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Impact of Communication Technology upon Human Experience: the key to changing civilizations

William McGaughey

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This book is about how communication technology affects the content of its experience. “The medium is the message,” said Marshall McLuhan. So the introduction of a new communication technology affects the type of society that is created after it becomes widely used. It also gives rise to certain institutions.

For example, the development of radio and television was an essential precondition to the entertainment culture that we have in America today. Such media allow certain personalities to become widely known through their personal images as well as words.

In a similar way the development of writing was useful to government and religion. The development of printing allowed commercial society to advertise and sell its products. It provided cheap books for courses in school.

When humanity adopted writing, something was gained and something lost. It had to do mostly with memory. Writing freed people from having to remember petty details. However, it also destroyed the rich culture of ritualistic religion that allowed people to connect with the spirit world through remembered rituals and words.
Primitive as it is, a society without writing has spiritual and emotional riches that civilized people do not know.

Now in the past half century, we seem to be moving from a culture based on writing to one again based upon the spoken word. Something is lost in terms of intellectual depth and precision; but it may be that something else is gained in the fast-paced, bountiful culture that young people today enjoy.

The thrust of this chapter is to show how changing communications media changed society and how such changes affected world history. To understand the connections will explain why world history should be organized according to the Five Epochs scheme.

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