



RECLAIMING THE
CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

**MEDIA,
JOURNALISM,
AND
COMMUNICATION**
A STUDENT'S
GUIDE

Read M. Schuchardt

Series Editor: David S. Dockery

“Schuchardt admirably integrates the history and philosophy of technology with a rich understanding of Christianity. With McLuhan and Postman in one hand and the Bible and Christian history in the other, he offers a thoughtful and challenging perspective on journalism and media today.”

Douglas Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy, Denver Seminary; author, *The Soul in Cyberspace*

“Read Schuchardt has been doing groundbreaking work in the new academic field of media ecology. Like his mentor, Neil Postman, he is asking us to think critically about the impact that new technology is having on everything from human development to political discourse to spiritual formation. This is an important book that is a must-read for serious Christians. I highly recommend it.”

Terry L. Johnson, Senior Minister, Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah; author, *The Family Worship Book*; *Worshipping with Calvin*; and *Serving with Calvin*

“Read Schuchardt’s progenitor is Marshall McLuhan, whose pithy style he so well channels. I once observed Read in the classroom as students both giggled and squirmed in their seats. They giggled because they were overjoyed that someone understood their world. They squirmed because he put his finger on what they had not yet perceived about the digital age. For the student of communication there is gold to be found in this hill of wise counsel.”

Arthur W. Hunt III, Professor of Communications, The University of Tennessee, Martin

“Read Schuchardt shaped the way I think about technology more than anyone else. With technology changing at an ever-increasing pace, Schuchardt is a sure guide to not only keeping your sanity but also your soul, whichever side of the Tiber you’re on.”

Brantly Millegan, Founder and Editor in Chief, ChurchPOP

“Schuchardt’s *Media, Journalism, and Communication* is a publisher’s nightmare and a reader’s dream. It fits no pre-established publishing category, because it is entirely too insightful to do so; its wine will not fit those wineskins. If Marshall McLuhan had been intelligible, Neil Postman a Christian, and Jacques Ellul an American, this is the book they would have coauthored (with Wendell Berry as their editor), though they would have taken ten times as many pages to have done so.”

T. David Gordon, Professor of Religion and Greek, Grove City College,
Grove City, Pennsylvania

“Not only has Schuchardt made the case for why the communication arts are essential to the liberal arts, he convincingly explains how they can make us better humans. This is one of the most superb short books ever written on the role and effect of media, and a must-read for every Christian college student.”

Joe Carter, Editor, The Gospel Coalition; contributor,
NIV Lifehacks Bible

“Read Schuchardt is in the business of telling fish about the water they swim in. We ‘fish’ instinctively breathe, eat, and drink media in all forms, all the time. We hardly notice. Schuchardt helps us notice both the fascinating and alarming. Schuchardt says some crazy things about media that just happen to be true, while pointing to truths in the gospel that may strike us as crazy. It’s why he is such a good person to discuss the media water we swim in.”

Mark Galli, Editor in Chief, *Christianity Today*

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AND COMMUNICATION**



RECLAIMING THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

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MEDIA, JOURNALISM, AND COMMUNICATION A STUDENT'S GUIDE

Read Mercer Schuchardt

Media, Journalism, and Communication: A Student's Guide

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To my students

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SERIES PREFACE

RECLAIMING THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

The Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition series is designed to provide an overview of the distinctive way the church has read the Bible, formulated doctrine, provided education, and engaged the culture. The contributors to this series all agree that personal faith and genuine Christian piety are essential for the life of Christ followers and for the church. These contributors also believe that helping others recognize the importance of serious thinking about God, Scripture, and the world needs a renewed emphasis at this time in order that the truth claims of the Christian faith can be passed along from one generation to the next. The study guides in this series will enable believers to see afresh how the Christian faith shapes how we live, how we think, how we write books, how we govern society, and how we relate to one another in our churches and social structures. The richness of the Christian intellectual tradition provides guidance for the complex challenges that believers face in this world.

