

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

8-10-2022

Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part I): A Review Conversation of The Life We're Looking For

Justin Bailey

Dordt University, Justin.Bailey@dordt.edu

Matthew Beimers

Dordt University, matthew.beimers@dordt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bailey, J., & Beimers, M. (2022). Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part I): A Review Conversation of The Life We're Looking For. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/1404

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Work Comprehensive List by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part I): A Review Conversation of The Life We're Looking For

Abstract

"Crouch's book reminds us that the story of the competing cultural narratives demands one thing from us: our love."

Posting about the book *The Life We're Looking For* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/thriving-against-the-technological-tide-part-1-a-review-conversation-of-the-life-were-looking-for/>

Keywords

In All Things, book review, The Life We're Looking For, relationship, technology, Andy Crouch

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt University.

Thriving Against the Technological Tide (Part 1): A Review Conversation of *The Life We're Looking For*

Justin Ariel Bailey

Matthew Beimers

August 10, 2022

Title: The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World

Author: Andy Crouch

Publisher: Convergent Books

Publishing Date: April 19, 2022

Pages: 240 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 978-0593237342

Note from Justin Ariel Bailey (JAB): Andy Crouch's elegant new book *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World* is one of the best books I've read in the last five years. Given the nature of Crouch's argument, I thought it would be appropriate to invite a friend and colleague, Matt Beimers (MB), to join me in what we are calling a "review conversation." We both found the book to be incisive in its diagnosis and challenging in its prescriptions. Here is part one of our edited conversation about the book.

Part One

JAB: In his three-minute book trailer,¹ Crouch describes his work as being about "how we became the most powerful people and the most lonely people in history at the same time and for the same reason... (and) about how we can change course." If a person is not a machine but rather a "heart-soul-mind-strength complex designed for love,"² we should measure cultural artifacts and institutions by the question, "does this help us live as the whole persons we were meant to be?" In some ways this book is the theory behind Crouch's popular and practical book *The Tech-Wise Family*. But it also moves forward in some important ways. Most significantly, it names "the Big Bad," the empire of Mammon that threatens to de-form us. Mammon offers a rival gospel, "the fantasy of abundance without dependence." In Mammon's empire we are encouraged to seek technological "magic" (which Crouch defines as "effortless

power”). But our quest for magic fails every time, diminishing us as persons. How did that resonate with you?

MB: I found myself recalling my own quest for magic, which took me to a mall in the town where we lived. This sounds silly now, but I was in search of some red Olympic mittens. These mittens not only became a “must-have,” but they also magically seemed to build community among those who owned them. I was incensed when I learned that the shelf in the store had been cleaned out; I demanded to know when the next shipment of inventory would arrive. As silly as it sounds, it is still a hard story to tell. I was not my best self that day. Part of my embarrassment in telling that story is not only admitting that I behaved rudely, but that I felt so strongly about needing a pair of cheap, wool mittens. I was convinced that my sense of belonging hinged on purchasing those red gloves. In my mind, no mittens meant I was an outsider. These days, I no longer need to go to the mall anymore. I can purchase everything online and it is delivered right to my door within hours or a day of ordering (any longer and I become impatient). When I do go to the mall, it is often because I need to get out of the house, ignoring the park down the road or the local coffee shop I love. What I need is community, but what I often choose is isolation.

JAB: Yes, and I think that part of what Crouch is trying to show is that our society seems calibrated in a way that points us in the direction of isolation, even as its products promise us community and connection. So regardless of how much willpower we can muster, we are swimming against a powerful current. It’s not just about the mittens, it’s about the lie that we can find fullness apart from being vitally connected to and claimed by others in ways that are profoundly inconvenient.

MB: There’s that quote from St. Irenaeus, “the glory of God is man fully alive.” The allure of places like the mall or Amazon is that the promise of being fully human is a credit card tap away. All you need to do is purchase the right shoes, phone, clothes or in this case, mittens. But of course, this also reveals the lie of Mammon: before your credit card is processed, the fashions change, and the phone needs to be upgraded.

JAB: So, Mammon’s magic fails us again and again, but we are led to believe that fulfillment is always just around the corner, that we can unleash a fuller life by making the right transactions. Though this book isn’t really about consumerism, is it? Consumerism is just part of the story.

MB: Right. Crouch’s book reminds us that the story of the competing cultural narratives demands one thing from us: our love. Places like the mall, Apple, and Amazon know that “we are designed for love...Love calls out the best in us—it awakens our hearts, it stirs up the depths of our souls, it focuses our minds, it arouses our bodies to action and passion. It calls out what is most human in us”³ If we fall in love with our phones and put our trust in institutions like the mall, then we believe that the good, the true, and the beautiful can only be found there and that those things alone will truly help us feel alive. Of course, in promising us never to be more human, they dehumanize.

JAB: Yes, that's so interesting, isn't it? Crouch talks about the promise that new technologies offer us: "now you can..." and "you'll no longer have to..." but he reminds us that devices also come with something that we don't consider: "you'll no longer be able to..." Now, I can look up whatever piece of information I need, keep up with the latest news, or search for the latest product, whenever I want. But the unintended trade-off of having the world at my fingertips is that I'm losing my ability to concentrate while I read and I'm fighting to be fully present with my children.

MB: In a sense, the empire of Mammon wants us to imagine an alternative home, a place where our needs are anticipated and met, but this is also a home where commitment to others is not required. I keep coming back to a question from Crouch that has haunted me since I first read it: "what kind of place do we require to thrive as persons?"⁴ More than that, how do we build such places? Where does Crouch suggest we begin?

JAB: One of the things I enjoy most about Crouch's writing are these elegant distinctions he makes. He proposes three redemptive moves to help us thrive as persons: a shift "from devices to instruments," "from family to households," and "from being charmed to being blessed."

-
1. <https://youtu.be/llpSexnoKHY>
 2. p. 33
 3. p. 35
 4. p. 150