# What is the Relationship of Technology to Theology?*

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│  ◆       **Introduction**      ◆ │
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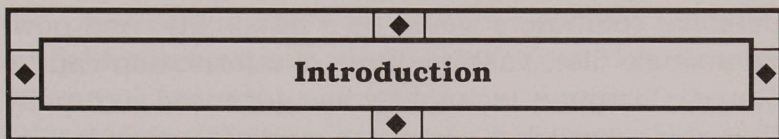
In several weeks I will be sixty-five, and during this time, I have seen so many changes that processing them is difficult. For example, I remember the early Model-T and Model-A Ford cars. The only radio in our home during my childhood was the crystal set requiring headsets. Although invented in 1927, I saw my first television as a college freshman in 1949. The quality of the picture was so poor that it resembled a snow storm rather than a clear picture. Since then, as you know, television has become an influential feature of global life, an indispensable part of world society.

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│  ◆  **Invention and Impact of Computers**  ◆ │
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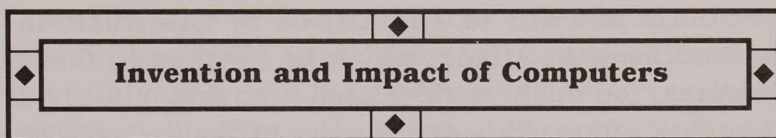
As a college student, I can recall dormitory conversations about a new discovery, the computer, that could create, store and transmit information of every description. Our minds were not capable of imagining the power of such equipment. During this time, a small computer would require an entire classroom for housing. Some years later we learned of the work being done in the Silicon Valley in Northern

California where massive-operational instructions were stored on minute computer chips.

It was unimaginable just a few years ago that personal computers would be a possibility. And now, on a single disc, vast amounts of information can be stored. Computer technology has advanced so rapidly that ships can lob a computer-guided surface-to-air-missile five hundred miles to a target; its heat-seeking capacity can almost guarantee a direct strike. Such was the case during the Persian Gulf War and more recently against Iraq in its attacks upon Kurds.
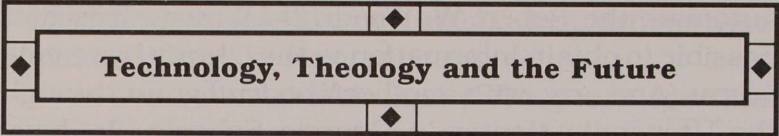
We hear about the massive technology of the military-industrial complex here and around the world. In Japan, for example, and increasingly in the United States, automobiles are assembled almost exclusively by robots. But have you ever considered the marvel of the fax machine? Several years ago, while on vacation, I had a brainstorm. Jotting several pages of notes, I went downstairs to the hotel office and sent them to Kenneth Merwin of the Office of Institutional Advancement in Atlanta which he received in fifteen minutes. You might wonder what is so dramatic about this illustration. Well, the wonder of it all—I sent my notes from Rome, Italy.

## Computers, Woodruff Library and ITC
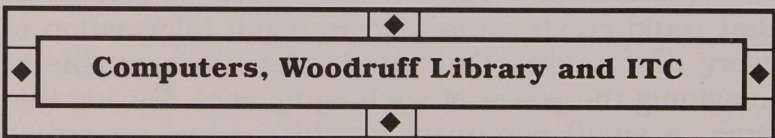
Several years ago the Atlanta University Center Council of Presidents received a grant in excess of $4 million from the Woodruff Foundation to renovate and

automate the Robert W. Woodruff Library.  It is now possible to obtain information in the Library by remote access. And now, with another Woodruff grant through the University Center in Georgia Schools, we have available via computer the Galileo Project. This ensures universal access to a core level of materials and information services for every student and faculty member in the University System—regardless of geographical location, size of institution or mode of instructional delivery.  No single library can afford this type of online service.

I could continue this discussion concerning technological developments. However, let me share an illustration critical to our life and work at ITC. Within days now, ITC will be completely equipped with hardware and software in every faculty office, on every secretary's desk, in every administrator's office, to enter the Internet world. This means that all information on the "super highway" will be within our grasp. We will have our own web site by which we communicate with persons worldwide. Our catalog will be available; all of our public relations documents will be accessible; anything on other web sites can be retrieved and printed—on our desks within minutes. Truly, ITC has entered the technological age. Our minds do not have the capacity to realize all of the ways this new equipment can enrich our academic life. The information available, our input and that of others, is humbling. It is vast. It is endless. It is beyond our grasp, our ability to contain or control.

## Technology, Theology and the Future

The question today is, "What is theology?" This word is a contraction of two Greek words *Theos* (God) and *Logos* (Word). Therefore, theology is the study of God's Word. From the beginning, there has been that driving force, the impulse within humankind, to know more about forces beyond the self. Realistically, this impulse is our religious self.

