Canst thou hear me now?:

God must want us to have cellphone conversations. How do I know? Because the beautiful landmark steeple of Storrs Congregational Church at the gateway to the University of Connecticut campus will soon be leased as a cellphone tower. What will the good Lord think of next?

Move over, church bells. Make way for wireless radio antennas. Verizon has come! Lift your electronic voices up high. Let wireless good news be shouted out from above the voices of the balcony choir and above the voice of the minister in the pulpit. Let beams of microwave electromagnetic radiation broadcast to every living soul not in a dead zone.

God must want us to reach out and touch one another, any time, anywhere. Otherwise, there wouldn't be so many inane, pointless conversations.

I frequently walk through campus. My pace is slowed at bus stops, stoplights, crosswalks and intersections where student pedestrians - - many of whom are chatting on cellphones -- jam up and slow down, just like traffic. Though I try not to listen, under these crowded conditions I can't help but overhear thousands of snippets of conversation, sometimes addressed to God directly. For example, I recently heard a young woman declare: "God, like you wouldn't like believe how much like salt he actually used." God may be interested in what she was saying. But I'm certainly not. Are you?

God must want churches to be fiscally stable. Verizon needs a high place from which to broadcast, its own Tower of Blather, so to speak. In return, the church needs revenue to make up for the diminishing tithes of our less spiritually minded and more selfish age. Verizon's 25-year pledge to the church is as real as cold hard cash being dropped into the collection plate. In exchange for regular payments, the church will permit the company to place an antenna behind the steeple's rose-colored windows and to make a few other modifications. Though final terms and regulatory approval are still pending, this marriage of convenience looks like a done deal, something that God would approve of.

The original Storrs steeple was built nearly three centuries ago. It was a visual pinnacle guiding the faithful to their weekly dose of spirituality. It was also an acoustic pinnacle, high enough to ensure that its bells could be broadcast over most of the parish. In our modern era, cellphone towers also need to be high. Hiding the visual blight of a radio antenna inside a church steeple makes perfect sense. It's certainly better than trying to camouflage a tower with plastic limbs to make it look like a sickly, alien sequoia.

But there are symbolic costs to what some consider an unholy alliance. When I look up to that beautiful church steeple today, or when I hear its bells ringing, my thoughts are guided toward spirituality. But when I look up in the future, I won't know whether it's a cellphone tower or not, whether it's sending out messages of common worship or messages of mindless electronic blather.
Maybe this isn't such a bad thing after all. I sort of like the idea that God is willing to listen to whatever anyone has to say, whether acoustically, electronically or by some other means. As a mere mortal myself, I'd rather not hear other people's blather. So I'm glad God doesn't mind.