

High-tech quest: Finding God in Silicon Valley

by [Richard Scheinin](#) in the [August 1, 2001](#) issue

Every now and then, one of Silicon Valley's high-tech workaholics makes a wrong turn off the freeway and stumbles upon a Californian Brigadoon. It's called Alviso, a backwater village that has so far managed to miss out on the technological revolution. In Alviso, everyone lives within a few blocks of the tiny church that is its centerpiece: Our Lady, Star of the Sea. On weekends, scores of children arrive for Bible study, violin lessons or catechism training, sometimes held in the garage beneath the parish house. People still walk to church in Alviso, which retains the feeling of a transplanted Mexican border town.

From Our Lady's courtyard, one can look across a highway and a broad swathe of undeveloped land—increasingly rare in the valley—and see an altogether different vision of Christian faithfulness. Rising in the center of grounds almost as large as all of Alviso is the Jubilee Christian Center, a theologically conservative, charismatic church with 5,000 steady members and a \$15 million sanctuary that seats 3,000.

Multimedia rules at Jubilee. When Pastor Dick Bernal and M. C. Hammer, the rapper, sit down with Smokey Robinson and other born-again celebrities, the proceedings may be streamed over the nondenominational church's Web site (www.jubilee.org) or taped for cable television broadcast. On Easter Sunday, 1,470 young people received free Samsung cell phones at Jubilee's doors (unit value: \$90) for bringing friends to services. "That was the hook, if you will," Bernal says. "Bring a friend, get a cell phone."

The cell phone giveaway may strike some as crass, especially compared to the traditional ethos of Our Lady, Star of the Sea, in Alviso. From time to time, I have enjoyed sitting in the early morning silence at Our Lady. I can actually hear myself think there. That's novel in the high-tech valley where Christians—including ministers—have told me that they carve out time to pray while exercising on treadmills or changing lanes in the middle of hairy rush-hour commutes.

Yet there's something intriguing about Jubilee's embrace of valley culture. Bernal has advertised his church on freeway billboards and the Howard Stern radio show. He fell into the cache of cell phones through his chiropractor, who mentioned that a business friend needed to donate hundreds of phones as a tax write-off. "Why not?" Bernal reasons. "The kids get a cell phone to put in their backpacks, and their friends get to find out if they like church."

Silicon Valley is a place and a mind-set. Geographically, it wraps around San Francisco Bay, but its precise boundaries are mercurial. The computer and high-technology industries have historically been centered in San Jose, a city of 895,000 at the bay's southern end, and surrounding communities in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties and in southern Alameda county. It's been said that this area—despite the recent downturn in the high-tech industry—represents the largest legal creation of wealth in the history of the planet.

Technology is ubiquitous. On Sunday mornings, pastors ask congregants to please turn off their cell phones, and moments later tell them to synchronize upcoming church events on their Palm Pilots. Work is venerated. Valley engineers put in 60- or even 80-hour weeks and see themselves as missionaries, promoting the values of efficiency, productivity, risk-taking and entrepreneurship. Many imagine themselves as creators of a utopian vision that will transform the world through better distribution of information, jobs and money. Business is religion, technology its fruits.

"It's not Protestantism, but it's sure the Protestant work ethic," said San Jose State University anthropologist Chuck Darrah, who has studied the effects of technology on family life in Silicon Valley for ten years.

Religion teaches a constant message. The valley values nothing more than change. Its mythical figures—its high priests—are businesspeople, the creators of products that make yesterday's innovations obsolete. In such a place, the church struggles to stay on the cultural radar screen.

"Silicon Valley has one of the lowest church attendance rates you can imagine," said Earnest Brooks, a Lutheran pastor who moved to San Jose six years ago. "You just don't have a lot of support here. You don't get a lot of overall reaction to what you do. And sometimes you get to the point where you wonder whether there is any meaning to what you do, and if the church has any meaning to the people who live

here.”

Technology was supposed to set people free, to save time so they could take time to pursue what’s most important to them. Instead, technology’s embrace seems to have left people famished for time, fighting through phone calls, e-mails and faxes to maintain priorities.

A time to plant? A time to sow? The Bible alludes to an abundance of time, while Silicon Valley makes it almost sexy to be frenetic. As a result, Silicon Valley workers may dismiss faith as irrelevant. Or inefficient, the greatest sin of all.

But it is at this point that a reaction can set in. Burn-out in the office can open a door to the spirit: “Will I be happy to give up my Palm Pilot, cell phone and laptop?” Robert M. Kinnally asked me last year. Stanford University’s dean of undergraduate admissions was about to quit his job and enter a Catholic seminary at age 40. “To some people that would be a sacrifice. I can’t wait.”