There is no essential difference in the human family. The great religions of the world—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Animism, Christianity—all quest to know more about that spiritual force greater than ourselves. You have but to travel in this country and throughout the world to see the evidences of religious cravings on the part of ancients. Carvings on cave walls, large imposing structures designed for worship of a holy being dot the landscape or are unearthed by archaeologists. Traveling the Nile River from Luxor to Abu Simbel is a telling example of the cravings of a people in search of a creator. There, the temples, pyramids, sphinx and other massive symbols point beyond a moment in time to eternity. Religion, you might say, is humankind's attempt to ponder the imponderable, to seek meaning beyond the present. Augustine was right, I believe, when he said, "There can be no rest until we find our rest in God."

Theology in the Judeo-Christian tradition derives from this same religious-driving force. We, too, are in search of definitions of ourselves and for manifest-ations of God. Christians and Jews are covenantal

people. We believe that God established a covenant with Abraham to leave Ur and the familiar banks of the Euphrates River in search of a new land called Canaan. His progeny covenanted to be the people of God. This journey for Jews and Christians alike began what we call  theology; that is, our attempts to state what we know about God into some kind of understandable parameters. Our theological journey—the journey of Jews and Christians—is essentially the same. The difference is the Incarnation. For Christians, God became human in the person of a Palestinian Jew named Jesus. Being people of the Covenant, Christians believe this was yet another effort by God to reestablish the Covenant broken by our sinfulness. For Jews, this incarnational event is expected.

The thing that most concerns me as a contemporary Christian is our tendency to "package" God, giving the look of a drugstore display counter, ready to market God as if what we currently believe is all there is to know. If you are in seminary to protect what you currently know about God, your God is too small and will not serve you well in ministry. We know vastly more about God and God's ways than did our forebears. Future generations will benefit from the works of the God who is the creator of the "whirling planets" and is still creating. We glibly say in the African-American idiom, "God ain't through with us yet." However, too many of us act as if God has completed God's creational work.

I believe what we know about God in our age-old intellectual search and what we know of Jesus, the Christ, are manifested through the unfolding, expanding, expressive, renewing and engaging work of

God's Spirit. Theology for me is that never-ending pilgrimage toward understanding. It is our attempt to be more faithful by being more understanding.

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## ◆ God and Communication ◆
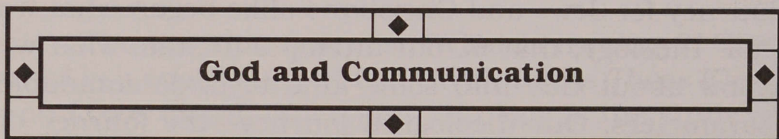
What I have said earlier about technology and theology is a single conclusion. God is still at work. The abundant life discussed in John's Gospel is being realized. Technology, for those smart enough to remain humble concerning the banquet God has spread throughout cyberspace, is but new and creative ways to understand the marvels of a loving and caring God. It is God's way of communicating more about God's self. It is absolutely astounding to see how technology has helped us understand the blood and bone structure of the earliest human found in Tanzania, Africa. Technology is but God's way to make our theology communicable. After all, communication is the common thread in both technology and theology.

As marvelous as is the computer, its value is the quality of our input into its operation. If we put garbage into the computer, garbage is what we get. Its capacity for sharing vast knowledge depends on how well we communicate. It can be a help or a hindrance. There are those who subvert the work of computer software with a virus, making stored information void.

In our theological journey to understand the egregious work of humankind, we see how sin has been the virus that has created a gap in our relationship with God. It is a "theological virus." Left unattended, it

can take all of God's potential blessings, turning them into an ash heap. Sin separates us from God and robs us of the communication link that brings life and meaning.

## Conclusion
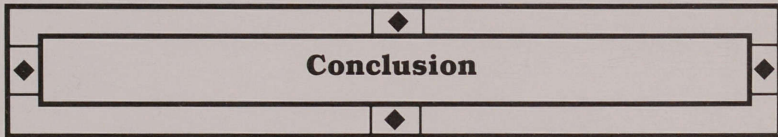
At Clark Atlanta University's new Science Research Center there is a teleconference area. By use of satellite, meetings can be transacted simultaneously around the world. I participated in such a conference recently. Here again, the purpose of teleconferencing is to aid communication. *Prayer* for the Christian is the up-link in our satellite system to God. *Prayer* is communication with God. *Prayer* is praise; *prayer* is adoration; *prayer* is intercession; *prayer* is thanksgiving; *prayer* is supplication; *prayer* is petition. *Prayer* is all these things. Put simply, *prayer* is the throbbing of the finite for the certitude of the infinite.

Therefore, how does technology relate to theology? Technology is but God's latest efforts to communicate creative wonders to and for us. Let us thank God profusely and use these gifts wisely.