This series is particularly designed for Christian students and others associated with college and university campuses, including faculty, staff, trustees, and other various constituents. The contributors to the series will explore how the Bible has been interpreted in the history of the church, as well as how theology has been formulated. They will ask: How does the Christian faith influence our understanding of culture, literature, philosophy, government, beauty, art, or work? How does the Christian intellectual tradition help us understand truth? How does the Christian intellectual tradition shape our approach to education? We believe that this series is not only timely but that it meets an important need, because the

secular culture in which we now find ourselves is, at best, indifferent to the Christian faith, and the Christian world—at least in its more popular forms—tends to be confused about the beliefs, heritage, and tradition associated with the Christian faith.

At the heart of this work is the challenge to prepare a generation of Christians to think Christianly, to engage the academy and the culture, and to serve church and society. We believe that both the breadth and the depth of the Christian intellectual tradition need to be reclaimed, revitalized, renewed, and revived for us to carry this work forward. These study guides will seek to provide a framework to help introduce students to the great tradition of Christian thinking, seeking to highlight its importance for understanding the world, its significance for serving both church and society, and its application for Christian thinking and learning. The series is a starting point for exploring important ideas and issues such as truth, meaning, beauty, and justice.

We trust that the series will help introduce readers to the apostles, church fathers, Reformers, philosophers, theologians, historians, and a wide variety of other significant thinkers. In addition to well-known leaders such as Clement, Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards, readers will be pointed to William Wilberforce, G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, Johann Sebastian Bach, Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, George Washington Carver, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Michael Polanyi, Henry Luke Orombi, and many others. In doing so, we hope to introduce those who throughout history have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to be serious about the life of the mind while simultaneously being deeply committed Christians.

These efforts to strengthen serious Christian thinking and scholarship will not be limited to the study of theology, scriptural interpretation, or philosophy, even though these areas provide the framework for understanding the Christian faith for all other areas

of exploration. In order for us to reclaim and advance the Christian intellectual tradition, we must have some understanding of the tradition itself. The volumes in this series seek to explore this tradition and its application for our twenty-first-century world. Each volume contains a glossary, study questions, and a list of resources for further study, which we trust will provide helpful guidance for our readers.

I am deeply grateful to the series editorial committee: Timothy George, John Woodbridge, Michael Wilkins, Niel Nielson, Philip Ryken, and Hunter Baker. Each of these colleagues joins me in thanking our various contributors for their fine work. We all express our appreciation to Justin Taylor, Jill Carter, Allan Fisher, Lane Dennis, and the Crossway team for their enthusiastic support for the project. We offer the project with the hope that students will be helped, faculty and Christian leaders will be encouraged, institutions will be strengthened, churches will be built up, and, ultimately, that God will be glorified.

Soli Deo Gloria
David S. Dockery
Series Editor

INTRODUCTION: ON PEDAGOGICAL ELEGANCE

Today's student needs to have an encyclopedic knowledge of everything in order to be able to do anything.

Marshall McLuhan

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

Media—Plural of *medium*, that which goes between. Any man-made object, tool, or process. Media are comprised of technologies, which are specific technical means for achieving specific technical ends.

Communication—The art of making many one. A form of rhetoric from a sender that attempts to persuade the receiver of a given relationship between the symbol and the symbolized.

Journalism—The daily news, so called because the time needed for production of the physical newspaper was one day, making today's newspaper yesterday's news. In digital culture, this is the newsfeed, updated by the minute and often initially reported before the event itself is over.

Look in your college viewbook or website, and somewhere you'll find one of the ultimate goals of your institution: *to turn you into a lifelong learner*. Your school says this, like most schools do, because it is indeed a noble and worthy aspiration. The only problem is that your school, like most schools these days, has no real idea how to achieve it.

But the ancient world did have a program. Around five hundred

years before Christ, and fifty years before Malachi wrote his last prophetic words, the ancient Greeks devised a system that would guarantee the student, regardless of grade-point average, to become a lifelong learner. They understood that in order to teach the student the maximum number of individual-to-particular relations using the fewest number of subject areas, they would have to create a system that was cumulative, integrative, and irreducibly complex. In what later evolved into today's modern university, their system stood for centuries as the one best way to impart the knowledge of unity in all the diversity of the world around them.

