in which there is a romantic scene, and after watching it, one of your parents says to you, "I hope you were watching carefully, because that was a God-glorifying romance scene." Could that ever happen? What would that scene be like? • Is your religion anyone else's business? • What does it mean to be masculine or feminine?
Individualism	• What is church for? • How do you react to your friends when they say or do something that you believe to be wrong? • Is Christianity more like a team sport or a solo sport?
Instant Gratification of Fabricated Desires	• Describe some differences between what you "want" and what you "need." • What makes you want things? • Is entertainment important? • How does waiting make you feel? • Do people make judgments about you on the basis of your possessions?

Appendix "A" (continued)

Spirit of the Age (Hielema, 2001)	**Questions**
Compartmentalized Anthropology	• We are called to love God with our emotions, our desires, our minds, our actions, everything! Is it easier to love him with some "parts" of ourselves than others? • If yes, why are some "parts" easier than others? • Is Love something you do or something you feel? Explain. • What do you mean by the word "heart" when you love God with all your heart?
Commitment and Choice	• What role does your faith in Christ play in making decisions? • Describe the relationship between choices that you make and choices that God makes with regards to you (your life). • How do you decide what to believe?
Low Information-Action Ratio (passive receptivity)	• Have you ever learned about a serious problem on TV (hunger, AIDS in Africa, etc.) and wanted to do something about it? • Did you do something? • Did you wish an adult had shown you how to do something? • How do you respond inside when you witness horrible human tragedies on TV? • What media messages on you <u>not</u> take seriously? • When 1 John 3:18 says, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth, "What actions are required?

Appendix "A" (continued)

Spirit of the Age (Hielema, 2001)	Questions
The Desire for Convenience and the Avoidance of Pain	• Remember a time in your life that you did something that was very difficult, very inconvenient, and afterwards you were glad that you did it. What was it? • Why were you glad afterwards? • What sorts of life activities fit this category? • Is it important to regularly have such activities in our lives? • Why or why not? • What is the role of prayer in your life? • Is it hard to be a Christian? Explain
Special Events	• Why do you attend events such as YC Alberta (major Christian concert/youth conference)? • What effects do such special events have on you a month after they are over? • Do you enjoy work?
The Relationship Between Noise and Silence	• Do you enjoy silence? Explain • When do you experience silence? What do you do when it is quiet?
History is Bunk	• In what ways do stories that your grandparents have told you about their lives affect you? • Do you feel at all that what they experienced in their lives helps you understand your own life as their grandchild? • Why or why not? • How important is knowledge of the past? • How do you know if or when God is talking to you? • What do you think is wrong with the world?

Appendix "A" (continued)

Spirit of the Age (Hielema, 2001)	Questions
The Achievement Compulsion	• Do your parents and friends relate to you based on what you do or based on who you are? • What's the difference? • How can you tell? • Is it true that God helps those who help themselves? • Do Christians achieve more than no-Christians? • Explain.
The Shape of Discourse	• How important is politeness when on MSN or text messaging? • What does it mean to speak the truth in love?
The Difficulty of Discernment	• Have you ever thought after hearing a sermon, "I don't think I agree; I think the preacher distorted something in the Bible."? • Is there a voice inside you that is continually examining how true and right things are? • Do you pay attention for matters of right and wrong? • Who in your world is watching to see what is true (on TV, the Internet, etc.)? How? • What does the term, "spirits of the age" mean to you? How do they travel?

Appendix "A" (continued)

Spirit of the Age (Hielema, 2001)	Questions
Electronic "Community"	• Think of a time when a difficult situation arose in your family or community and someone whom you did not know very well emerged as a loving, comforting hero. What's the difference between that kind of a "hero" and the heroes of the music and entertainment industry? • Should your parents get together to decide on guidelines for TV, movie, music, and Internet usage? Why or why not? • Describe what our reaction should be when there is a disaster on the other side of the world?
Home Away From Home	• How important is home? • Read Matthew 25:31-46 (the parable of the sheep and the goats). Is it possible to be a sheep on the Internet? • What are the characteristics of a family that is close?

Appendix "B"
Participant Informed Consent Form

As part of the curriculum of the Bible and Technology programs of Rocky Christian School, grades seven, eight, and nine students will be participating in a computer based exercise of questions and answers regarding matters pertaining to worldview and technology. The answers to their questions and the ensuing conversation will be used to help enable them to discern the spirits of the age (1 John 4: 1-6).

The entire process including student answers will be used as part of an Action Research project that Mr. Duiker is conducting. This research will partially satisfy the requirements of the Master of Education program that he is currently completing through Dordt College in Sioux Center Iowa. No document attached to the research project (permanent record) will include the actual names of the participants. While all students are encouraged to participate, students may drop out of the study at any time.

Please give your informed consent that your child may participate in this project by signing below.

I _____ give my informed consent that the participation of
        Parent or guardian name

_____ in the Discernment Project may be included in the data
      child

used by Mr.Duiker in his Action Research Project.

_____   _____/_____/_____
Parent or Guardian Signature   Date   DD/MM/YYYY

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