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# A Bold New Step for PD (Work Station Two)

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Gary B. Swanson

College student Chris van Rossmann answered an abrupt knock at the door of his apartment in Corvallis, Oregon, to find police and civil air patrol and search-and-rescue personnel standing there, demanding to know why he was sending out a distress signal. Dressed comfortably in his bathrobe and slippers, Chris clearly wasn't in any apparent distress, and he was completely unaware that he was doing anything whatsoever to summon help.

After a little investigation of the premises, the crack response team was surprised to discover that the signal was being emitted spontaneously, and completely unknown to Chris, by his year-old flat-screen television. The distress call had been transmitted into the stratosphere, received by satellite, and routed to the Air Force Rescue Center at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia.

"They'd never seen a signal come that strong from a home appliance," the 20-year-old told reporters. They

## A BOLD, NEW STEP FOR PD

had apparently expected to find a malfunctioning transponder on a boat or small plane, the usual problem in incidents like this.

As the response team left, they told Chris not to turn on his TV set or he'd be facing a \$10,000 fine for "willingly broadcasting a false distress signal." (Up till that time, of course, he hadn't been broadcasting "willingly.") And fortunately, the manufacturer of the TV offered to provide him with a free replacement. So now Chris van Rossmann can get back to *Letterman!*

With the frequent misunderstandings many of us have with DVD players and laptops and scanners and fax machines, some of us occasionally feel the upsetting need to be rescued. Keeping up with the possibilities in cutting-edge technology—not to mention trying to stay *ahead* of the curve—is sometimes a daunting challenge.

Or, to take the concept a step further, with the quality of broadcasting (e.g., so-called reality shows, social

and political commentary, and even some news programming) that are being provided on the air waves and the Internet these days, maybe we'd all be a bit better off if our TVs—and our computers—sent out an occasional distress signal. As Robert Wilensky, computer science professor at the University of California Berkeley, said in a 1996 speech: "We've heard that a million monkeys at a million keyboards could produce the complete works of Shakespeare; now, thanks to the Internet, we know that is not true."<sup>1</sup>

But as we are all aware, technology has brought us a great many blessings too. Consider, for example, all the good that comes from such fields of study as fiber optics, magnetic resonance imaging, microwave technology, artificial intelligence, and others.

Even these, of course, also have their negative applications. Such is the nature of humankind. Every gift that God has bestowed on humanity—except His very own Son—has been perverted horribly in some way. Yet each of those gifts, prompted by His love, is meant to be for the betterment of individuals and humankind in general. Each is an expression of His love. Each has its intended applications in God's kingdom on this earth.

For this reason, there is no room for a Neo-Luddite in the Christian family. Anyone who would seek to

prevent the full utilization of every technology to carry out the mission of the church is simply refusing a blessing proffered by God.

In 1972, Larry Norman, a contemporary Christian musician, recorded a song that asked the provocative question, "Why should the devil have all the good music?" Without venturing into the divisive issue of Christian music, a similar question might be paraphrased: Why should the devil have all the good technology?

In 20/20 hindsight, most of humanity would probably be thankful that Gutenberg was willing to ask the same question back at the early part of the 15th century. It may be difficult to imagine, but there were probably people of the time who, considering the possibility of using Gutenberg's innovative combination of movable type, oil-based ink, and wooden presses, said, "No thanks. The only way to communicate the truth is through illuminated manuscripts!"

But Gutenberg surely recognized the potential that this new print medium promised for the proclamation of the gospel.

The history of Christian mission began in the time of the New Testament itself. The apostles were compelled to take the message of Christ the Messiah to a waiting world. This was a truth that could not be stored protectively in backwater Palestine.

They did do some letter writing—pretty much the only readable medium of the time. But the *Pax Romana* offered new roads to spread the Christian message.

Philip, one of the first to preach the gospel outside Jerusalem, went to Samaria. Peter and John traveled to Samaria and to other places as well. And, probably most notably, Paul—joined by Silas, Barnabas, John Mark, Timothy, and others—took the mission, literally and figuratively, to new frontiers.

At this point in human history—in the first decade of a new millennium—humanity seems to have entered well into a new era. The cultural changes being issued in by communication and technology may well rival those of the 15th century, when the print medium galvanized Western culture and paved the way for the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

There is no certainty that the print medium will, anytime soon, go the way of cuneiform and papyrus. (We don't see too many people at the bus stop, in the aisles of our airliners, reading cuneiform or papyrus or other pre-movable-print media today.) In fact, if we're to listen to some of our futurists, we may begin to wonder if reading itself will become an outmoded way of learning.

Yet technology offers new roads for the proclamation of the gospel today. And this has prompted the

Adventist Theological Society to make a decision regarding *Perspective Digest*. Effective with the fourth quarter 2010 issue, *PD* will transition to a solely online publication. This present issue is to be the last one that will appear in print.

There are, of course, some economic reasons for this decision. But there are also some very compelling positive considerations as well. An online publication can be exponentially more accessible, more interactive, more engaging, and more timely than a quarterly print publication. And we look forward to these immediate kinds of constructive improvement.

In setting out on this road, we are aware that we must trust in the continuing support of our readers. We will place our hope that *PD* readers will uphold our efforts in prayer and take advantage of every opportunity to share with others the resource that an online *PD* will be able to provide. Accessibility, interactivity, engagement, timeliness—these will be the stars by which we guide our editorial efforts as we set out on this new road. And we invite you to come along.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Robert\\_Wilensky](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Robert_Wilensky), accessed April 24, 2010.