When it comes to church membership, attendance and other traditional measurements of religious commitment, Silicon Valley is among the least religious places in the country, rivaled only by San Francisco, Boston and parts of the Pacific Northwest. Yet there are plenty of Kinnallys, people who feel compelled to quietly grasp faith amid the noise of a culture that’s obsessed with work and worships what’s new. More than one minister has told me that the valley has a higher quality of spirituality than other places, even if it has a lower quantity.

In some ways, the valley has always been open to spiritual sensibilities. How so? Engineers are accustomed to seeking answers in the technological realm, so many expand the quest to seek more elusive answers in the spiritual domain. These include some of the area’s best-known executives: Apple co-founder Steve Jobs spent years as a Zen practitioner; Ed McCracken, former CEO of Silicon Graphics, has lectured on Indian spiritual disciplines. These local icons set an example for legions of workers: The spiritual journey is OK, they seem to be saying, maybe even expected as part of the valley’s questing ethos.

In the Christian realm, that ethos appears at the intersection of religion and business. Jesuit-run Santa Clara University discovered that MBA candidates are hungry for spiritual direction, so two years ago Santa Clara’s business school established an Institute for Spirituality and Organizational Leadership. Classes are standing room only.

I also sensed the questing spirit at a “time out” retreat for evangelical Christian women—teachers, mothers, marketers and consultants who were learning about St. John of the Cross and practicing contemplative Bible reading.

“I crave the quiet,” Mary Jane Klope, a Bible study teacher, told me. “We live in a community where it’s so hectic and so busy and I have three kids and I want to hear what God has to say to me. In my daily life, he’d have to scream to make me listen.”

The retreat was run by a group that calls itself Women at the Well, founded seven years ago by a former gym teacher and Bible Study Fellowship minister named Patti Pierce. “There is more of a melting pot here and therefore an openness to not doing evangelical Christianity in a box,” Pierce explained. The women who come to her retreats “have several hats to be worn. They’re businesswomen who are highly involved in career and marketplace and who are also wearing the hats of mom and wife. And amid all the calls and responsibilities and excitement, the bigger question of ‘Who am I?’ begins to emerge. Being in this valley presses the questions of identity more than in other places, because the spinning never stops—not even in church. People are going to church and saying, ‘Whoa! Isn’t that the greatest sermon you ever heard? I’m going to get a copy and e-mail it to ten of my friends’—and not taking the experience into their beings.

“It does get old after a while,” Pierce remarked. “Many women experience a shocking hollowness. Living with such abundance, we are spiritually deprived. . . . Part of the safety net we provide is to bridge modern evangelical thinking and our more contemplative roots.”

This is what she told the 30 women at the retreat: “Just let out the air and breathe deeply. And as you inhale, invite God into this time, this place, into you.”

Pierce has 3,000 women on her mailing list, and can be mighty hard to reach on her cell phone as she scurries about, setting up and running retreats. She is an entrepreneur of Christian spirituality. Once again, the penchant for innovation that defines the valley’s business culture overflows into its religious life.

It has become almost a cliché to refer to new churches as “start-ups.” More and more, valley churches are drawing on the marketing and high-tech backgrounds of members to reach out to a new generation.

I sat down a year ago with several founders of the Highway Community, a new nondenominational spinoff of a Baptist church, then meeting in a Palo Alto high school gymnasium. Pastor John Riemenschnitter wore a baseball cap pointed backwards as he showed me the slick direct mailings that he and his team had designed and sent to 37,000 homes in the cities of Palo Alto and Mountain View: "What if the hottest start-up in the Valley was a church?" one card said. "Let's do launch," said another.

He also showed off what looked to be a rock CD booklet; the cover photograph zoomed in on the pleading eyes of a young Everyman. In fact, it was a trim, paperback version of John's Gospel, made to catch the attention of young people. Highway volunteers hung the booklet on hundreds of doorknobs in surrounding neighborhoods.

Travis Reed, who runs a Christian multimedia production company, explained that the group was trying to "reposition" church in popular culture—tweaking the style of religious practice and outreach, but preserving the essential lesson about "the hope and truth of Christ's message." The point was to build the Highway Community "outside the Christian bubble or fortress," he said. The church's organizers were using a "Silicon Valley team" organizational structure—flat, nonhierarchical—as a business model. "That's what a church should be," Reed concluded—"where everyone is helping out with one big cause and your mission is to help everyone in the community."

