

99 New Notifications!: Digital Attention Economy
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Abstract

What does it mean to say “Yes” to technology in a way that advances the common good? Specifically, what does it mean to say “Yes” to social media and our mobile devices, at a moment when they simultaneously empower us and attempt (in ways) to enslave us?

Here we experience an old problem, presenting itself in new forms. Catholic thinkers and saints have wrestled with problems of free will and choosing the good through the entire history of the Church. In recent times, Romano Guardini and Christopher Dawson, among many others, have reflected on how technology impacts culture. They write before the advent of the Internet and cell phones, but their insights have only become more relevant with time.

This presentation examines the ways and the extent to which social media and mobile devices persuade us to use them, and often to continue using them beyond our original intent. It reviews how this is being discussed in the popular culture, referencing prominent individuals like Tristan Harris, Sherry Turkle, and Zeynep Tufekci. Finally, it examines these technologies in light of Catholic wisdom from thinkers ancient and modern, especially Pope Francis, Guardini, Dawson, and St. Augustine.

Very importantly: the goal here cannot be to abolish or abandon technology, but to understand what it means to use it in a humanized way, one that is good for ourselves and for everyone around us.