This system, of course, was the original liberal arts. The liberal arts (Latin: *artes liberales*) were those subjects worthy and essential for a free person to know in order to participate in civic life, such as debating in public, defending yourself in court, serving on a jury, and doing your military service. Liberal arts didn't just mean *free*; it also meant the opposite of the servile arts (Latin: *artes vulgares*). If you were free, you studied these particular subjects to understand the entire cosmos and increase your wonder at the beauty, goodness, and intricacy of the created world. If you were not free, then you were a slave, and you studied the servile arts in order to better serve your masters. The world was divided into the power relationship of master or slave, and if you wanted to maintain your freedom, it behooved you to study well. And being "free" to study well presumed that you had the free time necessary to pursue the life of the mind precisely because you had slaves (or servants) to do the cooking, cleaning, and household and agricultural chores necessary to keep things running. The life of the mind was a much more expensive proposition back before robotic vacuum cleaners.

The seven liberal arts were made up of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. In many ways this was a perfect separation of form and content, or we might say it constituted a complete curriculum satisfying the needs of both the right and left hemispheres of the brain.

The trivium consisted of the three language-based studies: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. You can think of these at the simplest level: letters, words, sentences. They were, to be sure, much more than this. But you attend grammar school to learn your basics, you attend middle school to think clearly and logically, and you attend high school and college in order to master the art of persuasion, or rhetoric. You can't move on to the next level until you graduate from the previous one.

But the trivium was anything but trivial. It was cumulative, integrative, and irreducibly complex. It was also, if you look closely, an attempt to get learners to focus on the good, the true, and the beautiful: Grammar was the key to good sentences. Logic was the key to finding the truth of a situation. Rhetoric was the key to making beautiful speeches, and by extension, beautiful things (from Parthenons to democratic systems to political citizens). You couldn't do the next thing until you had mastered the previous thing. And you couldn't do the last thing if you forgot the first things. (This is why you are encouraged to "spell-check" your papers before turning them in.) But the key thing to notice is that, being language-based, the trivium was historically contingent, and therefore the subject of study would depend entirely upon where and when you happened to be born. To study the trivium in ancient Greece was not the same as studying the trivium in nineteenth-century Germany, which is not the same as studying it today in post-postmodern America: *Know w'am sayin'?*

But if language taught you the idiom and metaphor of your culture, and how to communicate in formal and informal settings, then you still needed the quadrivium to fill in the blanks, or the "what" of things. For this you would study the four subjects of math, geometry, music, and astronomy. To today's student with fifty or more majors to choose from, this old list of four typically looks like a random collection of "things the ancients thought worthy" but not much more. In truth, these four subjects, in this particular

order, were the true genius of the system. The quadrivium, you see, is comprised entirely of number-based subjects of study. God, in his wisdom, made one world, and it is comprehensible to us to the degree that it is manifested in the universal and unwavering language of objectivity, or numbers. As such, the quadrivium represented a plan of study that was profoundly intelligent:

Math—the study of number

Geometry—the study of number in space

Music—the study of number in time

Astronomy—the study of number in motion (in space
and time)

This project, like the trivium, was cumulative, integrative, and irreducibly complex. But it was also something more: it took the student from inside his head to placing his head into the cosmos itself. Math is the study of pure abstractions, which are merely concepts in one's head. In reality, there is no such thing as a “number,” only the concept of number. So these calculations, performed in your head, can be performed using objects in the real world, but by and large to understand it, you need to be able to perform these calculations instantly, wordlessly, and accurately. Then, when the student studies geometry, he is suddenly able to leave the acoustic realm of concept and enter the visual realm of percept. In a point, a line, a surface, or a volume you suddenly “see” numbers in a way you never could before when they remained pure concept.

The word *geometry* actually meant “the measure of the earth,” which will come up again later in the study of the planets, or “spheres” as the ancients called them. And for the ancients, this study of geometry was intimately connected with the growth of biological life itself. It could be called *a point*, *a line*, *a surface*, or *a volume*, or it could be called what was observed in nature's growth cycle: *a seed*, *a stem*, *a leaf*, or *a fruit*. The perceptual observation

of nature confirmed the objective truth of geometry: clearly there was a pattern here that was intended by the Designer.