Because just about everyone works hard in the valley, and because relatively few people belong to religious communities, the church must prove itself relevant to the business world if it wants to grow. That's one reason why the Episcopal Church established a full-time missionary to CEOs and business "strivers" here two years ago. Richard L. Shimpfky, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real, reasoned that valley businesspeople have unique spiritual needs that arise from too much work and too much success achieved too quickly (and in recent months perhaps quickly lost).

Prior to the plunge in the NASDAQ late last year, many churches experienced what was described as a "tsunami of giving" by wealthy dot-com members. "In a region not known for high church attendance, offering plates are overflowing with IPO riches," the *San Jose Mercury News* reported. "Instead of scheduling bake sales, congregations are setting up brokerage accounts and grappling with a new

burden—the burden of wealth.”

Last year, the Highway Community received a series of “large, unpredictable gifts,” Riemenschnitter said. “We’d be behind and all of a sudden there’d be a \$30,000 check and, like that,” he said, snapping his fingers, “we’re back on budget.”

Recently, the large gifts have vanished and the church is paying close attention to its \$12,000-a-week operating budget. Similarly, Jubilee, which received about \$1 million in stock donations from dot-commers last year, didn’t receive any this past spring. With membership growing, Bernal said, the church is comfortably making budget.

But after years of warning worshipers to avoid the seduction of material success, pastors are now sermonizing on the predicaments of sudden economic misfortune.

Business strivers suffer because “banks are now freaking out over the crunch and lines of credit are being withdrawn,” said John H. Huntington, the Episcopal missionary to the valley’s business community. “One CEO in my care was forced to shut down a brilliant new business, turning out his employees, because the venture capitalists don’t have the courage to do their jobs. There are all kinds of suffering.”

A former CEO himself, Huntington, 62, is a big, bearish man who rides a blue, 1000 cc. Kawasaki motorcycle from appointment to appointment. The bike is a priestly necessity. The freeways are so gridlocked that arriving punctually to counsel his “clients”—dozens of CEOs and other business executives—is almost impossible by car.

A typical morning for Huntington might begin with an early breakfast meeting with a CEO who has been pinched by investors to lower the boom on employees, and who has no one to talk to about it. I sat in on just such a meeting this spring. Poking at his eggs, Kenneth Grunzweig recounted what led him to quit his CEO position with a dot-com late last year. Among other things, he said investors asked him to misrepresent the company’s stumbling finances to employees, to keep them from fleeing. “We live in a really strange area in terms of what the business norms are: lots of new companies, inexperienced management, capital flowing in with outrageous expectations on returns,” said Grunzweig, who belongs to a leadership formation group for businesspeople that Huntington has led at his home parish in Mountain View.

“Not all of this is consistent with what I would call doing the right thing,” Grunzweig continued. “As CEO, I was asked to tell my employees that everything was going to be OK until the end of the year, when I knew that wasn’t true. It was a crisis for me because I wanted to succeed. I’m driven to be successful. I want all the good stuff. Why not? That’s why I moved here eight years ago. But their God’s not my God. They worship at the Bank of America.”

An Ivy League-educated physicist with years of Defense Department contract work behind him, Huntington knows the ropes: His research and engineering firm went under during a downturn in military spending around 1990. He once mortgaged his house to make payroll and can bleed in sympathy with those he counsels. He believes that business leadership is a charisma, a gift of the Holy Spirit that needs nurturing.

“Yet the church is shockingly contemptuous of business, and disconnected from it,” he told me. “The business world at large provides an example to the church of what it means to be colleagues and collaborators. The ethics you find in the business world are on the average far better than those you find in many religious institutions. That’s just a fact. So the church is not well positioned to tell people how to behave. But to suffer with them, yes.”

Huntington would be among the first to admit that the church has its work cut out. It’s often said that people seem to drop their religious traditions when they pass over the Rockies. And when they reach the West Coast, they start from scratch. A Harvard-designed survey of 40 communities around the U.S., released in March, indicates that people in Silicon Valley are far less likely than most Americans to belong to or volunteer in a place of worship, to find a sense of community there, or even to trust the people they meet there. Only 27 percent go to religious services one or more times a week—an attendance record that lags behind that of Americans pretty much anywhere else except San Francisco, 45 miles to the north.

