beginning to swing back? Perhaps the increased interest, especially among patients, in alternative methods of healing (of which prayer is only one) offers a glimpse of a new cultural battle looming on the horizon. It may well be that physicians have succeeded in appropriating the sacerdotal mantle without offering patients (the laity?) enough of the “spiritual” side of medicine. In so doing, we may be at risk, like the 19th-century Established Church, of losing our flock.

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References

A rule of thumb

A British scientist has put her thumb on an unanticipated side effect of young people’s love of all things electronic.

Dr. Sadie Plant of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at England’s Warwick University says people aged under 25 are using their thumbs much more than previous generations because they have been raised with a steady diet of In-ternet, computer game and cell phone use (see www.motorola.com /mediacenter/news/detail/0,1958,534 _308,23,00.html). Plant travelled to cities around the world and observed that young people are using their thumbs to do things that used to be the domain of the index fin-ger, such as pointing and ringing doorbells. In Britain, she notes, youthful thumbs now type roughly 1.4 billion text messages on cell phones every month.

At an ergonomic level, more injuries to the thumb are occurring, but this number may increase as young people who spent their formative years playing computer games and sending text messages begin entering the work force. She says they will be primed for repetitive stress injury due to the amount of strain that they have already put on their hand and thumb muscles.

“While a generation ago teenagers wrapped themselves in the phone cord, almost as if it was the umbilical cord, well, today the umbilical cord is cut,” says Derrick de Kerckhove, Director of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, University of Toronto. “Today’s kids are using cell phones and text messages — they are part of the ‘Thumb Tribe.’ ”

— Peter Wilton, Willowdale, Ont.