And then the student picked up his violin. Or lyre. Or harp. Or drums. And while musical instruments vary from culture to culture, and one would not play the same instrument in ancient Rome as in modern Japan, the fundamental thing is the same everywhere: organizing noises by keeping them in time. Music is “the study of number in time” because without the backbone of a consistent tempo, there simply is no music. In 1662, Thomas Fuller wrote that “music is nothing else but wild sounds civilized into time and tune.”¹ Even an experimental musician like John Cage is demonstrating this when he goes against convention and makes musical exceptions that prove the rule. You may attend the concert, but you wouldn’t put that stuff on your iPod. Why? Because you can’t dance to it; it has no rhythm. But music is also much more than just the study of number in time. Music is how a student would incorporate the truth of numbers into his very body; it is where he first learned to re-incarnate the concept as percept. And in harmony with other musicians, it was an allegory of how he would learn to be part of the body politic.

For example, the conductor stops the music if just one player is off beat. And then you start again. And then when everybody gets it, the music soars and you feel yourself a member of something in which the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. You intuitively recognize that you need the other people in society in order to make this beautiful music. And they need you. In biblical terms, this is what is meant by everyone being a different part of the body, but all of them being important (1 Cor. 12:12–27).

So far, the ancient liberal arts program has taught the student how to communicate in his mother tongue, how to think concretely and abstractly, how to correlate concept with percept through geometry, how to incorporate these concepts and percepts into his

¹Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (1662).

body with music, how to be a part of a whole with other musicians, and now he is ready for the final study: astronomy.

Astronomy is the study of number in motion. And this motion takes place in space and time because the planets are actually in space and their movements can be measured in time—in fact, how long they take to move is the very essence of what defines time as we know it. The length of one year is 365 days, but that is just the amount of time it takes for the planets to revolve around each other, from our point of view. To understand how they worked was to peer into the very mind of the maker and see how the designer (gods and goddesses to the ancients, God to the monotheists) designed the entire system. Astronomy was also called “the music of the spheres.” By this the ancients meant that the way the planets were arranged in mathematical order revealed the grand mastery, or musicianship, of the designer.

It is also worth noting that the seven liberal arts coincided with the seven ancient planets, the seven musical notes, the seven muses, and numerous other groups of seven. In AD 27, the Romans built the Pantheon, the temple for “all the gods” (by which they meant seven): from the ancient world up through the Middle Ages, the symbolic value of these correspondences was inseparable from the high degree of psychological reassurance the average citizen had in knowing that the world made sense. And these seven studies were all precedent to the ultimate study—theology—in which the student could approximate an understanding of the very mind of God by taking the first seven studies seriously.

In some sense, we might even say that the quadrivium constituted the objective truth of reality, one reason why theology was called “the queen of the sciences” up through the medieval period. God, if he were to be taken seriously, must have spoken objectively, clearly, and universally in his creation: he must therefore have “spoken” in the objective language of numbers and math. So by studying the four number-based studies of the quadrivium, you would

be more and more qualified to perceive how it all fit together. It was only later in the seventeenth century and beyond that theology was demoted to one of the lower-paid levels of the humanities, where it ultimately became a subset of rhetorical interpretation.

The quadrivium, being number based, was therefore relatively ahistorical and noncontingent upon cultural factors such as the time and place of birth in history. So while studying the trivium in ancient Greece would be very different from studying the trivium in medieval England, the study of math and geometry would be largely the same. While musical instrumentation and styles changed throughout history, the student was still, always and everywhere, studying how to keep the beat, to keep number in time, using his body (fingers and/or mouth) on either a stringed or wind instrument of some sort, unless he was the drummer, in which case he used all of his body and was the very backbone of the band.

Whether you currently value these seven subject areas or not, you should nevertheless be able to see the nature and pedagogical elegance of the ancient program. How can we transmit to the young a sense of unity in the great diversity that we find in the cosmos? How can we give them a golden thread that will hold it all together in their understanding? And how can we do this using the smallest number of subject areas so as to minimally burden their young and developing minds? And finally, how can we do this in such a way that it produces that most desirable of effects, the creation of lifelong learners?