The valley has been transformed in recent years by immigrants who arrive hoping to share in technology’s riches. Whereas only 3 percent of people in the U.S. identify themselves as belonging to a religion other than Christianity or Judaism, 10 percent of valley residents say they are Hindus, Buddhists or Muslims, according to the survey. Some leaders of those groups claim that’s a significant undercount. Two percent of the valley is Jewish.

With its large Latino population, the region's Christianity is dominated by Roman Catholicism. In fact, Catholics represent 33 percent of the valley's residents, Protestants only 22 percent. (Nationally, the Putnam survey tabulates, Protestants account for 47 percent of Christians, Catholics for 26 percent.) Among Protestants, it's evangelicals, Pentecostals and other theological conservatives who account for nearly half the total.

The valley has high percentages of young, transient men and women, many unmarried, childless and politically liberal—none of which correlates very highly with religious commitment and involvement in the U.S. these days. On the surface, then, there is very little that points toward an outpouring of Christian conservatism. "Yet despite the overall low rates of religiosity, there is a very strong evangelical presence," said Larry Iannaccone, a Santa Clara University economics professor who specializes in the study of religious behavior and institutions.

You've got an environment here that doesn't really reward lukewarm religiosity," Iannaccone explained. "Here people pay the price for being religious, so why go to church if you're not committed? This area kind of purges out lukewarm Christians, and you're left with people who are really quite committed and no middle ground. It screens out the people we used to call 'nominal Christians.'"

"Let me speak as an evangelical in Silicon Valley," he offered. "You're uncomfortable talking about religion and your own commitment because you know how many of your co-workers would feel they were being preached at and you encounter some highly antireligious attitudes. You feel in some ways that you're existing at the social margins of Silicon Valley. You don't go out of your way to evangelize and if you do it takes some real finesse. If you're not really careful about how you broach religion, you're viewed as being terribly pushy or insensitive. For most evangelicals, and likewise for Orthodox or traditionalist Catholics, there's a sense that you ought to stay quiet."

A month before Easter, I had coffee late one afternoon with a group of evangelical businesspeople with similar complaints. We met down the street from Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, a congregation of 5,000 that has been called the valley's "high-tech church" because so many of its members are successful in the industry. "I'm just trying to get Good Friday off, man, and it's not going to happen," said Kristine Austin, then director of publicity for a Palo Alto dot-com called Informatica. She had just put in ten hours at the office, her work day cut short by this coffee

klatch with a journalist.

“It’s harder to talk about Jesus in a conference room or a business setting than it would be to talk about Muhammad,” agreed Susan Gibson, a biotech marketing consultant and Harvard MBA who’s worked in the valley since the late ’80s.

“Or Buddha,” Austin shot back. “Or Feng Shui!”

They seemed more bemused than angry as they discussed the tension in their lives between professional performance and a devout Christian life. Austin had just asked her boss to delay a round of press briefings for a new product—scheduled to take place in Manhattan the morning after Easter. The request brought on “the look that would’ve put me six feet under,” Austin said, laughing. Her boss relented, though, sparing Austin a long business flight on Easter Sunday.

Ken Perez, vice president of marketing for a health care and technology company called Omnicell, spoke of the ethical dilemmas that arise in a fast-moving business environment. His company was “pre-IPO”: preparing for an initial public offering of stock—a long, consuming process that’s fraught with legal legwork and steady stress.

IPOs generated instant wealth for thousands of valley businesspeople before the downturn. Perez has had to keep reminding himself, he said: Play it straight. His company was preparing a marketing campaign for a new product that wasn’t quite ready for manufacture. The prototypes and artwork were ready, however. Should they show them to investors to create a buzz around the upcoming stock offering? “No, we’ll show them an older version of the product that’s not quite as wizzy or advanced,” Perez said.

“Take a stand,” Austin said. “It’s not necessarily a Christian thing, but if it drives your value system—how else do you look at yourself in the mirror? I think it happens to everyone in this valley.”

“There’s a lot of pressure to *not* do the right thing,” Gibson added, “because the company’s livelihood is at risk. I was once asked to market a product that didn’t have FDA approval. You don’t do it. You need to be OK in your own skin.”

Doing the right thing can hurt. Gibson was no longer “viewed as being a team player,” she said. “I wasn’t trusted to carry the company line.”

Doing the right thing also has its rewards. The 120 Sunday morning worshipers at San Jose's Immanuel Lutheran Church know all about that. Immanuel sits at the edge of one of the city's less glamorous neighborhoods, known as the Burbank catchment area. Across the street are badly dilapidated apartment complexes, filled with poor or working-class tenants, many of them immigrants, all saddled with mile-high rents. In one complex, rents were raised in February from \$1,300 to \$1,800 a month for two-bedroom units with one bath. "These are old apartments. You get a space in a car port and a good chance that your tires will be slashed," said Susan Price-Jang, who lives in the neighborhood and co-chairs PACT, People Acting in Community Together, a faith-based social action group.

