

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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Is Google God?

Columnist Thomas Friedman posed this question in *The New York Times* in June of 2003. Quoting the Vice-President of a Wi-Fi provider, Friedman writes that "Google, combined with Wi-Fi, is a little bit like God. God is wireless, God is everywhere and God sees and knows everything. Throughout history, people connected to God without wires. Now, for many questions in the world, you ask Google, and increasingly, you can do it without wires, too."

At the beginning of 2005, Friedman's question seems prescient. Taken from "googol" (the numeral 1 followed by 100 zeros), signifying how much information Google initially hoped to catalog, "Googling" has now become synonymous with Web surfing. Following last year's lucrative initial public offering, Google announced arrangements with the New York Public Library, along with the libraries of Harvard University, Stanford University, University of Oxford, and the University of Michigan to digitize virtually every holding. Just days ago, Google announced the addition of a video search service, expanding beyond the web into television. No wonder that consumers in the Newsmaker study predicted that in 2005, Google - along with technological cousins BlackBerry and iPod - will rule.

There can be little doubt that what began as a graduate project of two 20-something Stanford students is now shaping the world. But how? Few would deny the convenience of the project, and the value it can bring. But there are troubling dynamics. First, and perhaps foremost, is the widening chasm between wisdom and information. Quentin Schultze writes that the torrent of information now at our disposal is often little more than "endless volleys of nonsense, folly and rumor masquerading as knowledge, wisdom, and even truth."

Second, there is the temptation to filter out any information we do not wish to consider, creating what University of Chicago professor Cass Sunstein has called the "Daily Me," a self-created world in which we see only the sports highlights that concern our favorite team, read only the issues that address our interests, and engage only the op-ed pieces with which we agree. The highly lauded personalization of information protects us from exposure to anything that might challenge our thinking or make us uncomfortable. Unchecked, we begin to follow the sound of nothing more than the echo of our own voice.

Finally, there is also the trivialization of knowledge. As laudable as the library project may be, the most popular Google searches of 2004 were, in order, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Christina Aguilera, and Pamela Anderson.

As a result, the Christian mind must be prepared. The ever-growing avalanche of information will create a growing hunger for wisdom, and whether spoken or not, for *revelation*. Is Google God? No, and the gap between Google and God will be increasingly felt. Only a Christian mind, informed by God's revelation and thinking in light of that revelation, will be able to offer what Google can never supply.

Truth.

James Emery White

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About Serious Times

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