The answer to all these questions was the cumulative, integrative, progressive, and irreducibly complex nature of the seven liberal arts, and for around twenty centuries, it did truly fulfill the meaning of the term *elegance*: maximal structural integrity using minimal material means. The ancients' pedagogical elegance was just this because it gave the student the highest understanding of everything using the smallest number of anything; it gave them the greatest number of universals using the least number of particulars.

The reason it produced the effect of becoming a lifelong learner was that it taught the secret of the universe: that nothing is outside the scope of the interconnectedness of all things. And if nothing was irrelevant, then nothing was boring. If you had a liberal arts education, then by studying just seven subjects you were now suddenly interested in all of them. You went to graduate school. You became a student of life. You didn't care about grades, you cared about knowledge. And along the way, you became useful to society rather than being another glazed-over Internet zombie, or what comedian Louis C. K. calls a "noncontributing zero."

In fact, there was only one problem with the ancient liberal arts system, and it was that it reduced the world to the master-slave dialectic alluded to earlier. For reasons beyond an individual's control, one was either among the in-crowd or the out-crowd, among the few or the many, free or slave. And it was into this Greco-Roman world that a new teacher, a Jewish rabbi from Palestine, came and showed an even more elegant way.

It is worth noting that Jesus began his life's work as a servile artist (a carpenter) and ended the last three years of his life as a liberal artist (a rabbi, or teacher). Yet central to his teaching was the idea that a slave of Christ was the truly free man, because Christ's followers did not define their freedom in exclusively political or economic terms. It was for this reason that the New Testament could admonish slaves to obey their masters, yet also encourage them to gain their political or economic freedom if possible. Paul's point about being able to sing while imprisoned and in chains was precisely this interior freedom that Christ alone was able to grant: it yielded a psychic freedom for the bearer that neither economic structure nor political fate could remove. This was a radically new definition of freedom that allowed its bearer to despise the world while simultaneously sympathizing with its self-induced plight. Thus there was no contradiction between a Christian who was persecuted for Christ's sake and a Christian who was also called

to care for the orphan, the widow, and the poor (James 1:27). To be “poor in spirit” did not mean to be without resources; it simply meant that one’s resources were not measured in exclusively economic terms (Matt. 5:3). In today’s job market this is called *psychic compensation*, and it is the personal or subjective benefits you get from a job that are not measurable by its objective or financial benefits.

The world has not forgotten about Jesus Christ since he came two thousand years ago, but it has forgotten how and why his teaching represented such a radical shift from the old way of thinking. Jesus’s teaching was in a certain sense a subversive activity in that it destroyed the old pedagogy’s false dichotomy of either/or and created a new world of both/and. We shall see how shortly.

According to some scholars, Jesus likely did have a classical liberal arts education in the Pythagorean mathematical progression. Whether that can be known or not, what we do know for certain is that early on, from at least the age of twelve, he had an astonishing rhetorical faculty that impressed even the scribes and teachers of the Jerusalem temple (Luke 2:41–52). We also know that, as an adult, he never quite fit into the established educational, cultural, or religious metaphor of his day. He could persuade soldiers, fishermen, prostitutes, and tax collectors, but the one group of people he absolutely could not work with was the professionally religious. They were the ones who received his wrath when turning over the temple tables, and they were the ones he called “whitewashed tombs”—pretty on the outside, but inside, full of dead bones (Matt. 23:27). In fact, the scribes and Pharisees were so upset by Jesus’s new teachings that they repeatedly plotted for, and ultimately called for, his crucifixion.