In April, about a dozen families unable to handle the rent increases faced eviction. The church had already decided that something needed to be done about housing. Founded by Swedish immigrants in 1884, Immanuel had foundered in recent years. Like many mainline churches, its pews were filled with "cotton balls"—elderly folks with snow-white hair. After Earnest Brooks arrived in 1995, he watched 16 of his members die in three years. Some folks expected Brooks to close the place and run.

Instead he conjured a creative, faith-based response to Silicon Valley's affordable-housing crunch. Brooks called a nonprofit housing corporation in southern California and asked it to develop the church's most precious asset: land. Soon, Lehman Brothers and the Bank of America signed on, lured by the federal tax credits given to church-based developments. The city of San Jose pitched in \$3.3 million in redevelopment funds. And on Palm Sunday, ground was broken for a tree-lined, \$10 million apartment complex with a subterranean parking garage and 63 affordable units for seniors.

The congregation gets something out of the deal: \$400,000 in fees for leasing the land for development. That will be enough to pay off the \$380,000 mortgage on the church's facilities.

But Immanuel didn't do it for the money: "This is our neighborhood," Brooks explained. "And I think it's a real expression of faith for this congregation, which worships with 120 people on Sundays, to say, 'Hey, we can do this, and we can make a difference in the community by stepping forward.'"

About 20 miles to the north in Mountain View, where houses often sell for between \$800,000 and \$1.5 million, churches face an entirely different set of problems. I

recently visited St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in this white-collar world and found the rector, Kevin Phillips, working up a sweat as he sanded a new set of church doors on a Monday afternoon. In his previous church in Lexington, Kentucky, Phillips had a congregation filled with carpenters, plumbers, mechanics and painters. If something needed fixing, there were folks who got it done. But in Mountain View, "You call a software engineer who doesn't know how to hold a hammer," said Phillips. "Good luck. When you look at my church, it's a lot of software engineers and high-tech people. I think we have two doctors, one lawyer, one accountant, and everybody else is high tech, and that is strange."

The cost of housing makes it hard for Phillips to lure new staff from elsewhere in the country. If he wants to hire someone locally—say, he needs a receptionist or secretary—he frequently can't match the salary or stock options offered by industries. Phillips finds that his often well-to-do parishioners are so technologically focused that he can't make allusions in his sermons to scripture, literature, poetry or great music. "I'd get blank looks."

He's not bitter about any of this. He's amused, and he takes it as a challenge. He likes his parishioners, finds them to be warm and interesting individuals, just different. Which means that eight years after arriving in the valley, he's still puzzling things out.

"We don't do potlucks in Santa Clara County," he said. "You know why? Because people don't cook in Santa Clara County."

In this region full of tradition and antitradition, of material infatuation and spiritual questing, Phillips draws on his down-home past while keeping an eye on the high-tech future. He's expanded a program of Bible study classes. He's also building covenant groups at the growing church, which has about 250 member families. "And on Wednesday nights, we've started this parish dinner where people just come and for five bucks they eat together. There's a homework room for the kids. But mostly, it's just a chance for people to do nothing, to just be together. Because human relations of depth take time that people in Silicon Valley don't have, or aren't willing to give."

Phillips has also created a leadership formation group for businessmen and -women. This is the group that Grunzweig attends and Huntington has led at St. Timothy's. The group is developing seminars to help people deal with the recent downturn in

the economy. About 15 leaders-in-the-making attend the leadership group—some are parishioners, some aren't—and Phillips sees it as the prototype for a national "Business Leadership and Spirituality Network" in churches, synagogues and mosques. The group meets one night a month for a three-hour session that's a little like a business seminar and a little like church. Typically, the men and women walk in and, on a scale of one to ten, grade themselves on a couple of questions: "How am I doing spiritually? How am I doing businesswise?" Then they read passages from the Bible or other sacred texts, Christian and non-Christian, and consider questions such as "What is a holy life" and "How can holy living happen at work?"

In the spring, a struggling entrepreneur named Tom Wootton found his way to the group and was happily surprised by what he found. "It was like going to your board of directors—but knowing that your board has this spiritual side to it," he said.

