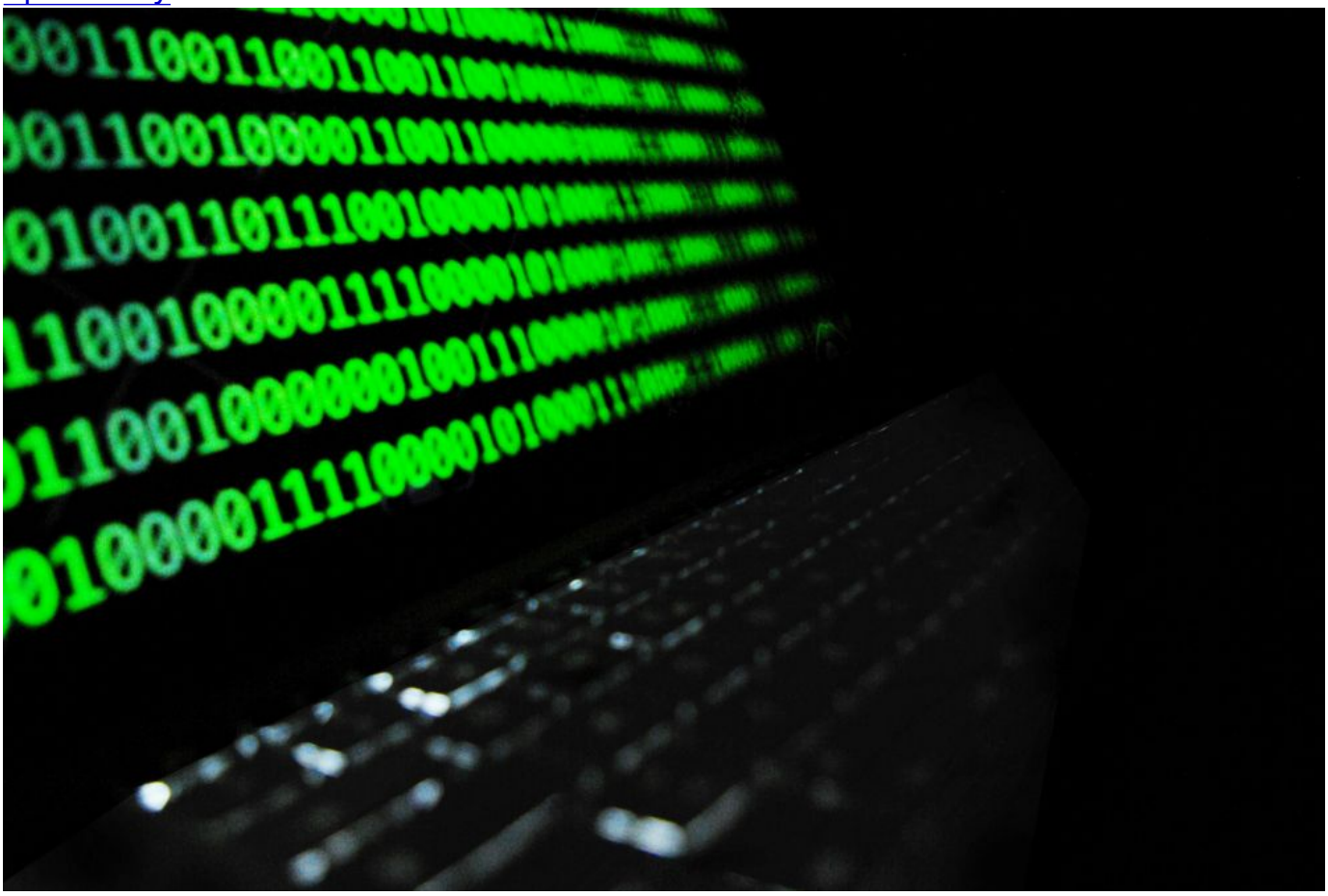
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Moritz Erken)



by Sr. Jane Marie Bradish

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As an undergraduate studying computer programming, one of the languages I learned was binary code. In the simplest terms, binary is a series of 0s (off) and 1s (on) and is still the underlying language for computer programming. "01001010 01100001 01101110 01100101 00100000 01001101 01100001 01110010 01101001 01100101" is my first name in code — not at all user-friendly, but necessary to "make things work.".

Binary leaves no room for ambiguity — no gray area. Most of us live in the binary world as children; life is either/or and there is no room for both/and. As we age, mature and increase our understanding of the world, many (not all) move away from the binary world into one that is more integrated, with lots of gray area.

If you're still reading, you're wondering where this is going. Stay with me. I haven't thought about binary code since that class so many years ago. Ministering in a school is the ultimate way to learn there is very little in the world that is either/or. I took a fall in early November and for the seven days between urgent care and surgery, I was extremely limited in what I could do: no errands, no housework, no going for a drive, etc. I prayed and rested and read and tried to think of what assistance I would need, but that did not even come close to filling the time.

On a complete whim, I opened YouTube to see what might pop up. I'm not a user of YouTube; I don't have or subscribe to any channels. I was surprised to find an old Bette Midler song I remember fondly. She sings about God watching from a distance, watching and caring but not really getting involved. I took it to mean perspective. There are times when I need to take a step back, walk away if you will, to regain perspective. Think about how different the world would be if we took a brief pause instead of instantly reacting. It may be a problem I'm trying to solve or a new way of approaching class materials with students or a detour I wasn't expecting in my travels.

Next up on YouTube came a newer song by Jesuit Fr. Roc O'Connor. He sings about God being near, ever near. This I interpreted as "being with," companioning if you will. Generally speaking, who doesn't like a companion? Think of all the times we are in community, officially or not. It's more fun, for example, to cheer for your favorite team with other people; cheering alone just isn't the same. Part of the human condition is the need and desire for relationships; even Scripture tells us it is not good to be alone.

More YouTube videos popped up, keeping me distracted and entertained — Muppets, anyone? But the refrains of those first songs stirred something. They kept creeping into my consciousness when I wasn't paying attention. "God is watching us from a distance." Wait, what? I don't want God to be distant and removed; I want God to be close and intimate. "You are near O God." Wait, what? I don't want that kind of intimacy; I want some distance. There I was, face to face with binary code in real life — God distant or God close.

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I was very much caught off guard by what my distraction and entertainment were stirring. I was able to push it all aside for a while, somehow convincing myself that my 100% focus needed to be on healing. There was no telling how much damage the fall had done, how I would react to all things surgical, and what initial recovery would look like. I didn't have the time or energy for any of this. Maybe it would all go away as mysteriously as it appeared when I initially opened YouTube. And yes, I understand tracking computer algorithms, so I was pretty sure what would pop up the next time I opened YouTube.

Healing is ahead of schedule, according to my doctor. So, without missing a beat, the binary relationship with God I stumbled upon came back big time. I find myself floating between wanting God watching from a distance and wanting God near. The perplexing thing is that I haven't noticed a pattern. I would think that when things are going smoothly, the "I got this" mentality, I would expect to be more than comfortable with the "distance God." And when things are more unsettled, the "near God" should be there. But, that's not my experience right now.

Maybe it's world dynamics. There is a lot unsettled in every part of our planet: war, exploitation of the most vulnerable, climate issues and gun violence come to mind first. Maybe it's changes in church, happening or needed, and what that looks like across denominations and cultures. Maybe it's me, strengthening and deepening relationships and learning (again) when to be near and when to give some distance. Or maybe it's me simply being weird. If I figure out the reasoning or not, I'm called to pay attention to when I want to be close and when I'd prefer God stand back a bit.