In pedagogical terms, the effect of Christ’s teaching was not fully perceived until perhaps Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, a far-flung network of first-century believers residing in ancient Turkey. It was in that letter that Paul first pointed out that Christ

had demolished the old master-slave dialectic. This dichotomy was not a new insight of Hegel or Marx; it was as old as antiquity. What Christ showed us was that your status as master or slave in your culture's political economy *was not the ultimate identifier of the self*. Paul put it shockingly blunt: if you were one in Christ, then there was no longer any spiritual validity to the distinction between male and female, between Greek and Jew, or between master and slave (Gal. 3:28). While most would read this to mean that, in Christ, you were as culturally validated as a *Greek male master*, what it actually meant was just the opposite. It meant that you could choose only one enslavement: either to the world and its false dichotomies, or to Christ and his transcendence of the whole thing. Thus, under the new assumption, you could actually have the political and economic status of a *Jewish female slave* and yet, paradoxically, be as completely "free" as the Greek male master. Given the burden and temptations of wealth (cf. Matt. 19:24), Christ's teachings suggested that the Jewish female slave could actually be freer than the Greek male master, because economic and political power were their own form of slavery. One might be a physical slave but if metaphysically free, then one could be imprisoned and find oneself singing, as Paul himself demonstrated (cf. Acts 16:16–40). And yet slavery was a pretty miserable circumstance, and Scripture never made light of it—in fact, Scripture made clear that, if possible, one should work to attain political and economic freedom (1 Cor. 7:21). If that were impossible, however, the Christian need not worry that this was the ultimate bondage. The language of the New Testament is rife with the joy of becoming a slave to Christ, suggesting that metaphysical slavery might yield the ultimate human freedom.

Today, of course, we've lost most of the pattern recognition that the ancients had, and we are faced with an overwhelming daily deluge of new and contradictory information, making it a full-time job just to keep up with what's happening, let alone understand it.

Today we attend liberal arts colleges and universities without the slightest clue of what the words mean—we just know we’re supposed to do it. As a result, today’s digital students are in a situation remarkably similar to that of the ancient world, except that their option to be free or slave is now largely derived by a combination of choice, fate, and diligence.

Upon graduation from a Christian liberal arts college, a graduate is just as likely to be a Starbucks barista as to be a Wall Street intern. He or she will as likely become a servile artist as a liberal artist and will do so both because the political economy of contemporary culture requires it, but also because Christ justifies all work (physical or mental) as equally worthy and redeemable. To prepare our students for this world is to remember Christ’s indifference to vocational calling of free or slave, of liberal or servile artist. Common sense (not to mention their parents) will continually remind them which one is preferable, and necessity (not to mention student loans) will largely make the choice for them.

Today’s college student feels the weight of the educational *blivet bag*—where you try to squeeze ten pounds of stuff into a five-pound sack—and as a result, experiences college mostly as a quixotic² exercise in frustration. Added to this, many liberal arts colleges are still using nineteenth-century media and pedagogical assumptions to prepare students for the twenty-first-century world. Thus, what contemporary Christian educators need to reflect profoundly on as they restructure their curricula is precisely this core question of elegance: How can we give students the minimal amount of content to produce the maximal result in personal freedom over the choices they make with the educational and vocational resources at their disposal? How can we provide a liberal arts education with Christ at the core that actually liberates our students to a vocational calling of—should they choose it—a servile art?

²*Quixotic*; adj., ideal but impractical.

Studying media, journalism, and the communication arts can be a liberating mode of *interdisciplinary simplicity*—a satisfying way of trying to learn everything you’ll need to know before embarking on any successful career in anything, including graduate school. Interdisciplinary simplicity offers three things that are not currently available in most classrooms. First, simplicity takes the student beyond the simplicity-to-complexity (i.e., grade school-to-college) evolution by elevating discourse at increasingly accessible levels of communication. Second, simplicity promises availability of abundant content to the interested user while simultaneously not compromising maintenance of the overall picture. Third, simplicity allows the user to maintain coherence amid a perpetually overwhelming information environment by receiving information in smaller and easier-to-digest units.

Simplicity is explanatory of the paradoxical facts that (1) a weekday edition of the *New York Times* contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in seventeenth-century England as well as the fact that (2) many of today’s newspapers are written at the fifth- to eighth-grade reading level. Simplicity, by the way, is where today’s student already is: one reason why students spend so much time reading 140-character tweets and watching seven-second vines. The more information there is, the more they will need it to be byte-sized. By studying media, journalism, and the communication arts, the student is given a way of studying the forms of human communication throughout history, and along the way, acquiring a substantive portion of the content of those forms at no extra charge.

