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more on

Media, Attentiveness, & Distraction

Maggie Jackson's *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age** (2008) is published by Prometheus Books. At this point, we usually list seven or eight other books that relate to this topic or related topics. In the interest of promoting greater attentiveness, we are breaking from our normal pattern and offering our listeners a more extended quote from Romano Guardini's *Meditations before Mass* (Newman Press, 1955) on the subject of attentiveness (which he discusses under the nature of "composure") and its significance in the life of prayer (and in everything else). "As a rule, a man's attention is broken into a thousand fragments by the variety of things and persons about him. His mind is restless; his feelings seek objects that are constantly changing; his desires reach out for one thing after another; his will is captured by a thousand intentions, often conflicting. He is harried, torn, self-contradictory. Composure works in the opposite direction, rescuing man's attention from the sundry objects holding it captive and restoring unity to his spirit. It frees his mind from its many tempting claims and focuses it on one, the all-important. It calls the soul that is dispersed over myriad thoughts and desires, plans and intentions back to itself, re-establishing its depth. . . ."

"What is genuinely disastrous is the disorder and artificiality of present-day existence. We are constantly stormed by violent and chaotic impressions. At once powerful and superficial, they are soon exhausted, only to be replaced by others. They are immoderate and disconnected, the one contradicting, disturbing, and obstructing the other. At every step we find ourselves in the claws of purposes and cross-purposes that inveigle and trick us. Everywhere we are confronted by advertising that attempts to force upon us things we neither want nor really need. We are constantly lured from the important and profound to the distracting, 'interesting,' piquant. This state of affairs exists not only around but within us. To a large extent man lives without depth, without a center, in superficiality and chance. No longer finding the essential within himself, he grabs at all sorts of stimulants and sensations; he enjoys them briefly, tires of them, recalls his own emptiness and demands new distractions. He touches everything brought within easy reach of his mind by the constantly increasing means of transportation, information, education, and amusement; but he doesn't really absorb anything. He contents himself with having

Part 1

- 1 **Introduction**
- 2 **Maggie Jackson**, on how multitasking exalts efficiency and promises the overcoming of bodily limitations as time is restructured
- 3 **Maggie Jackson**, on the importance of attentiveness in sustaining personal and social order
- 4 **Mark Bauerlein**, on how technologies have rearranged the social lives of teens (and their expectations of education)
- 5 **Tim Clydesdale**, on what the first year in college means for teens

Part 2

- 1 **Andy Crouch**, on the physical basis of cultural life and how "culture making" is done
- 2 **Jeremy Begbie**, on how music is a way of engaging with the order in Creation
- 3 **Jeremy Begbie**, on how writing and hearing music involves a recognition of likenesses in Creation and the exercise of "hyper-hearing"

'heard about it'; he labels it with some current catchword, and shoves it aside for the next. He is a hollow man and tries to fill his emptiness with constant, reckless activity. He is happiest when in the thick of things, in the rush and noise and stimulus of quick results and successes. The moment quiet surrounds him, he is lost." This wonderful book is sadly out of print, as is the reprint edition (*Preparing Yourself for Mass*, Sophia Institute Press), but Guardini's 1957 *Prayer in Practice* was reprinted by the Sophia Institute Press in 1995 under the title *The Art of Praying: The Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer**. In it, Guardini reflects on the need for a person striving to achieve any important task—from listening to well-crafted music to prayer—to "banish distraction and collect himself inwardly."

Other Works Mentioned

Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future** (2008) is published by Tarcher/Penguin. [See also Todd Gitlin's *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives** (Harcourt, 2001).] Tim Clydesdale's *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School* (2007) is from the University of Chicago Press. Andy Crouch's *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling** (2008) is published by InterVarsity Press. Jeremy Begbie's *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music** (2007) is published by BakerAcademic. [See also Begbie's more advanced *Theology, Music and Time** (Cambridge, 2000).]

The **MARS HILL AUDIO** *Journal* is produced at our studio in rural central Virginia, outside of historic Charlottesville. The *Journal* is one of several audio products we distribute, all of them intended to encourage greater wisdom about interaction with contemporary culture.

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