Years ago, Wootton was a monk in a Hindu monastery in Los Angeles and now describes himself as a "Hindu-Catholic." He moved to the valley in 1994 and "it was like the dark night of the soul. It's greed. It's paranoia. It's work-way-too-hard. It's one-dimensional and it's unfair. I worked for a company that made anti-computer virus and communication software and they drove me crazy. They were literally saying, 'You're here to work 20 hours a day.' I remember telling the CEO, 'You ought to try and create a culture here.' And he said, 'Who needs culture? Everybody's here for the money.' And then he wound up burning everyone for the money."

Phillips hopes the group will help business leaders to become "whole people." He suspects, as Wootton already knows, that most will find the wisdom of the ages to be surprisingly relevant to their harried lives.

"The value of that stuff isn't always readily apparent to someone who's working 60 hours a week and doesn't have time to play with his kids," Phillips said. Maybe that person will come to see that "the good stuff in life emerges from the down-time. Sabbath is forgotten here. You're no longer living in that seven-day cycle that reminds us that time is sacred."

As I thought about the broad sweep of religious life in the valley, I decided to call Peter Wilkes. The retired pastor of South Hills Community Church, one of the largest evangelical churches in San Jose, is one of the sharpest observers of Christian behavior in the region. Wilkes commented that seekers in Silicon Valley aren't really looking for a path; they want only a feeling.

As he said this, it occurred to me that he could be describing half the people in California, from sun worshipers to tree huggers. But maybe his point is also valley-specific: Work is so strict a discipline for valley folks that when they leave the office, church is the last place they're headed. They need to breathe. They need a fast feeling of release. "It's a feeling," said Wilkes, "that need be tied to no creed, no dogma, no belief. And in Silicon Valley, whatever triggers that feeling for you, that is your experience of God."

"The feeling," he said, "is related to the feeling I have when uplifted by worship. For me, the emotion accompanies the worship, but in Silicon Valley the emotion *is* the worship. . . . How do you persuade people to come out of the sensual appreciation that surrounds the truth and into the truth itself?" he asked.

This British-born evangelical pastor, who sees this part of California as virtually godless in its devotion to materialism, once told me that "the valley is filled with the idolatry of self." He summarized his feelings by quoting from 19th-century British missionary C. T. Studd: "'If you want to serve God, pitch your tent within a yard of hell and operate a rescue shop.' I feel that's what I've done here," Wilkes said. "This valley is a place of great suffering, of great illusion and tragedy and many lives broken on the treadmill of technology."

But Chuck Darrah, who grew up in the valley when it was still filled with orchards and has studied its technology-driven culture for a decade, takes a different view. He and his colleagues at San Jose State University have shadowed a dozen families for years, watched them shop, go to school, take vacations, occasionally attend church and, most of all, work. Beneath the materialism and rhetoric of efficiency there is also "a moral vision of what the world could be like," Darrah told me.

"Why do parents buy computers for their children? Out of moral obligation. You don't want your kids to be left behind. You don't want your spouse on the road without a car phone, because it's a rough world out there. You plow through agate-thick computer manuals because the personal computer is the 'New Latin,'" Darrah said. "You learn about it because it's good for you and it imposes discipline on your mind. The Protestant work ethic is just oozing through our technological lives." It is through work that people find "sheer intellectual wonderment. It's something more than a job. People are looking to find a kind of divine state through work."

“My colleagues and I have been doing this research for a long time,” Darrah said, “and we’re still struck by how decent are most of the people we meet. For the most part they’re profoundly moral and concerned about issues of right and wrong. Some go to church, some don’t. But there are very few people who just seem to be predatory or nonreflective or not concerned with some kind of larger meaning in their lives. Reporters come here from elsewhere looking for crazy, godless Silicon Valley spinning out of control on the edge of the San Andreas Fault and the Pacific Rim and the future. . . . The place isn’t that simple.”

The valley is confounding. It’s radically materialistic and technologically obsessed, and it sets some high barriers to religion. Its cardinal sin is wasting time, and religion simply takes time. Yet the religious impulse is all around the valley—in both its new immigrant communities and among its high-tech workers. People do want something more.

Every morning, I drive over a mountain to work in Silicon Valley. Sometimes I leave at 5 in the morning. It’s pitch black out as I drive over Highway 17, nosediving around turns that I’ve committed to memory after all these years. I look in my rear-view mirror and, every time, I’m shocked to see hundreds, if not thousands, of headlights lined up behind me. We’re all careening through the darkness. We’re together, but we’re alone. And, perhaps like many others in the valley, I say to myself: I must be out of my mind. What am I doing here? There has to be something more.