So how can you study history, war, economics, psychology, business, education, and religion all at once? By studying the changing nature of media forms, which have all, in each and every case, redefined the meaning of history, war, economics, psychology, business, education, and religion along the way.

Under conditions of information overload, interdisciplinary

simplicity is the only pattern possible for students to recognize, precisely because pattern recognition is the only form of intellectual taxonomy available at the speed of light. With a daily diet of 12 hours of media ingestion as their average, today's students are largely forced to improvise their ways through school. But that improvisation, like a jazz musician, is capable of producing great insight if it's pulling its cords and riffing off of such a rich media diet. We just need to remind students, on a daily basis, to not be so biased toward electronic or digital media only. We still need to teach them how to read.

To misremember the elegance of the ancient liberal arts and Christ's original revision of that curriculum is to misguide our students into any possible freedom they might have in an otherwise totalizing and technologically determined society. We must prepare them for the present world, not for an imagined future of a replayed past.

AND THIS, OF COURSE, IS WHY YOU SHOULD MAJOR IN COMMUNICATION

The one-stop-shopping phenomenon is nowadays contained in what's called Big Box Retail stores. Places like Walmart and Target are huge architectural boxes in the middle of suburban parking lots that allow you to get your food, replace your car battery, and buy a new dress all at once. You can also buy furniture, computers, toys, and a branded hot beverage, doughnut, or both. Instead of driving all over town to ten different places, you can get all your daily needs met with one stop, and there's a 5 percent "rewards card" to incentivize you to do just that.

In the modern educational system, this is called the communication major. Some call it the communications major, but either way, it is the one-stop equivalent and best effort that schools today have of transmitting to you the "everything" they need to teach you in order to become a lifelong learner. It is the closest thing

modern universities and colleges have to a system of “pedagogical elegance” that also teaches you the value and need of lifelong learning. You know that the current software is going to be obsolete by the time you graduate, so you have to keep up with the latest patches, downloads, and updates in order to stay current. You know that to work well in sound, you can’t just “plug stuff in” but you actually need to know the science and mechanics and physics of both the sound booth and the inner ear. You know, from bitter experience, what a feedback loop is in both theory and practice, as proven by the buzzing and jarring acoustic assault that happened last time you placed the microphone too close to the amplifier.

Communication, media arts, and journalism are all essentially the latest evolutionary form of English departments, which are themselves outgrowths of the ancient grammar-logic-rhetoric track—which was itself the most important side or “half” of the *artes liberales*. Grammar was not just a lesson in “reading”—it was at root an allegorical exegesis of nature’s phenomena, and it taught us how to “read” beneath the surface of things to recognize deeper patterns, using language as our observational tool set.

Nowadays most communication majors comprise both a theory and a practice track, so you can both mentally prepare your understanding of the field and also practice your hands-on, working knowledge of the latest technological tools. So under *theory* you might take a history of mass media or a communication theory course. Under the *practice* wing you might take public speaking, or journalism, or nonlinear video editing. And even though the curriculum or professors aren’t telling you this, you are acquiring ancient and valuable skills: Interpersonal communication really will help you to be a better citizen. Public speaking really does often teach you how to beat a traffic ticket and thereby represent yourself in court, or join a public debate, or simply speak up for your neighbors at a town-hall meeting. And your student loans will often enough incentivize you (or your friends) to perform your

military duty. So even though it's not nearly as systematic, clear, intuitive, or obvious, the communication major really is the one that more and more students are choosing for a host of reasons.

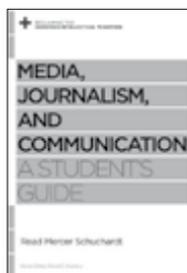
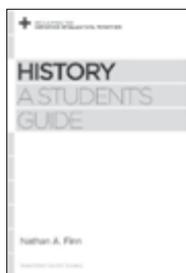
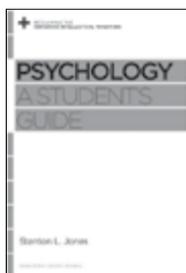
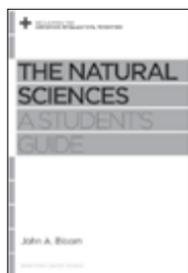
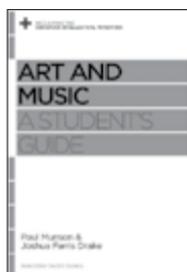
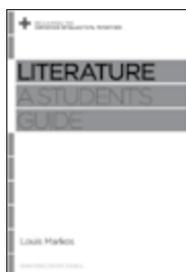
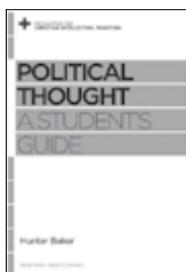
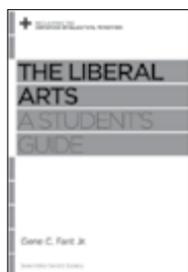
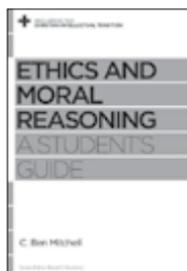
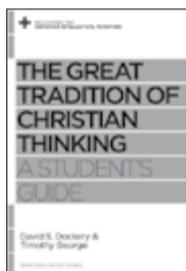
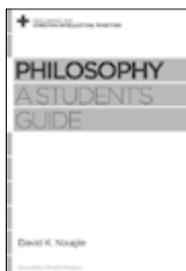
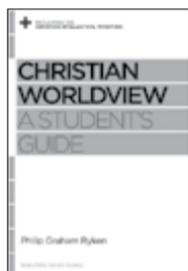
Cicero used to tell his rhetoric students that the orator needed to know everything that could be known; today, the one best way of attempting that impossible task (impossible, by the way, only since around 1800, thanks to the information explosion produced by the printing press and subsequent media technologies³) is to major in communication. It's the best major for telling you "everything about everything" because it incorporates history, science, language, psychology, philosophy, business, economics, theology, biology, chemistry, and many of the other majors. James Gleick's thesis in his book *The Information* is that what we've actually discovered after six thousand years of human history is that ALL of life is understandable as a "communication theory," whether it be communication between people, machines, cells, or atoms. Practically speaking, one of the biggest reasons for the growth of the communication arts major is simply the value of post-college employment: surveys tell us that among the top ten skill sets employers are looking for, "communication skills" are always at the top of the list. And this doesn't just mean that you should be a good, clear, personable, gregarious communicator; it also means you should be able to help your employer understand and function in the new world of a million apps and 34 gigabytes of daily information per person per day. Social media networking abilities such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat are all employable skills. And if you are really good at these things, you can go and work at those companies themselves.

So that's the theory. For the rest of this book, we'll discuss the ways in which the media is everything, the ways in which the media is lying to you, the ways in which the media is an alternative

³See, for example, Andrew Robinson's book about Thomas Young (1773–1829) titled *The Last Man Who Knew Everything* (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Press, 2006), 179.

or substitute form of religion, and the ways in which the media is harder to see, perceive, and understand than ever before, and what you can do about it in order to become useful to yourself and your culture by becoming a user of the media rather than becoming used by the media.

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In an age of accelerating information and increasing technology, media matters more now than ever.

In this book, Read Mercer Schuchardt helps us navigate the digital age from a distinctly Christian perspective, offering guidance for becoming wise users of media rather than simply being used by media. Highlighting the importance of studying and understanding communication arts and how they are changing, this book will help you think creatively about using media effectively for the sake of the gospel, the church, and the world.

“This book is a publisher’s nightmare and a reader’s dream. It fits no preestablished publishing category, because it is entirely too insightful to do so; its wine will not fit those wineskins. If Marshall McLuhan had been intelligible, Neil Postman a Christian, and Jacques Ellul an American, this is the book they would have coauthored (with Wendell Berry as their editor), though they would have taken ten times as many pages to have done so.”

T. David Gordon, Professor of Religion and Greek, Grove City College

READ MERCER SCHUCHARDT (PhD, New York University) is associate professor of communication at Wheaton College. He studied under the late Neil Postman at NYU and is a contributor to several books, the editor of *You Do Not Talk About Fight Club*, and the cofounder and editorial chair of the online journal *Second Nature*.

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